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A Minestrone of World Order Constructions: Reflections on Disciplinary Change in IPE

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Elisabeth Spelman begins her book on gender diversity and its implications for thinking about gender and feminism with a discussion of Uncle Theo, who sits on the beach and gets more and more offended by the multiplicity and diversity of the pebbles that are surrounding him. His sense of order and clarity is offended by the fact that a pebble is not a pebble and that they all differ so sharply (Spelman 1988). Keohane expresses the same kind of frustration about IPE in a very interesting article rethinking the paradoxical impact of Krasner's article "State Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade" (Keohane 1997; about Krasner 1976). He begins by pointing out that IPE is a subject without clear boundaries which

"is as old as trade and theft between societies— hence older than written history. It is spatially extensive: today no spot on the globe is untouched by distant markets or their manipulation by powerful states, and if intergalactic trade were ever to become a reality, international political economists would surely study it." (Keohane 1997: 150).

The argument Keohane then develops in the article is that it is against the backdrop of the "abundance of confusion" generated by the lack of boundaries and the cacophony of issues and approaches discussed in IPE that the success of Krasner's problematic argument has to be understood (151). Krasner's article had the virtue of saying something clear (lucid) and of providing the kind of "clear conception of our topic" that, according to Keohane, we are searching for. It provided one of the "focal points of contestation and hypothesis testing" by which the subfield of IPE "advances" (Katzenstein, Keohane et al. 1998: 649).

This paper is an inquiry into the implications for disciplinary change of the dual characteristics of IPE as an extremely diversified topic and as a topic that "advances" through focal points of contestation (but possibly not hypothesis testing). It begins by substantiating the idea that IPE is – in Susan Strange's words – a minestrone. The paper proceeds to argue that this shapes disciplinary change. It makes it seem highly unlikely that IPE will become more concentrated around any specific research program within which progress (of the kind Keohane seems to think we need) can take place. Rather, "strategies" aimed at adding new ingredients to the minestrone IPE are rewarding and fruitful. As the third section of the paper proceeds to claim, this is not necessarily a drawback. However, if IPE as a discipline is to preserve its status, a reflexive approach to the field is essential. As true minestrone cooks, IPE scholars have the responsibility to make sure that their adding and subtracting ingredients result in an edible soup.

1. IPE is a Minestrone: On the Self-definition of IPE

Susan Strange liked to compare her approach to a minestrone. This section will argue that the image of the minestrone captures what IPE is (possibly better than it does what Strange's own approach was). That is probably the reason why it has become so popular. The section does this by showing that IPE scholars in fact define their own field through its openness to a variety of empirical problems, to a corresponding diversity of theoretical approaches, and finally to the discussions and debates in a variety of academic disciplines. The result is indeed the kind of loose constellation Keohane points to where the discipline is about clusters of contestation and debate, which it would take a lot of imagination to construct strict linkages between and even more imagination to see as somehow linked in a straight line of progress.

Susan Strange began her introductory courses on IPE or on the political economy of finance by explaining that she meant her courses to introduce a variety of theoretical approaches, forms of argumentation, and empirical data from which one could pick and choose. The point was to use education to open the minds of those studying and not to close them down. The point was (as for the cook making a minestrone) to come up with something that was useful and good. To her, useful meant a critical argument about who gets what and why. Another way she used to say the same thing was that she was offering a “menu” from which one could pick a choice according to taste and interests (Strange 1988). Students would be surprised and bemused, shocked or indifferent (depending on their inclinations) by this frank disregard of academic conventions in environments where academic rigor, methodological soundness, and theoretical coherence were highly regarded.

Today, Susan Strange is one of the central figures in IPE thinking. She is singled out in textbooks as one of the forerunners of the discipline (e.g. O'Brien and Williams 2004). She has enjoyed a variety of institutional distinctions, including serving a term as ISA president. She is also one of the few IPE scholars to have had her students publish a book about her approach (Lawton, Rosenau et al. 2000). Particularly the last gesture may seem slightly paradoxical for someone who consistently resisted being bugged down into academic theorizing, who thought it a compliment to be called a journalist, and who thought it one of the greatest compliments to make to someone to emphasize that they were not classifiable in the academic terms. Part of this was coquetterie. Strange had a much more coherent, theoretically informed, and sophisticated approach than she liked to admit. However, both the fact that she consistently and even vehemently denied this (e.g. Strange 1998) and that her minestrone approach has become (one of the) central theoretical reference points in IPE is indicative of how IPE as a field self-defines.

