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*Published in:*  
International Studies Review

*DOI:*  
[10.1093/isr/viw006](https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw006)

*Publication date:*  
2016

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Hamati-Ataya, I. (2016). IR, the University, and the (Re)Production of Order: Between Perversions of Agency and Duties of Subversion: (in Félix Grenier & Jonas Hagmann (eds.) Forum: Sites of Knowledge (Re)Production: Towards an Institutional Sociology of International Relations Scholarship.). *International Studies Review*, 18(2), 333-365. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw006>

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Forthcoming in

Félix Grenier and Jonas Hagmann (eds.) Sites of Knowledge (Re)Production:  
Towards an Institutional Sociology of International Relations Scholarship.  
*International Studies Review*

**IR, the University, and the (Re)Production of Order:  
Between Perversions of Agency and Duties of Subversion**

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The discipline of IR was born in a time and place characterised by the consolidation of the University as the leading social institution of advanced learning and teaching. This contribution addresses two dimensions that can guide our thinking about IR's socio-educational impact as delineated and mediated by its University-bound condition, a condition that is presumably different from that of other institutions and sites of knowledge-production and transmission, such as private institutes, professional schools, or think-tanks. Each dimension calls for two types of reflection: a *socio-historical* one that aims to understand the situation IR faces within the liberal, public University and vis-à-vis the broader public realm; an *axiological-normative* one that aims to identify the possibilities for meaningful socio-academic action. These types of inquiry and their associated discourses and objectives are classically opposed, but need not, and should not, be. A sociological understanding of IR enables us to negotiate the interconnectedness of *what is* and *what ought to be* intelligently and responsibly, along the same 'logic' applied against the social sciences by political agents who have long understood this interconnectedness and learned to use it at our, and society's, expense.

The first point to consider is that the University's social position and relation to the social order are intrinsically ambivalent. The same institution that was notoriously irrelevant or resistant to the progressive developments of Europe's 'enlightenment' era (Anderson 2006: 21) was simultaneously viewed by conservative groups as a space of social subversion that, for Hobbes, was 'as mischievous to [the] Nation as the Wooden Horse was to the Trojans' (quoted in Gascoigne 1989: 18). Such ambivalence persists to this day. In parallel to the consolidation of the University as a progressive and innovative social institution serving 'truth' and 'society', runs the very concrete reality of its role in the reproduction of social order(s) and their constitutive hierarchies, inequalities, and legitimating ideologies. The sociologies of science and education have explored this paradox at the level of *national* social orders, to unmask the ways these institutions functionally contribute to propagating the ideas and dispositions that mediate the reproduction of extant social structures and practices. IR has started to explore it at the level of the *international/global* order(s), the realm it inhabits intellectually and pedagogically as a discipline itself subjected to global hierarchies.

These sociological studies tell us that as an institutionalized field of knowledge and practice IR is the product of structures and processes of local and global order-making and

power relations. As shown by Hagmann and Biersteker (2014) in their review of Western University IR curricula, teaching practices and programmes mostly tend to reproduce conservative and mainstream views rather than 'reflexive' ones, and are more likely to privilege orientations that are in line with their institutions' geocultural positions in the world. When integrated into a wider perspective that relates these geocultural positions to one another and to less privileged positions, it becomes obvious that IR also contributes to reproducing global structures of order and hegemony through its own educational practices (Tickner and Wæver 2009). These practices are merely the external manifestation of the symbolic impact the social order has on our mental structures and representations of it, which makes it more efficiently performative of its own 'truths' – as feminist and postcolonial scholarship has eloquently been demonstrating for decades (see Harding 1998). It is therefore legitimate to hypothesize that epistemic violence, which is the core operating principle of symbolic violence, is at work in similar ways at the national, international, and global levels. This is problematic because while one might accept that the teaching of world affairs might be more or less naturally governed or pre-determined by particularistic, power-based concerns and agendas in such institutions as diplomatic or military schools (as illuminated by Lebedeva & Hagmann, and Balzacq in this Forum) the same phenomenon takes an entirely different meaning, and has very different social and moral implications, in the case of the public University.

