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Habitus and Field

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Abstract

This article begins by clarifying and defining field and *habitus* (1) anchoring these concepts in a tradition drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, but also underlining the extent to which the concepts have been used beyond this tradition (2). The article then proceeds to discuss the use of field and *habitus* in international studies (3). It points out that field and *habitus* can be (and has long been) used for empirical studies linking the national, the international and the transnational. However, the concepts were imported into scholarly IR/IPE disciplines proper as part of the theoretical discussions surrounding the reflectivist turn. At present, field and *habitus* are often used to transcend the key divides (inside/outside and public/private) rather than to study relations across them. Finally, the article concludes on the avenues for further research using field and *habitus* in international studies, insisting on the scope for enhancing and clarifying the heuristic value of the concepts (4).

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Habitus and Field

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Habitus and field are twin concepts drawn from a Bourdieu-inspired theoretical repertoire. They are widely used in the social sciences to analyze power relations with an emphasis on questions about symbolic power and violence. Their value added in international studies is that they provide a way integrating and analyzing the material and ideational aspects of power relations and that they do not rest on (or reproduce) the state-centric assumptions that informs and shapes much of the analysis in the field.

The point of departure is that the way people understand the world and their own place in it, is key to all power relations. It shapes what kinds of things (e.g. money, arms, culture, diplomas, or contacts) confer advantages to people, institutions or states. It also influences the extent to which people, institutions or states recognize (or misrecognize) hierarchies and (therefore) how they behave. How do people, institutions and states conceive of their own interests? What kind of strategies do they follow? The answer depends on their understandings of the context they are in. Symbolic power is rooted in these understandings; it is the power to shape them, make them seem natural and hence to obfuscate the power relations they entail. Symbolic violence is the violence these understandings do to those who are on the receiving end of a hierarchy; a violence in which the victim is always complicit since symbolic power presupposes shared understandings. The question is how we can think about, access and analyze these “understandings” and the symbolic power and violence they entail. Field and *habitus* enter the stage as one possible answer. The “rules of the game” of a field and the dispositions (*habitus*) of those engaged in that field are the keys that can help us open door to an analysis of power relations, placing symbolic power and violence. This article spells out how this works with special attention to how field and *habitus* contributes to the analysis of symbolic power in international studies.

To do this the article begins by clarifying and defining field and *habitus* (1) anchoring these concepts in a tradition drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, but also underlining the extent to which the concepts have been used beyond this tradition (2). The article then proceeds to discuss the use of field and *habitus* in international studies (3). It points out that field and *habitus* can be (and has long been) used for empirical studies linking the national, the international and the transnational. However, the concepts were imported into scholarly IR/IPE disciplines proper as part of the theoretical discussions surrounding the reflectivist turn. At present, field and *habitus* are often used to transcend the key divides (inside/outside and public/private) rather than to study relations across them. Finally, the article concludes on the avenues for further research using field and *habitus* in international studies, insisting on the scope for enhancing and clarifying the heuristic value of the concepts (4).

Habitus *and* Field Defined

Habitus refers to a person's taken for granted, unreflected—hence largely habitual—way of thinking and acting. The *habitus* is a “structuring structure” shaping understandings, attitudes, behavior and the body. The *habitus* is formed through the accumulated experience of people in different fields. A field is an area/domain of social interactions held together by a “stake at stake” such as the definition of legitimate rule, good taste, useful economic knowledge, or of good family life. Fields organize the relationship between the elements in the field as gravity organizes the relationship among physical bodies.

Field

Using fields to study the social world is to acknowledge that social life is highly differentiated. Each field develops its own distinct logic which is vital for understanding that specific aspect of

social life. A field can be exceedingly varied in scope and scale. A family, a village, a market, an organization (such as a firm, the IMF, or Amnesty International), a professional category (such as economists, diplomats or security professionals) may be conceptualized as a field provided it develops its own organizing logic around a stake at stake. Each field is marked by its own (partially autonomously generated) taken for granted understanding of the world (*doxa*), implicit and explicit rules of behavior, and its own valuation of what confers power onto someone; that is what counts as “capital”. The *illusio* of the field makes the resulting power relations appear invisible, natural or inevitable plays a crucial role in upholding the logic of the field. It masks and obfuscates power and thereby reduces resistance.

The idea of referring to subsets of social interaction as “fields” is borrowed from physics and social psychology. The point is to capture the logic and rules of the game in a specific area that affects everything within this area. Fields are “magnetic” attracting and organizing social interaction. Changes in that magnetic force or field logic have reverberations across the entire field; they affect all actors in the field. Hence causality may be at “a distance”. A change in the logic of field caused by strategy A aimed at B has strong implications for C even though C is in no way directly involved or aimed at. In Short, a field is an organizing logic around a “stake at stake”, visible through its effects and dominating everyone concerned by the stake at stake whether or not they are conscious of participating in the field and/or actively engaged in the struggle for defining that stake.