As pointed out in the anniversary issue of *International Organization*, “initially IPE was defined by the topics that it investigated, such as trade finance, raw materials politics, and multinational corporations” (Katzenstein, Keohane et al. 1998: 645). That is, IPE appeared as a field with which those who thought that the kinds of empirical problems they were interested in were excluded or not covered right in existing academic disciplines could identify. IPE scholars in fact often began writing in the field because they were frustrated with the fact that the kind of political economy problem they were interested in and thought to be central was marginalized by discussion elsewhere. The issues have varied over time and space. This is no place to attempt to write a history of IPE as a discipline and the enormous variety of issues that have been covered under the umbrella heading of the field. The point that matters to the discussion here is simply that IPE scholars have often come to the field and identified with it precisely on the basis of this inclusive capacity. This has left the field with a strong penchant for “problem driven” research. IPE scholars have often thought of themselves as having been more capable of dealing with important issues that have appeared through changes in the real world than scholars in other academic disciplines. Strange for example began her own IPE career by arguing that the kind of political economy of finance that she was interested in could find a place neither in international economics nor in international relations. Until the end, she also maintained that the subject should be open to developments and include for example the environmental questions that were emerging in the 1980s.

The openness in terms of issues dealt with is matched by openness about what kinds of approaches can and should be used in the field. Just as many scholars moved into the field because they thought the kinds of problems they were interested in studying were neglected elsewhere, so many scholars moved into it because they were displeased with the kinds of approaches that were used in their own fields. IPE became a refuge for scholars that wanted to move away from strictures imposed by their discipline of origin in whatever way. Escaping the

disciplinary division between economics and politics has been a fundamental concern of most scholars. But exactly how this is done has been very open.

At one extreme of the spectrum there are IPE scholars for whom overcoming disciplinary divisions simply meant integrating politics into economics or vice versa. Hence, for some IPE scholars the field simply provides a means for including “the politics of international economic relations” on the agenda of international relations and foreign policy-making analysis. For them the stricture is broken down because it has become possible to consider factors like sanctions or trade negotiations (Baldwin 1985; Putnam 1988). Inversely, for many economists, overcoming the strictures entails thinking about the economics of international political relations. This can be done either by making international politics yet another field where economic methodologies can usefully be employed or, alternatively, by looking at the economic effects of the “political environment” within which firms operate (Baron 2002).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, of how politics and economics have been integrated in IPE, are the many approaches that think of this integration as entailing an overcoming of the distinction between politics and economics. IPE is a field where it is admissible to integrate and draw upon (neo-)Marxist scholars in a serious way. Exponents of dependency-theory, world system theorists, neo-gramscians, the Amsterdam school and the French regulation school figure prominently in IPE journals and on the academic agenda (Jessop 1995: and other articles in the same issue; JIRD 2004).

Moreover, IPE has been a space of rediscovery of other writers who, in different ways, break up the division between economics and politics. Hence, Albert Hirschman (an economist), Polanyi (an anthropologist), Jacob Viner (a sociologist), and Ibn Khaldun (a classical Arab social thinker) are some of the figures that have been “rediscovered” in recent IPE (Kirschner 1995; Mittelman 2000; Cox and Sinclair 1996). Finally, IPE is a site of innovation in terms of thinking about how the economics and politics might be rethought. A variety of institutionalist, constructivist, feminist, and post-structuralist approaches have been made part and parcel of international political economy (Palan 2000b; Tetreault, Denmark et al. 2003; Marchand and Sisson Runyan 2000; Peterson 2003). Between these two extremes of the spectrum there are, needless to say, a great variety of approaches that in various ways claim to integrate economics and politics.

The point is that this variety of approaches can legitimately claim to be part of IPE. They are published in IPE journals and included in IPE textbooks. There continues to be openness about approaches in IPE which is rarely found in political science. This is not to say that there are no struggles in the field or that everyone is happy to accept the plurality and presence of all the other approaches. There is certainly a hardening in the tone of the “methodological debate” (between rationalists and reflectivists) in the field (O'Brien and Williams 2004: 34) and an increasingly strong reaction of gate keeping on behalf of the mainstream in the field (Palan 2000a). Rather, the point is that the plurality is still there and is a matter of controversy, rather than something denied.

A final aspect of IPE is the plurality of academic disciplines to which it relates. It is true that IPE is often read and presented as something that emerged as a subfield of IR, perhaps as an attempt to salvage realism by giving realism a more sophisticated understanding of power and a possibility to focus also on the economic aspects of power relations (Guzzini 1997; Guzzini 1998). However, even if this might have been the case, it is also true that the relationship between IPE and IR remains very ambiguous.

First, it is far from clear that IPE scholars have an (even remote) interest in the problematique of international relations. Indeed, for many scholars the basic drive behind IPE has been to challenge the ontological assumptions of international relations, “the central of which is that states are the major actors whose interaction is to be explained” (Sinclair 1996: 3).

Second, “IPE is interdisciplinary in nature. It draws on contributions from political scientists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians and geographers” (Cohn 2002: 8). I think the list of disciplines could be extended even further to include for example gender studies, area specialists, comparative politics, environmental studies, or media studies. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it is also filled with scholars that do not (at all) relate to international relations but to debates and problems that have come from elsewhere.

Third, (and consequently) it is far from given that IPE scholars accept to see themselves as a sub-field of international relations. Some would rather link up with some other field (if pushed). Others would reverse the claim and argue that in fact if anything IR should be seen as a subfield of IPE (this was how Strange saw it).

