Comments for Panel on Interests and Identity:

- Rawi Abdelal, *National Purpose in the World Economy*, (Cornell 2002), chaps. 1 and 8;

By Yoshiko Herrera

Let me begin by saying that overall I was very impressed by all three works. I appreciate the opportunity this panel has given me to re-read these authors and it really was a pleasure (and quite an interesting exercise) to try to seriously consider the works in reference to each other. Because these are all published works and because I basically am in agreement with most of the claims the authors make, I wanted to use this opportunity to reflect on the contributions the authors make to the study of identity and interests, as well as social science, rather than provide a more traditional critique of the works.

All three authors represent what I consider to be a very welcome change away from traditional IR category and variable rigidity. Each one makes an important contribution that seeks to use identity as a variable or use identity to reinterpret the meaning of existing variables and therefore significantly improves upon existing explanations.

In some ways all three authors are addressing the same problem, which seems to be *the* problem of international relations, which is why do some states seek greater ties with certain states while they distance themselves form others. Interests are at the heart of these explanations, but so too are identities at the heart of interests. In this way, by focusing on identity, each of the authors has made a significant contribution to preference formation, a topic that should be (but is mostly not) a central focus of any interest-based explanation. That is, it's not enough to claim that states or groups have particular interests, but rather one should ask, as these authors do, where those interests came from and what they are based upon.

Rawi Abdelal (hereafter "RA") used national identities to explain the trade orientation of some of the states of the FSU after perestroika. Ted Hopf (hereafter "TH") used identities to explain how states understand the world, and therefore how to explain Russian foreign policy alliances and breaks in 1955 and
And, Jutta Weldes (hereafter "JW") used identities to explain the meaning of national interest, illustrated by a discussion of the Cuban Missile Crisis; national interest is an important variable in IR, and figures very prominently in explanations of a range of state behavior. All three focused on identity, but they also focused on interests: RA on economic interests; TH on political interests; and JW on national interest. In some ways, JW's national interest is actually the focus of both RA and TH's work in that the leaders of the states under consideration by RA and TH were obviously engaged in the process of determining their national interests in regard to both economic and foreign policy.

In the paragraphs that follow, I would like to raise a number of issues and consider how the different authors deal with these issues. I will begin the topic of the relationship between theory and empirical data and the treatment of alternative theories, and then discuss the author's use of identity more explicitly in terms of content and contestation. Finally, I consider the issue of alternatives to identity in the authors' works.

Theory and Empirics

The three authors set up their research in very different ways. Some type of empirical puzzle motivated each one, but the works differed in their relationship between empirical findings and the theories of identity and interests.

RA began with a very solid social science problem; that is, when we look out into the world, given what we know from existing theories, we expect to see "X" but instead we see "Y," and that forces us to ask "why is that, and what does it mean for existing theories' ability to explain events?" In this case, the curious choice of trade partners and pattern of trade among FSU state could not be explained by existing realist or liberal theories, therefore RA had to turn to national identity, because it did a better job explaining empirical reality. One can see that RA did not have to write a book about identity, but it turned out that national identity was the best theory for his particular set of cases; in other words the empirical situation determined the use of identity as a theory.

TH, on the other had, did not start out with empirical findings. Rather he started with an interest in recovering identities from 1955 and 1999 in Russia, and then after carefully figuring out which identities existed, turned to empirical data to see if and how those identities affected foreign policies in terms of states understandings of other states. In this case, TH was committed to identity from the start; it is possible that he could have had negative findings, that is, he might have found that the recovered identities did not play a role in Russian foreign policy, but the book had to be about identities nonetheless. In this case a commitment to an identity-based theory, rather than an empirical puzzle, was
motivating the research. While this was interesting and useful, I wonder a little bit about the pre-commitment to a particular theoretical agenda. The empirical puzzles do come, but I would have liked to see them a bit earlier, because I felt that since this was not mainly a theory text, the empirical motivation could have been given more emphasis.

For JW, it seems that the motivation for the paper was two-fold, both theoretical and empirical. On the one hand JW found that "national interest" as a variable was ill-defined and moreover that realist definitions were lacking. She therefore turned to constructivist theories to better explain the construction and use of national interest as a theoretical variable. On the other hand, JW was concerned to show that a constructivist national interest variable was better able to explain certain types of state action, namely the Cuban Missile Crisis. While I agree completely with the need to unpack the concept of national interest, and while I very strongly support JW's reconceptualization of the concept, I'm not totally convinced that American action in Cuba really is a puzzle. It seems like there were many factors, beyond identity, which would have predicted American action. I think it would be nice to see some case where an outcome is not explained by existing theories. Alternatively, I thought JW could have gone farther in perhaps reinterpreting the notion of puzzles. That is rather than accepting existing explanations at face value, recast empirical puzzles by unpacking a whole range of vague variables, for example, do the same kind of analysis with "power" or "material interest." In some ways this is what TH and RA do, but one could be more explicit about the relationship between theory and empirical data.