To understand the field, “field analysis” therefore usually includes (often begins with) a more or less formal and graphic “mapping” of *positions*. This is an inroad to understanding field effects. To undertake this mapping, it is essential to understand what counts as advantage—as *capital*—in the field and who has it. There is no reason to believe that money is all that matters. In some configurations (e.g. among voluntary aid workers or revolutionary groups), personal wealth may be

of little or even negative value in determining “positions” in the internal hierarchy. Instead education, local connections, practical experience or personal authority (i.e. forms of cultural, social, or symbolic capital) might be of great relevance. Placing the people or organizations in a field on a map according to the capital of which they dispose paves the way for an analysis of how they relate to each other. This mapping is often partly based on objective indicators such as CV data or income statistics, but it also involves the analysis of “incorporated capital”, the *habitus* (more about which shortly).

“Fields” are not static however and the “mapping” is merely a snapshot of relations in the field at a given point in time. Fields are constantly evolving, dynamic terrains of struggles and change. People and organizations in a field struggle over the relative value of different forms of “capital” in their field as well as over the “rules of the game”. They do this “strategically” trying to advance their own positions. Hence instrumental rationality—*strategy*—is integral to field analysis. People promote their own positions by drawing resources (capital) from other fields, by struggling over the boundaries of field. But they do this from a specific position (based on their capital) and with certain dispositions (to see the world in specific ways). To understand and explain their instrumental strategies, these have to be explained and cannot—*pace* rational choice theorists—be assumed. In field analysis (as in Marxian thinking) people make history but they cannot choose the position they start from. In field analysis, people cannot even choose how they understand their starting position, their interests or the adequate “strategies”. These understandings are shaped by their *habitus*.

Finally, fields exist in context. They are only relatively autonomous from each other. Developments in one field influence those in other fields. People and organizations move between fields and can try to make capital and positions from one field bear in other fields. Cultural capital (such as an MA in International Relations) may be used to promote a career in the diplomatic

service, in business or in academia. There is consequently a certain *homology*—common ancestry—to the positions and hierarchies produced in different fields. However, there is no automatism to this process. Fields are hierarchically linked to each other. Some fields—such as the educational field, or the state—may produce capital that is of value in all (or most) other fields. They are *metafields* shaping other fields. But more commonly the relationship between different fields—and the relative value of capital and positions in them—is itself an object of struggle taking place in the *field of power*. Strategies and positions in the field of power as elsewhere are largely shaped by the *habitus* through which people understand the world around them and themselves.

Habitus

Succinctly put, the *habitus* is a system of durable and transferrable dispositions integrating all past experience. It structures and shapes perceptions and actions at all times. The *habitus* is in other words a concept that links taken for granted, often unarticulated understandings (*doxa*) with action and behavior. It is a “structuring structure” that shapes all behavior and thinking. It is essential for anyone seeking to understand why and how social hierarchies can be reproduced.

To some extent the *habitus* is field specific, reflecting and reproducing the rules and discourses in the field including those rules that come with the specific position of a person in a given field. In that sense, fields make up the social contexts from which habits and understandings are internalized. The field specific nature of the *habitus* becomes particularly clear when people move into new fields. Until they acquire the dispositions tied to the new field their behavior appears odd and out of place. There is a period marked by *hysteresis*—“lagging behind”—until they catch up with, adapt to and eventually internalize the prevailing rules. As this indicates, the *habitus* is not only tied to *one* field. It reflects *all* experience. As people move between different fields, that may obviously become something rather complex in nature.

The *habitus* is an inclination, a disposition, to see, talk, taste, do or work in a specific ways. It is a background matrix that shapes what is understood to be rational or to be right and wrong. The *habitus* also shapes views on painting, music, literature or politics. Lastly, the *habitus* shapes the body and body language by shaping how people care for themselves—their attention to their body, health and clothing—but also how they understand gender, race or sexuality. Since bodily expression is integral to social positions, the *habitus* can readily be seen as a form of “incorporated capital” in an ideational but also in a physical sense.

The *habitus* is consequently integral to practices. This has at least three implications. One is that one would expect the *habitus* to be reflected in all practices, including the scientific or the political. A diplomatic gesture will reflect the diplomat’s *habitus* and related understanding of what it is rational to do and how that is best done. A second is that one should expect (and be aware) that meaning for observers and for the observed varies as their *habitus* diverges. The academic interpretation of a diplomatic gesture will diverge from the diplomat’s own, as it is shaped by different experiences, dispositions. Hence the typical “rational” action approach wherein the researcher imputes rationality to—in fact imposes her own rationality upon—a subject is mistaken (unless the observer and the observed do share the same understanding of rationality but that is something to be explained *not* something to be taken for granted). Finally, scientific objectivity and validity can only be grounded in *reflexivity*: the only way to limit the distorting impact of one’s own academic *habitus* is to objectify the own activity and submit it to the same kind of analysis one would submit any part of the social world to. Hence *habitus*/field belong to an approach that is often referred to as *reflexive*.