The unavoidable conclusion is that “three decades or so after the emergence of IPE as a branch of International Relations scholarship, the nature, boundaries and intellectual ancestries of IPE are still a matter of dispute... [it is] a deeply divided field of study lacking agreement on the 'first principles'. Indeed, even the label international political economy is under dispute” (Palan 2000a: 2).

A consequence of this plurality of empirical questions, approaches, and disciplinary reference points is that anyone looking at the discipline will be struck by the plurality of simultaneous but unrelated discussions in the discipline. This is an inevitable outcome of the different ontological and epistemological assumptions in the discussion. Concretely, IPE scholars see different problems, they see them in different ways, and they therefore have different understandings of what is interesting and important. In this sense, Keohane’s image of focal points of contention and the stress on the importance of the “lucid” work which triggers discussion and scholarship is well taken.

This image of IPE as a disputed discipline which hosts a wide array of topics and approaches, and links up to a variety of academic disciplines, is not particularly controversial, it seems to me. Nor is the idea that it advances by moving between focal points of discussion that are not necessarily linked to each other. In fact, it corresponds not only to the image Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner gave of IPE in the IO anniversary issue. It also corresponds to the presentation it is given in most contemporary textbooks. IPE is presented as a field which is plural and open. It is one of the things that is valuable about it. For example on one account,

“IPE theorists also seek to overcome the limitations imposed by the current disciplinary boundaries... IPE scholars have the daunting tasks of focusing on domestic as well as international interactions and of crossing the boundaries between a number of social science disciplines” (Cohn 2002: 8, wow, nothing less).

A look at textbooks in the field also reveals more or less interest in preserving the plurality of foci, of approaches, and of disciplinary linkages in the field (e.g. Frieden and Lake 1995; Gill and Law 1988; Gilpin 2001; Murphy and Tooze 1991; Strange 1988; Stubbs and Underhill 1994).

It might be more contentious to use the irreverent epitaph “minestrone” to describe IPE. It is nonetheless befitting. A consequence of the plurality, the lack of boundaries, and the interdisciplinarity in IPE is that it is impossible at any point in time to say which focus, empirical topic, or disciplinary link is indispensable for the field. If scholars in the field suddenly stopped thinking about finance (which does not seem very likely) or oil (which in fact for a while they almost did) it would not spell the end of IPE. There would still be plenty of trade issues, regional integration, the political economy of wars etc. to look at. Similarly, if Hegemonic Stability Theory analysis was suddenly to vanish it would not spell the end of IPE. We would still have Frieden- (1991) and Rogowski-type (1989) research on the linkage between domestic interest group structures and the international economy or research into the gendered nature of the

international political economy (Enloe 1990). Similarly, it is difficult to say that adding any one specific approach, focus, or discipline to the field is impossible. There is, in other words, an almost limitless scope for innovation and adjustment in the field. In that sense, trying to cook up IPE is really much like cooking a minestrone.

2. **Adaptability and Progress in the Art of Minestrone Cooking: The Structure of the Field of IPE and Academic “Strategies”**

The conclusion that doing IPE has much in common with cooking a minestrone is a conclusion which is bound to be displeasing to many for good and for poor reasons. All those who share the inclinations of Spelman’s Uncle Theo and would like to see a more unified and coherent world are bound to find it highly displeasing. In academia that inclination could translate in part as the very justified call for clearer, better formulated, and more unified research agendas. Such research agendas are necessary for scholars to benefit from exchanging ideas, effectively make use of the knowledge from other fields (interdisciplinarity), and eventually deepen their understanding of a given area of research. However, the inclination could also translate as an attempt to impose the deepening of some specific research program at the expense of other research programs. This deepening is achieved by narrowing, by closing off the discipline (or the own subfield of it), by excluding other research programs and other approaches. Calls for progress by narrowing and closing off would be few and far between. The overwhelming majority of academics – all persuasions compounded – would claim that their call for increased rigor and clearer research programs were of the former and not the latter kind. To settle whether they are right or not is not important, at least in the case of IPE.

As this section will argue, it is rather unlikely that attempts to discipline and direct “progress” in IPE into the deepening of specific research programs would prove effective. The reason is that the structure of the field in IPE is likely to generate academic “strategies” that reproduce the fluid and open structure of the field and hence the tendency of IPE to rapidly adapt to and integrate new (academic or empirical developments) and to progress by leaps from one problematic lucidity to the next.

One way of systematizing why and how IPE evolves as it does is to look at the “strategies” of the scholars in the field. Strategy here is not referring to the strategy of the disembodied actor of rational choice theory. “Strategy” is the behavior of an actor, embedded in a social reality which construes his/her understanding of what is rational and adequate in any given situation. Strategies are “produced” by dispositions that actors acquire through their presence in different “fields” of social relations. The field “disposes” them to act in given ways, to develop specific tastes and ways of expressing themselves. Dispositions are not acquired by a conscious process of learning (if anything they dispose people to learn certain things and not others). Dispositions are the “practical knowledge” pertaining to the position in different fields. Since actors are part of different fields and have different trajectories in life, the sum of their “dispositions” is merged in their “habitus”.