Finally I wanted to make one point about the interpretivist enterprise, discussed in most detail by TH. In particular, I wonder about TH's claims to be unfamiliar with Soviet/Russian foreign policy in advance of his post-recovered-identities analysis; I don't of course doubt TH's claims about himself, but wonder if that is the right way to approach the empirical study of identity. I think Weber's analysis of science and objectivity speaks directly to these points. Weber rejects the tabula rasa metaphor, and explicitly makes permeable the boundary between objectivity and subjectivity. Moreover, he argues for the necessity of value-based science, since it is through values that social scientists make sense of the sea of data that confronts them. Because all three authors in fact make a strong case for the situatedness of knowledge, and like Weber, reject the idea that "the facts speak for themselves," I thought it might be worthwhile to consider the interpretivist enterprise and the study of identities in light of Weber's work.

Alternative Theories

While all three authors are addressing similar theoretical and empirical questions, it is interesting that they don't address the same alternative theories. RA is
intervening amongst realists and liberals; TH is intervening amongst constructivists and neo-realists; and JW among realists and constructivists.

Of course the specifics of the empirical cases influences greatly the type of alternative theories considered, but at times it was not clear exactly why some but not others were examined. I think it would be useful for the authors to reflect on why they did or did not consider other alternative theories. For example, in TH's case, why discuss only neo-realism, and normative constructivism and systemic constructivism? Why not realism and liberalism?

What is Identity?

Obviously in any work on identity, the question of definition is sure to come up and I think it is worth considering how the three authors define and use identity. As you will see from my own presentation (of a co-authored paper with RA, Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott) at the conference, I am inclined to think about identity in terms of content and contestation.

Content

Differences in the content of identity, it seems to me are one of the core differences between TH and RA's work. TH defines identity primarily in terms of cognitive and relational content. RA focuses primarily on social purpose, but considers relational content as well. In JW's article, if you consider the different articulations as identities, then it seems to me that they have purposive, relational and normative content. But on the other hand, one could consider the articulations themselves to be the cognitive content of state identities. It might be nice to think about these types of content more explicitly in the discussion of articulations.

I think would be interesting for the three authors to consider the types of content they chose to focus on and how their work might have been different if they included other types of content. For example, TH might have considered purposive content in the way that RA did, or RA might have considered cognitive content, which would have allowed him to go a bit deeper into the construction of economic interests by considering the meaning for different actors of material facts (a topic which is close to my heart because it happens to be the topic of my own book). I don't mean this to suggest that the authors should have done something different in their work or that they should have written different books; I only offer it as a potentially interesting post-production thought experiment.
Along these lines I also thought that TH might think of the different logics (appropriateness, everyday, etc.) in terms of types of content – similarly we (that is, my coauthors and I) might think of our types of content in terms of these logics. This might not work out, but it would be interesting to consider the difference between our consideration of types of content and these logics and whether there is a way to put them together.

*Contestation*

I was very pleased to see that in all three of these works the authors take the issue of contestation seriously. All three reject the concept of uncontested groupness; that is they don't take the meaning of groups for granted. But they do this in different ways. RA considers actual contestation among group members over the content (especially the social purposes to which the group is oriented). TH does not treat contestation in terms of actual people trying to convince others in the group of their view, but rather considers the multiplicities of identities that exist and are available to society and elites at any one time, and he also considers the process of naturalization of a particular identity through the logic of the everyday. JW suggests contestation in her analysis of the possibility of multiple articulations, and also some level of closure to contestation in the process of interpellation. I think TH's concept of the logic of everyday is similar to JW's concept of interpellation in describing how a particular identity or articulation becomes dominant, and in this way, both are related to RA's conceptualization of contestation. In my view it would be nice to consider similarities and differences between the logic of everyday, interpellation, and contestation.

However, for both TH and JW I would have liked to have heard more about how the process of articulation and interpellation or distillation of multiple identities and the logic of everyday works. For example, where are these processes located exactly and who are the relevant actors and which structures of power are involved? It is obvious that there is some level of contestation taking place at the scholarly level amongst analysts, but what about among actors on the ground?

It might be helpful to begin by discussing the interplay between actor-based identities or articulations more explicitly – this would go some way towards addressing the issue of agency. Next, a more detailed empirical discussion of how the process of interpellation or the logic of everyday makes use of and transforms these articulations and identities would be useful. I wondered for example, if we might think of the process of interpellation as identity creation or formation? In addition, I would be interested to know from JW, in discussing the parameters of interpellation, where are you in terms of Bourdieu and Gramsci, on the one hand; and on the other hand, appreciating some of TH's analysis,
how does cognitive or social psychology fit into the process of articulation and interpellation?

**Alternatives to Identity**

The discussion of the definition or content and contestation of identity in these works brings up another question, which is whether we are really talking about social identities *per se*. To be provocative, with the caveat that I believe these works are all making a serious contribution to the study of identity, let me ask a few questions that I hope might push the boundaries of our understanding of identity. At times, especially in TH's work, I asked myself if he really needed the concept of identity, or if he was not just considering ideas that are socially held? Do these recovered identities actually exist (or do they have the uncertain ontological status of recovered memory)? Do people (both individuals and groups) matter for identities or is it just a matter of ideas and discursive formations? And, are cognitive structures the same as identities? For both JW and TH, I wonder, if people don't *identify with* an identity, what are the implications? And, in particular, is it still rightly called an identity?

**Final thoughts:**

Each of the works makes a contribution that I think can only be fully appreciated upon multiple reflection and reaction. I hope the authors find these comments interesting and that the comments will stimulate further discussion. I look forward to the panel.