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Internationalizing Political Theory Courses

—Isis Leslie,
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(Mis)Understanding Others

On March 28, 2006, the following televised exchange took place between two professors at Al-Azhar University in Egypt and the station newscaster for Kuwaiti Al-Rai TV on the subject of female circumcision:

> *Interviewer:*
> So what about the . . . opinion [of the girl who will be circumcised]? What if she says: I don't want to be circumcised. What happens then?
>
> *Dr. Muhammed Wahdan:*
> If a girl says she doesn't want it, she's free. No problem.
>
> *Interviewer:*
> Is this what happens in reality?
>
> *Dr. Muhammed Wahdan:*
> I have no relation to reality. I am talking about the way things should be.[1]

Most of us, as U.S.-trained political scientists, are unable to make sense of Professor Wahdan's claim. What can he mean to vehemently assert in the middle of a political debate that he has no relation to reality?[2] With no training in Islamic political theoretic assumptions, or the impact of the neo-Platonic denigration of the actual on Islamic thought, we are neither able to decipher Professor Wahdan's claim, nor to render his point comprehensible to our students. We are equally unfamiliar with the Islamic doctrines that inform this worldview,[3] as summarized by Yusuf Umar (2003): "Theological reason in Islam limits itself to the talk of interpreting the present in light of an ideal [Quranic] community in the past. The present is always confronted as a deviation from the ideal."

Without training in Islamic political thought and history we cannot fulfill our responsibility as political scientists to foster transcultural competence in our students. We can neither aid in comprehension of historical events, such as the nineteenth-century Sudanese revolt against the British that was ideologically fueled by the Doctrine of the Hidden Imam, nor foster understanding of contemporary political realities, such as the pressure Shi'a Islam places on secular states to conform to Shari'a law, principles, and precepts, while rejecting secular states' claims to legitimacy (Umar 2003).

The State of Political Theory

Judging from a general survey of syllabi of introductory political theory courses, the critical training we as a discipline are offering our students in political theory is almost exclusively Western. Standard courses in political theory commonly include readings in the Greek tragedies, Plato, Aristotle, sometimes Augustine, less often Aquinas, usually Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Rawls, occasionally Marx, sometimes Hume, Nietzsche, Foucault, etc. In general, these courses could appropriately be renamed Political Thought in the Western Tradition. These courses are what we were taught, and what we teach our students, and we have a lot of students.

Between 1991 and 2001, over 400,000 baccalaureate degrees were awarded to majors in political science, and a sizably larger number of non-majors enroll in and are exposed to discussions in political science classes. In our current global context, it is critical that Western college graduates, particularly in political science, understand more than the nature and history of neo-liberal capitalism that is generally taught in political science courses in the U.S. Such limited training is inadequate. This generation of students, and their instructors, should have the ability to understand the cultures and contexts with which the global market places us all in contact. It is incumbent upon the discipline to cultivate transcultural competence in our students and instructors so that we are able to decipher political speech across cultural boundaries.

Classroom Aims

Not only should additional materials be taught, but these materials should be taught with a far more international approach than they currently are. So, what can be done differently in the classroom? The following sections offer some possibilities that correspond to the period organization of most political theory courses.

The Ancients

Political theory instructors can place assigned readings in international perspective, beginning with the earliest canonical texts. Eduard Meyer (1995), for instance, addresses the visit of Herodotus to Egypt, underscoring how understanding Egyptian thought is critical to understanding that of the Greeks. While Plato's *Timaes* and *Critias* explicitly mention Plato's visit to Egypt, the importance of the Egyptians to Greek civilization is rarely, if ever, mentioned in traditional political theory courses. Furthermore, the extensive debates on the influence of Egyptian culture on Greek thought since the publication of *Black Athena* typically go unmentioned as well, despite the availability of numerous articles that outline these debates (Meyer 1995). Classroom examinations of debates surrounding the comparative and influential relationship of Greek to Egyptian thought would contextualize canonical texts in a broader global context. Moreover, at the very least, a substantive explanation is in order in introductory courses of why political theory courses begin with the Greeks, rather than the Egyptians, or sub-Saharan African thought.

An internationalist approach to classical material in political theory may also consider scholarship on African oral traditions in relation to the oral traditions on which the tragedies are based, as well as in relation to the Socratic oral tradition. Segun Gbadegesin argues in *African Philosophy* that "communal wisdom derives from ongoing critical debate and rational inquiry among individuals, which is only later popularly formulated and remembered and perhaps unquestioningly, as oral tradition" (Presby 2001, 12).Gbadegesin's analysis reverses the customary view of oral traditions as deficient in critical rationality. His reevaluation of those traditions can enrich classroom discussions of folklore as expressed in the tragedies, and the nature of philosophical political thought.