On this account, understanding the habitus is the sine qua non for understanding action and “strategies”. It is only by analyzing the habitus that it becomes possible to understand why people make the choices they do. It is by looking at the habitus we can analyze why people follow given “strategies” for accumulating the different form of “capital” (economic, social, symbolic), which have become the trademarks of Bourdieu’s analysis (along perhaps with the idea of the *doxa*). It is only by analyzing inherited dispositions that it is possible to grasp why people participate in the production of the “symbolic violence” which so obviously harms them by

constraining and humiliating them. Bourdieu's analysis varied considerably on the extent to which it looked at the habitus as given by the field or as tied to the life story of an individual. In his study of Kabyl society (Bourdieu 1980) it is almost entirely given, whereas in his study of social suffering in France (Bourdieu 1993) it is tied to the individual person. The difference is without doubt traceable to the different levels of complexity and diversity of life situations in the two contexts. But even in the more agent centered period towards the end, he chooses the pun "economics is all about why people make choices, sociology is about why they do not have any choices to make" as the epitaph for his book on the social structures of the economy (Bourdieu 2000b).

This way of looking at the issue of behavior has far reaching implications for thinking about behavior and the reproduction of power relations in all social fields. In his central work the "Distinction" (Bourdieu 1979), he provides a map of social fields in France and looks at how they are tied to each other. Subsequently, he has shown the potential of using the analysis to look at things as diverse as taste in art, the social reproduction of the state elite, and the lived social hierarchies in the French suburbs. In all cases the emphasis is on unmasking power relations through rigorous analysis and on showing that (contrary to what is usually thought) taste and judgment are socially produced. As Bourdieu explains with regard to the economy:

"The adjustment of supply and demand is not the result of the miraculous aggregation of innumerable miracles operated by rational calculators capable of choosing according to their interests. Contrary to appearances, there is nothing natural or self-evident in the fact that the most deprived buyers find themselves confronting the firms offering outmoded products, especially aesthetically, whereas others 'spontaneously' turn to firms which occupy positions homologous to their own in the social space [...] We are hence brought to substitute the myth of the 'invisible hand', key to liberal mythology, with the logic of spontaneous orchestration of practices, grounded on a wide network of homologies" (Bourdieu 2000b: 97-8, my translation).

The educational and university system has a pivotal place in the overall analysis. It is absolutely central in the reproduction of the social hierarchies in all other spheres. It is hence not surprising that education is a recurrent part of Bourdieu's analysis of all social fields and that he has subjected it to separate analysis a number of times (e.g. Bourdieu 1964a; 1964b; 1982; 1984).

Of particular relevance in this context is Bourdieu's rather merciless analysis of the (French) *Homo Academicus*, of which he himself is a specimen. In this analysis Bourdieu gives a cruel (but persuasive) account of power relations in the world of academia, of the interactions of students, assistants, and colleagues, of the institutional struggles within disciplines and of the struggles and hierarchy relations among disciplines. Following Bourdieu's lead, other scholars have looked more closely at how specific academic subdisciplines have evolved in France. For example one very interesting study of economics in France explains the transformation of the field of French economics and in particular the rise and establishment of formal, heavily mathematical versions of economics as dominant in the discipline. It does so via a careful analysis of the academic field and of the individuals within (Lebaron 1997).

In this paper it is impossible to make a serious analysis of the "habitus" of the scholars in the field of IPE. That would take an extensive research into the background and biographies of leading scholars. However, it is possible to take a pause and seriously think about what kinds of implications the minestrone-like nature of IPE has and what kinds of power relations it reflects. On this basis it is possible to say something about what kind of power-relation the minestrone is,

about what kinds of “strategies” it would dispose scholars and researchers to adapt, and what the implications are for adaptation and “progress”.

First, IPE is a very weakly institutionalized discipline. There are few if any departments which bear the name. The vast majority of scholars who identify with and work within the field are hosted in other departments (of international relations, of political science, of development studies, of economics, of history etc.). Some departments have titles that are large enough to also encompass IPE explicitly (including for example the Helsinki department of World Politics). There are research centers that focus more or less stringently on IPE issues and that are defined in relation to them, such as the Centre for the Study of Globalization and Regionalism in Warwick or the TIC in Oslo. But the fate of the vast majority of scholars is to be located inside larger units with a more general focus. In addition (and in reflection of this), there are few degree programs in IPE. The London School of Economics MSc in “politics of the world economy” program is one of the few exceptions. The bulk of IPE courses are part of educational programs with other overarching aims.

Second, and relatedly, IPE is a highly internationalized discipline. IPE scholars communicate outwards to a larger extent than many of their colleagues. One reason is simply that the community of IPE scholars in any one context tends to be too small to provide a basis for exchange. Another part of the explanation is certainly that not only is the field small, but it also hosts a great number of “focal points of debate” in Keohane’s words. This de facto further reduces the size of the relevant scholarly community and pushes for internationalization. A final part of the explanation is certainly that the discipline is relatively new. It was established when the pressure on academics to publish internationally in peer reviewed journals was already strong.