Apart from a general understanding of wide-ranging internal trends, we know much more about IR's role in the reproduction of the global order in/at the 'periphery' – where the post-positivist-favored *problématique* of the 'knowledge-power nexus' finds its greatest and most political exemplification – than about everyday macro- and micro-processes of social reproduction affecting Western and non-Western societies. These are the processes through which University education shapes the generational transmission of dominant frames of seeing and valuing, which are traditionally associated with 'ideology' (Althusser, 2008) and 'acculturation'. At the global level, while we understand *that* the reproduction of dominant ideas produced by an existing social or international order is likely to reinforce dominant practices that sustain and legitimate that order, we still need to understand *why* and *how* this happens in specific contexts. The corollary of this inquiry is an understanding of the University's role in the mediation of processes of 'subversion' of the existing ideational order (i.e. 'socio-cultural revolutions'), as witnessed, for example, during the students movement of the 1960s (Bourdieu 1990): what happens to the 'dissident', 'subversive' ideas that are effectively produced through IR scholarship and transmitted to new generations through IR university curricula? And more importantly, is such a subversive knowledge channeled to society beyond the safely 'critical' walls of the IR classroom? Levine and McCourt (2014) have recently asked whether theoretical 'pluralism' really matters in the discipline if such diversity does not translate into *different* practical political outcomes. One should equally ask whether our scholarly oppositions produce different educational practices, and if so, whether the latter also translate into different social practices and outcomes.

The truth is that we have no answers to such basic questions about IR's actual impact because we still haven't systematically investigated the processes of circulation and concretization of ideas within and across societies – and we need an *international sociology of knowledge* to do so systematically. We could be assuming benefit/harm where there is none – i.e. assuming relevance where IR is utterly irrelevant or inefficient – and ignoring

less visible forms of impact embedded in *longue-durée* societal changes mediated by University-based educational frameworks and practices. In other words, our *logical-conceptual* understanding of the *relations of (dis)similarity* between (textbook) ideas in IR and ideas in the world is no (dis)proof of their *actual relations* – and no amount of theoretical debating and argumentation can make these relations more or less real or valid. If we rather adopt a *realist* approach and consider knowledge from a *material* perspective – as a ‘product’ and ‘property’ (Fuller 1992) – it becomes possible to empirically track the circulation of specialized knowledge from the University into the general political economy of symbolic exchanges, and understand the different ways specific worldviews and practices ‘translate’ or not socially into systems of beliefs, dispositions, and skills that can be mobilized to produce judgments, actions and long-term, institutionalized practices.

Given the importance accorded to the University as the site of ‘universal’ and ‘critical’ aspirations, one way of problematizing the issue is to consider the effects of the disjunction between the University’s *internal vocation* and its *social function*. The social function whereby the University serves progressive societal needs while operating as a stabilizer and pacifier of the social order can be conceptualized in terms of the creation and destruction of knowledge as a ‘positional good’ (as defined by Hirsch 1977: Chap. 3). Moving away from the idealist conception of knowledge as a ‘public good’ whose value is unaffected by its social distribution and consumption, social epistemologist Steve Fuller (2006, 2009) enjoins us to consider the ‘schizoid’ role that the University plays in the creation of social capital (in the Bourdieusian sense) through knowledge-production (research), and its destruction through knowledge-transmission (teaching). In other words, the cognitive innovation that is the heart of the University’s internal vocation creates social advantage, i.e. an excess of capital for some, and this advantage is lost as this capital becomes more widely distributed through public higher-education.

Assuming a reasonable functioning of the researcher-teacher and research-led-teaching models, this process should be studied in order to understand what social advantages get passed on or lost through general and specific educational practices, and how IR’s content/meaning is transformed, made efficient, or neutralized, in this spatial translation from one public realm to the other. What is certain is that this model needs to take into account the ways IR travels through the ordered paths of international hierarchy. If IR pedagogy perpetuates the institutional and symbolic power of the ‘core’ over the ‘periphery’, as alluded to above, then it is obvious that while the capital of those on the receiving end might increase on some individual level, it is simultaneously decreasing on a range of collective levels, thereby further enhancing, rather than destroying, the social, collective advantages of the producers. Post-colonial societies understand very well how their chances at autonomous development are undermined by the systematic cultural surrender of their institutions to Western models and influences, whether directly or through the education of their elites in the Universities of the ‘metropolises’ (Fanon 2001. For insights from postcolonial studies on education, see Kelly and Altbach 1984). In this process, the social sciences and humanities are subjected to the opposite logic than that of the ‘hard’ and technical sciences, which are protected through patents and rules of transmission that often make them inaccessible beyond their production site, precisely because the international diffusion of such knowledges destroys the material advantages of the producers. But in the case of subject-matters like IR, diffusion translates as enhanced advantage – as IR scholars themselves understand in relation to states’ ‘soft power’. In this

case, an institutional sociology of IR would need to investigate how IR pedagogy is inscribed in the University's articulation of its internal vocation with its social function of stabilizer and pacifier of the *global* order.

