

# Institutional Memory Papers: New Perspectives - Closing remarks



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Institutional Memory Papers: New perspectives

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The empirical and reflective articles in this series mark the core of what is unique and spectacular about the IISL: a thriving intellectual community that nurtures synchronicity even as it deals with distinctly different threads of inquiry. The IISL has been a hub for creating extraordinary dialogue about socio legal studies and it was on representative display in these articles, especially in the essays reflecting on the Institute's role in professional formation. Whether it be to influence clinical pedagogy with political theory (Morales-Cruz), expand the theoretical implications for a specific sub-field (Cordero Arce), or reshape fields to include more critical extensions (Zevounou), each reflective contribution highlighted important ways in which the IISL has served as an organizational alchemist for scholars across contexts and at different stages of their academic and professional journeys.

Part of this institutional grounding and capacity for breadth is rooted in the Institute's legitimacy as a global interdisciplinary space. For scholars who might be within academic traditions where sociolegal framings are not particularly valorized, the Institute offers a welcome intellectual haven. But beyond those who seek such refuge, the IISL also offers a canvas for building coteries and language that can transcend more individual research motivations. As the authors in this series suggest, their ideas were not simply confined to the coordinates of their own circumstances, they grew when they were deliberated upon in relationship to other theories from dissimilar, but comparable, contexts. It is this patchwork of possibility that makes the IISL a foundational support system for a range of critical interventions. Finally, as Zevounou reflects, by not being viewed "as a Trojan horse for North American academic imperialism" (p. S276), the IISL has afforded an innovative paradigm within which to do this work of germination and expansion. By being a site of inclusive intermingling committed to truly global inquiry, it has made possible the renegotiation of prefigurative biases alongside a generative space for critique and collaboration.

It is exactly this kind of building that the three empirical articles in this Series elucidate. Rich with insightful detail about their very disparate sites – whether it be non-conventional *Misyar* marriages in Indonesia (Lukito), guerrilla graves in a remote cemetery in Northern Kurdistan (Bostan), or the compliance navigations by European aircraft professionals (Woodlock) – the studies each highlight comparable questions about the relationships between law, its rhetoric, and its everyday reality. At first glance, these papers sound like they might have little in common but their deployment of traditional theories to unpack new research sites hold value for more than just its substantive purveyors. Whether it is the use of legal consciousness and pluralism to

understand the working of everyday legality (Woodlock), plural normativity of local practices (Lukito), or Foucauldian ideas of truth regimes to make sense of current fictionalization of power negotiation (Bostan), these empirical contributions rely on constructions of a relatable social theory to make sense of starkly variegated scope conditions. In turn, these extensions afford new ways for new scholars coming to this literature to think about the life of these theories and their possibilities for development.

Reading these research testimonials and impressive projects made me think about my own relationship to the global sociology of law community and the ways in which the IISL has been instrumental in shaping that bond.

In 2010, I was a junior student at Stanford's sociology department trying to convince my program that a sociolegal study on Indian law firms would be a good idea for a possible project. Funding for global legal studies like this were not common in American sociology departments, certainly not for very junior scholars. At the time, I had not passed any of my comprehensive exams, not yet defended my dissertation proposal, and had nothing to show for my idea outside of a favorable reception its presentation had garnered earlier than year at a *Law and Society Association* conference. One of the predominant suggestions was that I consider pilot interviews before committing to the project, and one of attendees mentioned a grant that catered to precisely such exploration: the *Juan Celaya* research grant for studies in globalization and the law. I knew nothing about the IISL or Oñati, in fact, I could hardly believe such a scholarly institute existed, much less than it would support, in such a tailored way, preliminary scholarship along these lines of inquiry. The surprise grew even deeper when the following year I was selected as a recipient of the grant.

This IISL affirmation not only helped with the pilot interviews in 2012 that would shape my dissertation, it changed the course of my academic career. As the first validation for my research, it was an unprecedented honor that made me believe that my idea had "legs" worth pursuing. Second, as a generous grant that materially funded my fieldwork, it allowed me - a second-year graduate student - to think about my research site with much more nimbleness than I might have been able to incorporate later in the research process. It was this grant that allowed me to decide to focus on a single legal market (Mumbai) and go in-depth with my analysis of gender, rather than make the project broadly about the Indian legal profession across urban sites. If I had not had the luxury of that extended pilot fieldwork, I might have not had the confidence to make that research decision, it certainly would not have produced my first book *Accidental*

*Feminism* (Princeton 2021) that hinged on that important research finding from the pilot study. Finally, the grant became a sort of gateway-honor for other opportunities (e.g. smaller conferences at the IISL, membership within research associations like the RCSL, legitimacy for other grants) because it offered sight within a socio-legal community that was peripheral across many of my institutional contexts. Over the next decade, it would be this community that would significantly shape the architecture of the second book I co-edited with Sara Dezalay (2021) on legal globalization and the invisibility of our institutional building.

In turn, this small grant, meant to be used over the course of an academic year (2012) not only helped shape my dissertation, it also set me on a path towards a decade-long research agenda. I wrote my first article from these findings in 2013, and it was the seed of that article that would become my first book almost a decade later. But it was not just the trajectories of research. The IISL's essence is in the communities it invites and nourishes by just existing. That 2013 article I wrote from my pilot findings was for a special issue of a journal whose editors I first met and got to know well to at a summer workshop in Oñati. I continue to teach and write with others with whom I share IISL connections, including the editor of my second book, whom Sara and I met first through the IISL-inspired connection. As a newly immigrant law professor in the United States committed to inquiry about the periphery, these questions of community and solidarity are constantly on my mind, and it feels pertinent to declare my gratitude for the ways in which IISL has given me, over the years, a world of collaborators and interlocutors that I have built meaning with. These subversive journeys to theory, method, and reasoning, have been rich in their education, especially embroiling sites that go beyond traditional trajectories of north and south.

I continue to regularly plot with close friends and collaborators about ways in which to revisit the IISL for newer extensions. Just as many of the authors in this series allude to, the time at IISL and the actual opportunity (whether it is a lectureship / fellowship / visit / grant) is no doubt important, but what it affords beyond is buoyed by the larger commitments that the IISL invests in: a rich institutional structure that holds within it synchronistic possibilities for a web of ideas to nurture and grow. Only the other day, a dear friend and collaborator, was relaying to another IISL-fan how we first met in one of the Institute's buildings over a decade ago. These are the kinds of extensions that cannot be predicted or premeditated by a single opportunity. Rather, they call for embeddedness within more intentional structures and environments that have been built agentially beyond traditional margins made to keep us complicit within its structural limitedness.



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I wish for the ideas and scholars in this series (as well as for all of us who continue to search for communities from and through a range of peripheries) the same thing I could not have known to ask for my own past self – expansive possibilities for the reach of their research, and the blessing of journeying with like-minded others with sight and solidarity.

## References

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