The judgment of quality and of “progress” consequently takes place in the context of the international scholarly community rather than at the national level. The main IPE journals (*Review of International Political Economy*, *New Political Economy*, *Economy and Society*, and *International Organization*) are “international” journals in the sense of attracting scholarship from many different countries. Moreover, the many journals which are not specifically IPE oriented, but where IPE scholars place their work, including for example *World Politics*, *World Development*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, *Millennium*, *Global Governance*, *European Journal of International Relations*, and *Development and Change* are also all internationally oriented. The emphasis here is on international orientation. There is no claim that this orientation is neutral. The international orientation has power effects in itself and of its own. The fact that discussions take place in English, according to the writing standards of the English speaking world and often in accordance with the research interest dominant in this part of the world, is a considerable handicap for scholars from other places and for the development of their research agendas and interest.

Finally, the interdisciplinary and multifaceted nature of IPE makes what Maton terms “epistemic capital” essential to IPE scholars. The point Maton makes (in the context of thinking about academic disciplines and scientific development in general) is that, in addition to the kind of capital that Bourdieu suggests that scholars (as other agents) strive to accumulate, we need to add the specific “capital” which has its roots in the perceived capacity to explain the world. Without such a notion it is very difficult, Maton argues, to understand the success of some scientific schools (including for example that of Bourdieu’s sociology). Therefore, Maton suggests that:

“we add to economic and cultural capital, the concept of epistemic capital, or the ability to explain the world. This captures the way in which actors within the intellectual field engage in strategies aimed at maximising not merely resources and status but also epistemic profits, that is better knowledge of the world” (Maton 2003: 62).

This point is especially relevant for IPE as a field. Indeed, precisely because scholars in the field are constantly talking across disciplinary boundaries, very little can be taken for granted - there are no shared understandings about what is valuable and what is not. IPE scholars have to base their claim on making a contribution to the fact that they are (somehow) better at explaining (some aspect of) the world than their predecessors and their peers in other disciplines. This is how scholars tend to define their contribution, and it is the self-justification of the discipline.

The structure of IPE just described gives some indications of what kinds of “strategies” scholars in the field are likely to pursue. It provides some general parameters which scholars in the field will more or less consciously adjust to and perform in accordance with. As I will now argue, they seem likely to produce a situation where strategies of “disciplining” the discipline are very difficult while inversely strategies of disciplinary innovation are highly rewarded.

A low level of institutionalization gives little scope for disciplining via the control of appointments and of career prospects. The bulk of the appointments in the field are likely to take place largely on the basis of judgments coming from scholars who are not directly engaged in the field but working in the wider area in which the specific IPE person is being appointed (IR, political science, economics etc.). This limitation makes it difficult to ensure that those appointed – i.e. those who become the professionals of the discipline – adhere to some specific school of IPE and work within some specific approach.

Moreover, the low level of institutionalization limits the potential of disciplining through the kind of nepotism or more kindly “school building” that Bourdieu so well depicts as prominent in French academia and the overwhelming majority of scholars will know from their own university context (with national variations). Nepotism is tied to institutional resources that can be distributed. Assistants and students follow the lead of their professor, in part at least, because of the promise of positions of publications and of career advancement. The low level of institutionalization leaves even the more prominent IPE scholars with little to offer in terms of these classical scholarly assets.

Second, the high level of internationalization of the discipline accentuates the difficulties of disciplining. It gives IPE scholars a possibility of linking up with and establishing reputations on the basis of their links to international networks. These networks are by definition larger and more diverse than national networks. They offer scholars a far larger panoply of approaches or foci than would nationally defined and dominated debates.

One should not depict the international realm of IPE scholarship as a space where the types of disciplining efforts that mark national contexts and the struggles between schools and scholars are somehow absent. There are efforts to discipline also the international networks and debates and to impose a dominance of specific schools and approaches. Peer-reviewing processes (as everyone will be aware) serve precisely the purpose of ensuring that publications meet the “scientific standard” as understood by the editors. It is therefore indeed a requirement to build on and debate with the approaches and problems of the specific publisher or journal that one is trying to publish with. In this sense, IPE is no different from other fields.

However, IPE scholars have a range of options available for circumventing the more stringent implications of these requirements. First of all, the range of approaches and foci accepted in the variety of international IPE fora is broad. The weakness of direct institutional control makes it possible to draw on the range of those options. The range of specific IPE journals reaches across the spectrum from the institutionalist (*International Organization*) to the critical (*Review of International Political Economy*). Moreover, it is acceptable for IPE scholars to publish their work also outside the IPE journals, to attempt to draw on and fit into debates which are not dominated by any specific IPE problematique. For example, the scholars who contributed to the book on Susan Strange’s approach to IPE (Lawton, Rosenau et al. 2000)

publish their own work in journals as diverse as *Alternatives*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, and *International Business Review*. In other words, there is quite some scope for making choices about which kind of approach to build on. It is perfectly possible – and has been done – to build up a network of international contacts not primarily based on contacts within the discipline but still take part in disciplinary debates. In other words, the internationalization leaves scholars with more approaches to choose from but also with a greater number of possibilities of escaping the approaches of the school altogether, should they wish to.