As a concept shaping all practices, the *habitus* is pivotal to social hierarchies and power relations. It sheds light on the puzzling fact that people on the receiving end of social hierarchies behave in ways that harm them socially and even physically. It elucidates why they become

complicit in the “*symbolic violence*” of orders disadvantaging them. A *habitus* shaped by the experience of being dominated (that is of not possessing the symbolic, bodily, financial and social capital to resist dominance) will tend to express itself in “strategies” that fail to be effective in breaking domination as well as in a physical appearance that accentuates it. A key role for the social sciences is to critically unveil this and create the reflexivity that is a precondition for breaking cycles of symbolic violence and domination.

Habitus and Field in Context

Habitus and field are intimately tied to each other; they are twin concepts. More than this, they are parts of a more general, elaborate, widely used and well developed sociological approach often tied to the person of Pierre Bourdieu [1930-2002]. Bourdieu certainly played a key role in developing and promoting it with his roughly 40 books and 200 articles, most of which are translated to English. However, a Bourdieu-centric understanding of the approach and its origin is misleading in that it severely downgrades the role of the broader scholarly community around Bourdieu as well as the independent status gained by the approach and the concepts tied to it.

The Bourdieuvian Origins

Niklas Luhmann answered when offered a chair in Bielefeld that he wanted an office and a library so that he could spend the coming 30 years developing a social theory (which he did). Bourdieu repeatedly expressed the opposite attitude to sociology and academic activity. He abandoned philosophy for anthropology/sociology, insisted that “theory” should always be tied to empirical analysis and that science had to be critically engaged. At the end of his life Bourdieu engaged in politics and became a “public intellectual”. This empirical and engaged approach to science is

mirrored in the way *habitus*/field evolved. They were essentially developed to communicate in a scientific field and to solve specific problems emerging in empirical social analysis.

Bourdieu was intent on communicating effectively in the scientific field with the aim of influencing the way social science was conducted. Substantively, Bourdieu was looking for roads to circumvent—or at least to limit—the debilitating influence of what he termed the central “dualities” in social thinking such as objective/subjective, material/ideational, action/structure, particular/general, or mind/body. Consequently, much of Bourdieu’s conceptual innovation was geared to dissolve or circumvent these dualities and make social science drawing on both sides of the duality possible. In order to communicate effectively in his scientific field, Bourdieu drew extensively on the existing repertoire of ideas and vocabularies and pragmatically used them for his own purposes. He borrowed vocabulary conferring symbolic power (and ideas obviously) from the grand authorities of the past such as Aristotle, Durkheim, Goffmann, Husserl, Marx, Mauss, Merleau-Ponty, Panofsky, Pascal or Weber. But the way he used these thinkers was unorthodox and “irreverent”. He was “thinking with a thinker against that thinker”. In translation this meant to find inspiration in a wide range of classical sources, but to pick only parts and transform/use them for the own purposes.

The way Bourdieu developed the concepts *habitus*/field speaks both to his substantive concern with overcoming dichotomies and to his preoccupation with effective communication. The *habitus*—which Bourdieu drew most directly from Marcel Mauss—had already been widely used in social thinking by e.g. Aristotle, Elias, Weber, and Husserl. Bourdieu’s motivation for working with it systematically, was that it could be used to transcend central schisms haunting social analysis. It could integrate individual bodily traits, ideas, actions and subjective beliefs with structural, discursive, material, and objective constraints. Similarly, “field” was introduced as a pragmatic way of reconciling objectivist, materialist, class analysis, focused on the hierarchical stratification of

society in its entirety with the differentiation of society, the centrality of symbolic forms, and the multiplicity of social dynamics of “distinction”.

Bourdieu’s pragmatic, “irreverent” and empirical approach to sociological theory has left a strong imprint on his concepts. Bourdieu was inclined to treat his own concepts in the same way as he treated those borrowed from classical theory. He used them differently depending on context with the result that the concepts themselves are defined in varying and evolving ways. Brubakers recounts trying to count definitions of *habitus* and abandoning the enterprise after having identified more than twenty definitions. Struggling to pin down the *one* correct definition and usage of field would be no easier. Bourdieu’s approach to theorizing and theory was that it should facilitate critical, engaged, empirical and reflexive social inquiry. Theory should convey a critical “sociological disposition” aimed at making symbolic power visible. It should not be “theoretician theory” or more plainly “gobbledygook”. From this perspective, concepts such as *habitus/field* are “thinking tools”. They are emphatically not intended as part of a tightly knit, abstract and de-contextualized system of social analysis.

