

Session Reports: Politics



Oral Session 1

Discussant and Author: John Thomas Scott

Three students, Jordan Gray, Carleton University, Olivia Kurajian, McGill University, and Dylan McClain, University of Arkansas at Monticello, presented papers focusing on political and historical dynamics surrounding nations and people groups interacting with and against each other. The papers collectively contained two common themes.

All three papers used the case study approach to understand larger questions at hand. Gray used case studies to identify what kinds of problems there are in the current rules-based international system and to identify how historians might approach this problem in the future. Kurajian examined a landmark Canadian legal case involving a religiously discriminated sub-group in Canada in hopes of shedding light on what is a growing problem in our own age-anti-Semitism. McClain studied two emerging nations' experiences with nationalism in the 20th century to explore how and to what extent nationalism might be a useful tool to help developing countries foster a “sustainable economic, social, and political infrastructure.”

This issue may be among the most enduring questions in human history and politics – how should differing human groups interact – and how might they do so as to preserve peace and dignity for all? Sets of rules – either by treaty or practice – have been an enduring solution, but who gets to set the rules, how the rules are applied in particular cases, and how just the rules are to all involved are enduring questions about the rules themselves. National concerns, both internally and externally, continue to shape global thinking about group interactions, and the success of recent nationalistic endeavors suggests they will not soon fade away. The conversation about how to best interact with each other must continue to prevent conflict – the other most common “solution” to the dynamic of group interactions – from emerging.

At the end of the presentations the following questions were posed to the students and the audience:

- What role does/should nationalism play in our thinking either about internal minorities, the international order, or economic, social, and/or political development?
- What strengths and weaknesses have you seen in conducting case studies as a methodological approach to understanding much larger questions? Are case studies particularly well suited for undergraduates who have less time and fewer resources than professional scholars do?



Oral Session 2

Discussant and Author: Bastian Guong

The research theme “Politics” in Oral Session 2 consisted of three contributions.

Lauren Cassidy, University of Kansas (USA), presented her work “Annexation or Reunification? Linguistic Appraisal of German and Russian News Reporting on Crimea.” Her analysis focused on a comparative view of one Russian and two German newspaper reports on this issue.

Madia Alfarhan, Zayed University (United Arab Emirates), gave insight into her research on “Changing Perspectives: Re-Framing Terrorism in the US (and Global) Media.” Her focus was the media coverage of the 2013 Boston marathon bombing.

Dominik Grundt’s study “Ethical Questions and Simulative Evaluation of Coping Strategies for Dilemma Situations in the Context of Highly Automated Driving” was conducted at the University of Oldenburg (Germany). His research is the result of a series of tests using a computer simulation to give ethical guidance for the world that moves towards driverless cars at breakneck speed.

“Surveillance” is a core element in all three cases – more precisely, surveillance for the sake of security, which immediately calls to mind Foucault’s “Discipline and Punish” (Foucault, 1975). On a more subtle level, a thematic emphasis lies on the surveillance of the controller, i.e., the ones performing surveillance (media outlets and car manufacturers).

All three projects analyze in one way or another “ethics” by exploring societal phenomena with various methodological approaches. Lauren Cassidy and Madia Alfarhan’s methodologies tread the same ground and approach media discourse analysis from different disciplines. The work on the Crimean Crisis echoes Bal’s (1985) power of narrative, whereas the study on the 2013 Boston marathon bombing reveals what happens when you ask – from the vantage point of visual culture – ‘what is given to be seen’ (Wenk & Schade, 2011).

“Can there be morals that are universal?” was one of the questions posed during the discussion. This input brings together the issue (“ethics”) and research transfer. If we follow Mary Douglas’ claim that institutions are intelligent entities that are able to ‘remember’ and ‘forget’ (Douglas, 1986), we arrive at the conclusion that, on the practical level, institutions such as media outlets and car manufacturers need to be more conscious of their agency and societal impact. As such, they need to be kept in check by professional as well as student research.

References

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Oral Session 3

Discussant: Dana Jackson-Hardwick

Author: Glenn Arthur Ricci

The opening presentation of Oral Session 3: Politics was the research by Allison Haynes (University of Alabama at Birmingham, USA) which looked at the refugee crisis going on in the world and the access the refugee children have to schooling. Previous studies have shown that the refugee students require more attention during their studies due to the various issues that come with the trauma and displacement they have faced in their lives. To look at the issue, the project interviewed and surveyed the public and language teachers to gain a better understanding of the school's ability to handle refugee students. It was found that schools lacked resources while the teachers themselves lacked a background understanding of the refugees which limits providing individual instructions for the students. These issues will be further studied through a series of surveys among community organizations and language teachers in the hopes that the results will shed light on how to best deal with the refugee crisis.