Finally, the centrality of epistemic capital in the field accentuates the difficulties of disciplining and the prime for innovating in IPE. In IPE disciplinary arguments have a relatively low standing. Besides the obvious difficulty of knowing and fixing the “discipline” to which one would be relating. IPE scholars usually speak in interdisciplinary contexts, where the discipline as such is not of prime interest. In such contexts, the claim to be able to explain a previously unexplored empirical problem, or the claim to be able to draw links between scholarly disciplines and approaches that highlight aspects of already existing problems in new ways, is something that carries far more weight than the claim to develop already existing understandings. It is therefore not so surprising that many IPE scholars describe their own work in terms of its lucidity with respect to a specific problem nor is it a surprise that introducing new ideas is considered a major asset.

As examples of this, the way publishers market their books is a good indication because they obviously do this in relation to what they expect to be the judgment of the audience. Therefore, let me quote from a couple of recent works to illustrate the point. In their introduction to Spike Peterson’s recent book, the editors of the *RIPE Series in Global Political Economy* open by saying that “one of the most satisfying aspects of editing an academic book series is seeing provocative ideas being honed into ground-breaking books....” They then proceed to tell the readers that the book they have in their hands is such a book because it

“combines international political economy, critical theory, feminist, post-colonial and post-modern theories”[...] it follows Foucault, Bourdieu and feminist economists in order to introduce a broader conceptualization of ‘economy’ [and it] links class, gender, race/ethnicity dimensions to changes in productive, reproductive and virtual economies, separately and together” (Peterson 2003: xi-xii).

Certainly no reader can avoid being impressed by the interdisciplinary of the approach, or by the ambition of its claim to explain. Similarly, *Sage* advertises Cameroon and Palan’s recent work by telling the readers that “it serves an ideal introduction to key contemporary debates in politics, international relations, geography, international political economy and sociology” (nothing less) (2004: back-cover). Finally, (to underline that this is not the only European or critical interpretation of the field) let me quote *Princeton University Press*’ way of introducing Gilpin’s book. According to the publisher, Gilpin

“integrates economic and political analysis in his discussion of ‘global political economy’. He employs the conventional theory of international trade, insights from the theory of industrial organization, and endogenous growth theory. In addition, ideas from political science, history, and other disciplines are employed to enrich [as if that was needed at this point] the understanding of the new international economic order. This wide-ranging book is destined to become a landmark in the field” (2001: back-cover).

It is now possible to use this account of IPE as a “field” which produces certain kinds of “strategies” (strategies of diversification and innovation) while hampering others (disciplining

strategies) to draw some rough conclusions about how the prospects for change and progress in IPE look. A first conclusion is that the tendency of IPE to produce strategies of diversification will perpetuate the already very strong tendency of the field to branch out into different areas, to constantly draw in new topics of research, and to innovate in terms of disciplinary approaches. Inversely, it is also possible to conclude that the various efforts to impose greater academic rigor are bound to be frustrated, at least if they have ambitions to do so beyond very limited subareas of the discipline. It does not seem very likely that any single approach will have the capacity to establish itself dominantly. In other words, progress and change in IPE are likely (to the frustration of the Uncle Theo's of the discipline no doubt) to reproduce the minestrone-like structure of the field.

If the minestrone is in fact likely to reproduce itself, it is important to ask what this means for the future of IPE more broadly. What is its future as an academic discipline? The diversity, openness, and capacity to integrate new topics have contradictory implications. On the one hand, it certainly makes the discipline attractive for researchers who seek to innovate. IPE is potentially a formidable site for actual theoretical and empirical development. Hence one possible future for IPE is as magnet for innovative, interesting, and diverse research (1). However, (on the other hand) the lack of clear boundaries, disciplinary standards, and distinct topics could also pave the way for more gloomy futures. They may (2) result in a situation where IPE is simply swallowed by (integrated into) the larger and more established disciplines which the scholars supposedly draw on. (3) The discipline might also fragment into a multiplicity of sub-disciplines as the multiplication of approaches works as a centrifugal force. (4) IPE might survive by way of institutional inertia in academia. If for some reason innovative scholars would leave IPE and gather under some other label, IPE would lose the status claim it can make on the basis of its 'epistemic capital' (and on some accounts this has already happened (Wæver 1997)). One way of thinking about the likelihood of these four scenarios is to discuss the responsibility of IPE scholars in deciding which one will come about.