Introducing into the classroom treatments of oral traditions in African thought, including those of Gbadegesin, Teodros Kiros, Gail Presby, and Claude Sumner, would enrich our study of the nature of the Socratic tradition and inform analyses of how, if at all, knowledge cre-

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ated by the Socratic method differs from that created by the critical method, which produces folklore.[4] Such considerations would encourage students' development of critical skills, as well as their intellectual sensitivity to cultural difference, while also raising the possibility of indigenous African political philosophy, something our current disciplinary curricula generally do not do.

Looking now forward, rather than to historical precursors of the foundational canonical texts in the discipline, an examination of the influence Plato and Aristotle had on the Islamic world would provide a richer internationalist orientation to introductory political theory courses. The short introductory chapter, for example, of Majid Fakry's (2004) *History of Islamic Philosophy,* "The Legacy of Greece, Alexandria, and the Orient," has been recommended by the Lebanese scholar, Lloyd Precious. Including such pieces, which are short enough to be incorporated into syllabi, adds the important voice of non-American and non-Western contemporary scholarship to our syllabi.

Modern Political Thought

Machiavelli

From an internationalist perspective, an introductory political theory course that includes Machiavelli can also include Dallmayr's work on the political notion of peace in Confucian thought, which contrasts the Western emphasis of war with an Eastern ideal of peace. Dallmayr's work also directs the reader to primary sources.

Hobbes and Locke

Likewise, a course that covers Hobbesian materialism can also include a treatment of Mahatma Gandhi's critique of materialism through the incorporation of such pieces as Anthony Parel's (2003) "Mahatma Gandhi's Critique of Modernity" and/or selections from Gandhi's (1939) political tract *Hind Swaraj.* Gandhi's work, informed by the traditional Hindu idea of the importance of the spiritual development of individuals to statecraft, argues that cooperative soul force is superior to brute force. In addition, informed by the Hindu notion that political economy must be subsumed under a conception of the moral good of the community, Gandhi's work levels a critique against Western political economy (Shah 2003). Both Hobbes and Locke could thus be placed in conversation with Hindu traditions of political thought.

Three or Four Conceptions of Liberty

Similarly, in addition to such classic readings as Isaiah Berlin's "Two Conceptions of Liberty," Hobbes, Locke, and Mills' emphases of rights can be contrasted to the Confucian emphases of goods and benefits to the community, which continue to influence Chinese politics, and contrasted to Hindu and Confucian emphases of communal responsibility for moral and spiritual development and direction, in secular as well as religious Eastern thought (Ware 2003).

Non-Western Adaptations of Western Thought

Obvious modifications to syllabi would include Eastern and colonial adaptations of Western thought, such as Franz Fanon's adaptation of the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and G. W. F. Hegel and Mao Zedong's conception of communism. But, these texts should be understood as products of interactions between cultures, rather than mere appropriations of Western thought. For example, some understanding of Confucian thought and culture would illuminate the form communism takes in China. Indeed, Mao's politics of charisma were supported by the emperor tradition that preceded him, just as Gandhi's liberalism was informed by Hinduism (Keith 2003).

Transnational Influence within the West

I have focused on the relationships between Western and non-Western scholarship, but international curricular development need not and should not be exclusively a conversation between Western and non-Western scholarship. Scholarship on such subjects as the impact of Machiavelli in England and/or on Shakespeare should not be undervalued.[5]

Examination of the influence thinkers have on nations and cultures beyond their own underscores what Daniel T. Rodgers (1998, 1) has called "the complicity in world historical forces [that] marks all nations." Rodgers argues for scholarship that is attuned to the relations and connections between countries, instead of "masking interdependencies between nations [and cultures], freezing historically contingent processes into ideal types, and laying across a grid of social and political characteristics." Rodgers is concerned specifically with relations between the U.S. and Europe, but his point is equally relevant in the global context. Only through attention to the connections and relationships between nations and cultures—connections that modernity has created and out of which modernity emerged—can the contemporary global situation be understood, and ethically addressed.

An internationalized view of modernity is, perhaps, the most revealing method for studying Western culture. It is only through attention to the diverse ways in which modernity has been expressed in diverse contexts that any alternative to modernity as the progressive "Europeanization of the earth" can become conceivable (Dallmayr 2002, 6). Only through an examination of the specific ideological and structural circumstances of modernity in other nations can it be meaningfully considered whether there may be, as Charles Taylor asks, "a Japanese modernity, an Indian modernity, and various modulations of Islamic modernity [that] enter alongside the gamut of Western societies, which are also far from being uniform" (Dallmayr 2002, 6). It is an ethical responsibility to educators, and particularly political scientists, to foster intellectual openness to the idea of the cultural and political validity of the possibility of other modern cultures.