Next, the session continued the theme of relocated students, but this time looked at the migration of students into the German education system. The project of Benjamin Goecke, Johanna Hartung, Mattis Geiger, and Selina Weiss (Ulm University, Germany) examined how a fair admissions test could be developed for foreign students entering Germany. The project specifically looks at developing a fair college admission test for engineering sciences by systematically developing reasoning and reading comprehension tasks. The goal was to fairly test the eligibility of the applicants for engineering sciences. Their project demonstrated that the working memory capacity demands were an important predictor of item difficulty and that psychometrically the test can be considered fair.

The final presentation was the work of Nour El-Hakim (The American University in Cairo, Egypt) looking at the race and struggle against the proletarianisation in academia. This work frames the university system as a corporate one wherein the academic labor does not fall astray from the mechanisms of domination and exploitation that the capitalist mode of production deploys to necessarily develop its production process. This project aims to explore the ways in which the academic workers struggle to achieve a critical pedagogical experience while at the same time going against the rules prescribed by 'capital' in order to create an equitable society for everyone. The research found that, in their opinion, the university as an institution needs to be revolutionized.



Oral Session 4

Discussant and Author: Carol Strong

The 'Politics' Oral Session 4 consisted of three contributors: Daniela Delgado, University of Arkansas – Monticello, Arkansas, USA; Cassidy Neri, Eastern Connecticut State University, Connecticut, USA; and Iceline King, St. Catherine University, Minnesota, USA.

Ms. Delgado's presentation, "The Evolution of the Modern Presidency in the United States and its Impact on the World," charted the emergence of the 'modern U.S. presidency.' It mapped how the executive branch, once dominated by Congress, has vested increasing power into the hands of the U.S. President. The purpose of her research was to evaluate how the role of the modern and traditional presidents in the U.S. have impacted and continue to make an impact on international politics.

Ms. Neri's presentation, "Pro-Israel PAC expenditures and Candidate Decision Making," explored the intertwined relationship between U.S. Political Action Committees (PACs) and the U.S. Congressional legislative process. It focused specifically on how donations from Pro-Israel organizations impacted decisions in the U.S. Senate. By time tracking campaign donations by Pro-Israel groups and comparing them with U.S. Senatorial roll call votes, it attempted to rank U.S. Senators on the likelihood that the donations they received from Pro-Israel PACs would impact their Senatorial voting record.

Mr. King's theology-sociology presentation, "Forgotten and Forsaken Bodies: Black Trauma and the Problematic Construction of History in Public Memorials," considered how well public memorials (which construct visions of the past that underpin ongoing social perceptions of history) erected in the American South embody the social reality and transnational identity of African Americans. Using Afro-Pessimism to analyze ongoing perceptions of racism, colonialism and slavery, as tested against textual research, site visits and theological understandings of memory, it was found that the memorials erected to the victims of the hurricane Katrina neither tell the stories of Black people nor teach about how race/class/gender were central to the lived experience of the storm.

Commonality was found in the fact that each presenter considered specifically focusing on the interplay between domestic patterns of behavior/perceptions and international factors and considerations. Delgado and Neri considered these themes at the national level (focusing on the U.S. President and Senate respectively), while King focused at the state and local level and the creation of monuments to individuals at the local level. With this, all levels of U.S. politics were explored. All three papers also discussed the concept (and reality) of representation in American politics. Delgado and Neri considered how individuals elected into the U.S. Congress and the White House represent their constituents (including not only the people who voted them in, but everyone living in their respective states/districts) and King explored how minorities were represented through visual art renderings.

The concluding discussion between the audience and the panelists included insightful comments and stimulating questions about historical memory and identity, as tied to the theme of representative politics. There was also a lively exchange of ideas and reflection on methodological practices in qualitative research and how they provided valuable insight with regard to the extent to which international concerns impact domestic politics in the



United States. The take-away was that while international factors do indeed have an intermittent role in domestic, U.S. political debate, they are not always foremost in the minds of most Americans when assessing leadership and legislative decisions at the national level. This is in contrast to much of the rest of the world, which pays attention to domestic politics in America because of the potential impact the resulting decisions can have on the international community.