3. The Responsibility and Accountability of Cooks: The Significance of Reflexivity in IPE

IPE is likely to reproduce its minestrone-like structure. This is not necessarily a drawback. On the contrary, it may allow for interesting innovative developments and also work as a healthy check on scholarly hubris. This said, as just concluded it also entails some quite substantial risks for the standing of status of the discipline. It is therefore important to think about what IPE scholars can effectively do to make sure that diversity and openness remain virtues and do not turn into drawbacks. It is necessary to think about what the "cooks of the minestrone" can do to make sure that the mixture of ingredients and approaches they are using does not make the soup unattractive or poisonous. This section pursues the argumentation from above to underline that reflexivity is one of the keys in such thinking. There are two main reasons for this: the first is that reflexivity is a precondition for good research. Since the minestrone structure of IPE makes its status depend on the accumulation of this kind of epistemic capital, this is a concern that is of fundamental importance. Second, reflexivity is of importance because it directly problematizes the interplay between the field of IPE, other academic disciplines, and social hierarchies at large. Such a problematization is essential because it provides the backdrop against which scholars can reflect and react to the way that the discipline develops and hence adjust in ways that may help them prevent its marginalization.

The first point, I want to make, is that reflexivity is important for good and rigorous research. This is true in general and there is an overwhelming consensus around the importance of doing "reflexive research" which is matched by a profound disagreement about what reflexivity

means (Lynch 2000; Leander 2004, forthcoming). The basic reason for the consensus is the growing awareness of the importance of problematizing the role of the observer. The growing awareness of social theory and related attention to meaning is one trend behind this development and to the insight that (scientific) stories are written somewhere, by an observer situated in a context and looking at the world from a specific point of view. To this some add the insight that reflexivity has become more important because of the increasing centrality of knowledge and science in late (reflexive!) modernity (Beck, Giddens et al. 1994). There are different ways and levels of dealing with this insight (Lash 1994).

If one analyses change in scientific fields in terms of the “habitus” and strategies of the scientist operating in it, it becomes absolutely essential to proceed to what is sometimes called “epistemological” or “reformist” (as opposed to ‘narcissist’ (Bourdieu 2001: 178) of reflexivity, at least if one does not want to fall into a complete relativism about the standing of research. Indeed, it is necessary to “objectify the objectifying subject” (that is looking reflexively at our own activity) to understand the “strategies” (we as) observers are selecting from and using to interpret the world (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Only this way is it possible to introduce a modicum of “epistemological prudence”; that is a conscious and critical effort to avoid the most obvious pitfalls tied to the own dispositions, the own position and the own strategies in the own field (Bourdieu 2001: 179).

Introducing such prudence is particularly important for a field like IPE that depends on accumulating “epistemic capital”, that is for producing understandings of the world which appear credible and important. This is so for two fundamental reasons:

One pertains to the choice of subjects and issues to study. Thinking about scientists as acting in a “field”, and following “strategies” to strengthen their own position within it, allows critical thinking about why some subjects are dealt with and others are not, and about how to redress the balance. This is particularly important in a minestrone-like field such as IPE where the ease of adding new topics is as great as the related risk that adding too much of one ingredient will crowd out other important topics. Indeed, the temptation is great to allow certain topical issues with good funding possibilities – e.g. “globalization”, the new financial architecture, or foreign investment regimes – to crowd out other less fundable and less topical issues for for which research funding is lesser. This creates a great risk that media debates and current politics come to lead the long term research agenda. That is one way of accumulating “epistemic capital” which is so important in the field.

The temptation is further accentuated by the current pressure in most countries for researchers to rely on “external” funding and to communicate with the public through the media (Bourdieu 1998; 2000a). This pressure means that researchers have to subject their research agendas to the demand and priorities of the media, policy establishments, fund managers, and market actors. This is not necessarily a problem. There is no reason to assume that there can be no correspondence between the interests of funds and the “scientific” research agenda. The point, though, is that it is imperative to resist the temptation of “collective hypocrisy” and “self-delusion” which comes with simply assuming or pretending that this is the case. Uncritically accepting that there is a fit amount for running the risk of obscuring and obfuscating power relations and in particular the location of the power to set agendas. It also means running the risk of allowing the domination of certain topics to threaten the standing of the field. If the field becomes too closely associated with any one topic, waning interest in that specific topic spells the decline of the field. The minestrone would cease to be one to which ingredients can readily be added and subtracted to adjust to change and support the epistemic ambitions of the field. It is therefore important to actively work for the preservation of the diversity of the field. It also seems important that the field itself should continue to ask questions rather than simply answer questions asked by others.

The other reason for advocating reflexivity is that it matters for how topics are dealt with and hence for how persuasive the results are. At the most immediate level, it is important to be aware (to the extent possible) of the bias entailed in looking at the world from one's own perspective. It matters because it is a way of limiting the imposition of priorities and schemes of analysis which originate in and reflect that bias. It also matters because it makes it more likely that one can actually interpret the meaning that those from other backgrounds attach to things.