APSA as Civil Society—Shared Scholarship and Teaching

Benjamin Barber (1995) identifies "civil society" as a place where dialogue that is critical to the protection and creation of democracy in the global context occurs. In his analysis, contemporary civil society has been eclipsed by a simplistic division of spheres of life largely defined by consumption on the one hand and a public defined solely in terms of government action, which citizens affect only through periodic voting, on the other. This division of life, he has argued, leads to an impoverishment, if not complete loss, of the public domain. Barber writes, "strong global democracy needs and depends on a methodical internationalization of civil society" (287). Civil society offers a space "between government and the private sector" where the conversations that are the foundation of a global public domain can occur—a domain that can countermand the machinations of multinational corporations, on one hand, and parochial and provincial reactions against these machinations, on the other (281). To Barber, civil society represents a domain in which "not politicians and bureaucrats, but an empowered people" express their liberty, and which "carries with it the obligations of social responsibility and citizenship as well as the rights of legal persons" (287).

Disciplinary organizations are civil societies. This set of papers is a product of an initiative of the American Council on Education to internationalize undergraduate curricula through interaction with disciplinary associations, including the APSA, the American Historical Association, the American Sociological Association, the American Psychologi-

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cal Association, and the Association of American Geographers. With the support of professional societies, this initiative can be a step toward the creation of stronger international civil societies that create international communities.

As political scientists in the civil society that is APSA, it is our right and our responsibility to develop language for talking about the global context *across* cultural boundaries, and to train our students to do so as well. Strong disciplinary organizations that are attentive to the special conditions that globalization creates can constitute one element of a vibrant civil society of the sort Barber identifies as integral to "secure global democracy" (268).

And, as Barber notes, we need not start anew: "To re-create civil society . . . does not entail a novel civic architecture; rather, it means reconceptualizing and repositioning institutions already in place, or finding ways to re-create them in an international setting" (281–7). There are extensive networks already in place within the discipline to exchange ideas on internationalization in political science. Posting internationalized syllabi on the APSA web site and conversations, like the one we are beginning here, are means of developing this community.

Political science as a discipline can and should function as a global civic space within which to examine connections between cultures, a civic space that is not exclusively occupied by American scholars and scholarship. Connections between the International Political Science Association (IPSA) and APSA are especially important for the international conversations they foster; these, in turn, can create a community of knowledge that can then be transmitted to students, thereby increasing the cultural sensitivity of scholars and students alike.

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Notes

1. The Middle East Media Research Institute. TV Monitor Project. March 28, 2006. Clip #1090. memritv.org.

2. Ibid.

3. These include the Doctrine of the Just Sultan (which allows for the coexistence of religious and secular rule), Khomeini's Doctrine of the Trusteeship (which dictates theocracy), and the Doctrine of the Hidden Imam (according to which all political rule, and therefore reality, is illegitimate until the messianic return of the Twelfth Imam and which doctrine informs Wahdan's claim to have no relation to reality).

4. Gail M. Presby, "The Wisdom of African Sages"; Claude Sumner, "The Proverb and Oral Society"; Teodros Kiros, "Introduction: African Philosophy: A Critical Moral Practice" and "Zara Yacob: A Seventeenth Century Ethiopian Founder of Modernity in Africa"; D. A. Masolo, "Critical Rationalism and Cultural Traditions in African Philosophy"; Ali Mazrui, "Ideology and African Political Culture"; I. A. Menkiti, "Normative Instability as Source of Africa's Political Disorder." In *Explorations in African Political Thought: Identity Community and Ethics* (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2001).

5. Conversation with Stephen Wirls. Unpublished manuscript. August 18, 2006.

Internationalizing the American Politics Curriculum

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Why Should American Politics Internationalize?

The increasing recognition of a global interdependence among our economies and societies places a significant amount of pressure on educational institutions to prepare future citizens for successful participation in this "new world order." While there might be general agreement that globalization or internationalization is a "major trend in education" or a "worldwide phenomenon," there are barriers to internationalization, some of which can be individual—resulting from faculty and student attitudes; some institutional—caused by long-standing policies, practices, and traditions; and some reflecting the attitudes and culture of the wider American society (Green 2003, 11). There are different ways that institutions of higher learning can respond to this phenomenon most effectively, including, for example, changes at the curricular level, broad institutional policies that involve recruitment of foreign students, experiential partnerships with foreign institutions of higher learning, and the creation of campuses in other countries (see Altbach 2002).

American Politics is a significant subfield in political science, representing 20% of all APSA members as well as 20% of graduate student members.[1] It is a subfield that, by its nature, is immersed in America and has seemed particularly resistant to the trend to internationalize. Unlike other subfields that infuse an international perspective organically, American Politics can be insular in its view of how it fits within the larger, global political context. Clearly, this is related to the foundational circumstances and principles of our Republic, and some of the manners in which we have come to understand the U.S. government and politics (e.g., American exceptionalism).

The State of American Politics Courses

An examination of American Politics/Government syllabi was conducted to assess the extent of internationalization

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