Oral Session 5

Discussant: Elizabeth Sandell

Author: Glenn Arthur Ricci

Oral Session 5: Politics centred around the theme of humanitarian efforts by looking at various situations around the world. The first presentation was of the research by Shen Yang (Pace University, New York, USA) that looked at the efforts of different soup kitchens in New York City. Through a series of participant observations via volunteering in the soup kitchens and conducting interviews, the researcher obtained qualitative data that was used to address the challenges faced by the everyday front line workers of the kitchens. Two separate soup kitchens were then compared. It was found that due to the high level of demand from the diners and the ever-changing volunteer staff, that the normative rituals and sentimentality needed to be replaced to allow a functional or rationalised system.

The follow up presentation looked at the struggles and challenges that orphanage care workers face on a regular basis in Guyana. Shemaine S. Robinson's (University of Guyana, Guyana) research explored this topic by investigating the essence of experiences that orphanage direct-care workers have while working with the children in their care. This research used semi-structured interviews in order to collect data across three orphanages from eight care workers. Across all three orphanages it was found that no specific requirements were needed in order to be hired as a direct-care worker while at the same time training was provided infrequently (at best) or only to certain workers. The caregivers found that working with antisocial or children with emotionally troubled behaviour were difficult to work with and some of the caregivers felt that children were being misdiagnosed, thereby compounding their difficulties. Such difficulties made the caregivers detach themselves emotionally, which could prove problematic for the children who still relied upon them. Hopefully this research will be able to provide training techniques or provide the orphanages insight to problems within their institutions.

The final presentation was of the research done by Lydia Makena (The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya) which explored the violation of human rights and humanitarian law in Kenya by looking at a case study of Internally Displaced Persons. Through a combination of qualitative methodology, interviews, focused group discussions, and documentation, the study looked at 302 internally displaced persons and administrators of displaced persons. It was found that there were indeed violations of human rights that directly contradict humanitarian law through questionable and selective forms of protection and assistance. The research recommends that the government provide stronger enforcement of non-discriminatory protection and assistance while also providing, or at least monitoring, the financial sustainability provided to the internally displaced persons. Furthermore, the local and regional politics need to also address the armed conflicts and violence that involves the internally displaced populations.



Oral Session 6

Discussant and Author: Julye Bidmead

The topics of the three presentations on the surface seem to have little commonality, however they illustrate the diversity of methodologies utilized in the humanities and social sciences. Aidan Jones' presentation, "Dating Soyboys: Women's View of Veg* Men," combined first-hand ethnographic information, quantitative data, with a thorough literature review. Leah Sparkman's contribution, "The United States Adversarial Court System: Addressing Sexual Assault with Restorative Justice," examined comparative studies of restorative justice from the United States with models from the United Kingdom and Belgium, while Rebekka Scheler's presentation, "The Dialectic of Dissimilarity and Relation: The Position of Man and Woman as Seen by Karl Barth," was an exegetical analysis of primary source material.

Despite the divergent subject matters, some common and intradisciplinary themes arose. On a meta level, all of the presentations address some aspect of gender; seen explicitly in Aidan's and Rebekka's presentations, and implicitly in Leah's research. While not using the word gender, her topic (sexual assault) revolved around gender issues as the survivor-victim is often gendered stereotyped and gender is often a factor in our "tough on crime" culture. Aidan tackles gender identity by pointing out the prevalence of gendered stereotypes when men identify as veg*. Going beyond an essentialist definition of masculinity, he claims that despite the emasculation often associated with veg* men, women see them as strong and kind, a concept he terms "strong-kindness." Rebekka examined gender through an exegesis of Karl Barth's theology, investigating his anthropological Christocentrism to reveal human relations and equality. Barth, she argues, espouses a hierarchical reading of Genesis 1-3, which resulted in years of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. Leah's analysis forced us to ponder on the power relationships between the survivor-victim and the assailant through the adversarial nature of the US justice system. The theological questions in Rebekka's presentation compelled us to ask existentially what does it mean to be human? Are we all equal? Does the victim blaming/shaming often seen in rape cases happen because of hegemonic masculinity?

Leah's solution of restorative justice to make the perpetrator a better citizen and preventing the survivor-victim from feeling revictimized, are human attempts at social justice and equality. In Aidan's presentation he stated that society views cooking as part of female nature. Can that statement be traced back to the Genesis narrative where a woman's first action is feeding her husband (a veg* man)? And what would have happened if God's solution to the disobedience of the first couple in the Garden of Eden had been restorative justice instead of something punitive?