Finally, it matters because where one looks from (the own social position and background) matters not only for the subjects chosen or the own schemes of explanation. It is essential also for the actors that are being observed. This general point is well argued in the discussions of the interview method used for the collective study on "social suffering in contemporary society" (Bourdieu 1993). In this discussion, the enormous difficulty, the team of researchers faced in dealing with the fact that their physical appearance, reactions, gestures, and way of speaking influenced what the interviewees said and did not say, are discussed (Bourdieu 1993: 1389-1446). It is pointed out that several of the interviews have to be disregarded because of these effects. It is also acknowledged that ultimately there are limits to the reflexive efforts of objectifying the own bias. Researchers have to rely on profoundly unsatisfactory things such as "the profession" or "the eye" of the sociologist and term the process a "spiritual exercise" (1993: 1399). However, in spite of these acknowledged limits, the approach seems to have worked. The book seems to have persuaded its audience. It produced not only "epistemic" profits as it has sold more than any other book in the history of French sociology.

This is something that ought to make IPE scholars think. Their dependence on persuading a variety of audiences of the relevance, importance, and interest of their work would certainly seem to make it very interesting and important. Even though the contexts within IPE scholars work differ in various ways from those of the banlieues in the "suffering of the world", the issues at stake are not dissimilar. There are, indeed, people working at the macro level where the concern with bias inherent in schemes of interpretation is of greater relevance, and there are others basing their work on micro level research in which case the latter concern is clearly more significant, it therefore would appear.

The second reason for thinking that the kind of reflexivity just introduced might be determining for how the IPE minestrone develops in the future is that it directly and explicitly should/could make scholars think about the field IPE in the context of social power relations more broadly.

At the simplest, it brings explicit attention to Robert Cox's dictum that "knowledge is always for someone". This is not unimportant in a context where preserving independence, critical capacity, and real world relevance is of essence. At this level there is a considerable amount of reflexivity going on in IPE. For example, in the globalization debate the political implications of writing about globalization as a deterministic and mystical process have figured prominently in the critique (e.g. Hay and Marsh 2000; Cameron and Palan 2004; Rupert 2000). The heat of the debate surrounding the subject is directly traceable to awareness of the links between academic writing, politics, and society.

However, it is possible to push the logic of the argument further. It is not only that academia (and hence also the academic field IPE) can be used by others in the real world outside. IPE is itself (re)producing social hierarchies and power relations. It does so in at least two ways:

(i) The university system itself is a field in which social hierarchies are (re)produced. In this reproduction, the extent to which the academics accept the rules of the game, censor their own critique of it, or, inversely, try to change the field, and the rules of the game are determining how the social hierarchies inside academia are shaped and reshaped. The way that this social hierarchies and judgments within it evolve is (of course) essential for the criteria which will be used for judging IPE scholars, their students, and their activities. Reflexive awareness of what

kinds of criteria are implicitly or explicitly supported (or contested) is hence very important for what kind of judgment the academic world will pass on the virtues and vices of a minestrone field such as IPE.

(ii) More broadly, the university hierarchy is itself linked to (and interacting with) the more general social hierarchy in society. The university system plays a role in (re)producing social hierarchies by its legitimation of specific forms and kinds of knowledge, problems and issues, and delegitimizing other kinds. As Gellner puts it:

“At the base of the modern social order stands not the executioner but the professor. Not the guillotine, but the (aptly named) *doctorat d'état* is the main tool and symbol of state power. The monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence” (1983: 34).

Explicitly focussed attention on these links between the academic field of IPE and its social context increases the capacity to think critically about trends and developments in the field. This is important as far from all developments and new scholarly movements are progressive and innovative, even when and if they masquerade as such. Changes that create new rules which disadvantage (social and academic) outsiders by making tacit knowledge, scholarly intuition, and postures more important are profoundly conservative on the contrary. This is particularly important for IPE as a field. IPE depends on its attractiveness as a site for innovative and progressive research. Conservative, status/hierarchy preserving developments are almost by definition working against the capacity of the IPE minestrone to integrate new agendas and approaches and hence its attractiveness as a field.

Conclusion

This paper has done its best to reflect on disciplinary change in IPE. It departed from a rather consensual description of IPE as a very diverse, fluid, and fluctuating field. From there the paper proceeded to consider what this description could tell us about the structure of the field as such. It argued that it is possible to deduce three things from this general description: that the field has a low level of institutionalization, that it is highly internationalized, and that “epistemic capital” plays a central role. The paper then proceeded that, if we used this basic and general understanding of the field, we could also say something about what kinds of strategies scholars were likely to adapt and hence what kind of change could be expected. The argument here was that strategies for disciplining IPE were unlikely to appear as they are disadvantageous, while inversely, strategies for adding new elements (foci, approaches, disciplinary crossings) were likely to continue to be prominent. In concrete this means that IPE is likely to reproduce its own fluidity. This raises the final question the paper discussed, namely what the implications of this are for the future of the discipline. The answer to that question, so the paper argued, will depend on how IPE scholars deal with the responsibility fluidity and flexibility imposes on them. More concretely the paper argued that introducing more explicit reflexivity is a key element of shouldering that burden.

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