Another important question concerns the way this University-bound process of creation-destruction of social advantage affects 'criticality' on both sides of the pedagogical relation — the criticality of researchers-teachers as well as that of students. But to address this notion in equally realist terms beyond our abstract and idealistic conceptions of 'critique', 'critical thought' and 'critical thinking', we need to confront the second important paradox of a University-bound intellectual vocation, namely, the fact that the social independence and autonomy of the academe, which was won through fierce struggles against competing social authorities and groups, has in effect been achieved not merely at the price of a greater isolation from the wider public realm, but also at the expense of intellectuals' social autonomy and subversive potential. Replacing the 'itinerant workers' of the 'Enlightenment', today's researchers-teachers are

civil servants who, in the first instance, address each other in jealously guarded ('peer-reviewed') zones of discourse and only then, after that initial filtering process, the larger society. Consequently, their potential for incendiary speech has been domesticated into reasoned cultural critiques and piecemeal policy advice. (Fuller 2009: 22)

No doubt, this 'domestication' has not fully erased academics' ability to pursue and transmit genuinely critical/subversive research. It can also be argued that it is this very process that enables us to perform our intellectual and pedagogical vocation objectively, safely, and for the benefit of all. But as academics who struggle with the neoliberal 'impact agenda' implicitly and paradoxically understand, the University's privileged status as a social space sufficiently removed from social struggles simultaneously alienates it from the pulse, experience, practice, and needs of everyday life. As an alternative to the classical Weberian view on the scientific 'vocation', I wish to briefly advance two different, related arguments in relation to this problem.

First, IR scholars who worry about their social role have an interest in reclaiming their social autonomy by setting the terms of their situated social relevance. To do so requires that the theory-practice problem be addressed anew, this time from a specifically *praxeological* perspective. The recent 'practice turn' in IR should expand the praxeological posture in the two opposite directions it has so far largely ignored: the level of our epistemic reflection, and that of our pedagogical practice. Engaging the first level would enable us to reconceptualize 'criticality' in terms that are not alienated or abstracted from the stuff of social and international *experience* and *practice*, and that can hence respond, through an engagement at the second (pedagogical) level, to the *cognitive* and *practical* needs of real social agents and groups confronting real social problems. This entails rethinking the relation of research and teaching, and seriously considering the advantages of a reversed, *teaching-led-research* paradigm of academic practice, whereby criticality is constantly gauged in relation to the socio-historically situated life experience of new generations of learners, and theory is informed by the challenges that arise from differentiated experiences of the global. Without such a praxeological posture, IR will keep ignoring, for example, the fact that when traveling beyond their production sites, so-called

'critical' approaches can have negative effects on the cultural and practical autonomy of students and elites of the 'periphery', while 'mainstream' approaches can better help them confront the logic of hegemonic threats directed at their societies.

Second, we need to move beyond the analytical discussion of the relation of facts to values/norms, and science to politics, which distorts our understanding of science's *actual* social function and effects. That a reasonably objective socio-historical understanding of the world leads to value-preferences and normative choices rather than political or ethical 'neutrality' is something that 'political man' has discovered long before any sophisticated philosophical discussion of the alleged nature and antagonism of 'descriptive' and 'prescriptive' claims about reality. I suggest that the history of the (neoliberal) political establishment's efforts to constrain the development, visibility, and socio-educational impact of the social sciences whenever their critical role of unmasking objective structures of social reproduction, control, and domination starts to bear its fruits is *the* historical indicator of the relation between *objective knowledge* and *political values and norms*. A socio-historical understanding of the conditions of possibility, nature, and impact of our own institutional condition is therefore a *necessary* and *sufficient* step for delineating a morally and politically meaningful pedagogical and social practice.

This is the wider project and promise that a sociology of IR holds for the discipline and its members: to better understand our condition and practice within the University, society, and the global order, so that we rise to the challenges of our 'vocation'. But as far as pedagogy is concerned, the ultimate question for us remains: can an IR curriculum truly pose any serious threat or danger to existing global structures of power-knowledge? If it cannot, is teaching IR an endeavor worth pursuing at all beyond the training of a limited class of future civil servants involved in the management of world politics, regardless of our idealist attachment to abstract conceptions of social utility, critique, and progress?

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