Bourdieu resisted treating his own work as a *corpus* which he associated with a terminal, dead status where concepts and theories, had become de-linked from their living context. (He consequently would most probably have found the idea of an encyclopedia article—such as this one—on *habitus/field* rather unappealing, preferring scholarship using his concepts, preferably criticizing and transforming them). Perhaps because most people who engage Bourdieu and his concepts do so partly because they share this irreverent approach to theory, it should come as no surprise that *habitus/field* have travelled far beyond their originator and developed in largely independent directions.

Habitus and Field beyond Bourdieu

Bourdieu inspired work has flourished in virtually all fields of the social sciences including anthropology, art theory, economics, educational science, ethnography, gender studies, geography, institutionalism, media studies, philosophy, and sociology as shown by the range of special issues listed in the general part of the bibliography. Consequently, *habitus/field* have been discussed and elaborated in a variety of directions. They have taken on context specific meanings that have followed distinct and increasingly divergent paths.

The spread of *habitus/field* and of Bourdieu's ideas more generally can only be fully understood with reference to Bourdieu's role as an editor and institution builder. From early on (already in 1964) Bourdieu becomes the editor of a series (*le sens commun*) at the Editions de Minuit publishing house in Paris. In 1975 he launches the review *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* based at the Centre for European Sociology which he was then directing. Bourdieu also held leading positions in the French university system, culminating with his appointment as professor at the *College de France* in 1981. In 1993 he became the first sociologist to receive a golden medal from the *CNRS* (National Centre for Scientific Research); the highest scientific distinction in France. These positions contributed to the exceptional diffusion and interest in Pierre Bourdieu's ideas; an interest that extended far beyond the circle of his immediate collaborators.

It is no exaggeration to say that, as a consequence, *habitus/field* have taken on lives of their own extending well beyond their originator. They have spun context specific research debates, to an extent where the *habitus/field* in one context have little in common with *habitus/field* in the next context (beyond references to the work of Bourdieu). For example, in philosophy the notion of the *habitus* has attracted considerable attention (e.g. Shusterman, 1999). The *habitus* is used to raise central philosophical questions including those pertaining to rule following, the free will, the mind/body or the conscious/unconscious. In the process, the sociological origins of the *habitus* all

but disappear as shown by the near total absence of fields and empirically grounded research. Inversely, some sociologists have focused almost exclusively on mapping fields on the basis of statistical estimates of capital, marginalizing the role of meaning, *habitus* and *doxa* (e.g., 2004). In his reactions and replies to usages, transformations, perhaps deformations and developments of his work in contexts outside his own, Bourdieu underlined the extent to which this confirmed that science takes place in situated fields following their own logic, but also with irritation at having been misread/abused in other people's academic struggles.

It is beyond the ambition of this review to give a full account of these paths. Suffice it to point to the emancipation of the concepts *habitus/field* from Bourdieu as a person. In part to create awareness of the multiplicity of existing meanings and usages, but more centrally pointing to this emancipation is a way of underlining that *habitus/field* have and can be developed in different, context-dependent directions. To neglect these developments would be misleading, disrespectful, but also impoverishing. For a review concerned primarily with *habitus/field* in international studies, it follows that it is useful to go beyond the futile exercise of pinning down *the* correct definitions based on Bourdieu's work and instead give some practical understanding of how the concepts have been deployed.

Habitus and Field in International Studies

Considering that Bourdieu was close to Raymond Aron, worked as his assistant and participated in the Centre for European Sociology that he established, scholars in international studies may find it odd that he did not more explicitly share Aron's interest in wars, European political developments or the international system. With the exception of his early work on colonial Algeria and his late work on globalization, Bourdieu focused squarely on France and paid little attention to the international. This said numerous scholars used *habitus/field* to study aspects of international

studies. With the “reflectivist”; post-modernist or “sociological” turn in the course of the 1980s, the concepts were imported also into the academic disciplines specifically dedicated to international studies: International Relations/International Political Economy (IR/IPE). The resulting work underscores that *habitus*/field are particularly useful concepts for those interested in breaking with the state-centric assumptions of international studies.

National, International and Transnational Habitus and Fields

Bourdieu-inspired scholars have addressed issues at the core of international studies, but speaking from other disciplines. Exploring the impact of national *habitus*/field on the international and transnational or vice versa, Bourdieu-inspired scholars have attempted to explain changes in power relations.

One of the earliest examples is Bourdieu’s study of Kabyle society in which colonialism (and its demise) and worker migration figure as key sources of change. But this is no isolated example. This issue stands at the centre of a large number of studies. Boltanski (1990) shows the link between Americanization of management in France in the 1950s and the shifting nature of the international economy, insisting on the role of this shift in reinforcing the internationalization of the French economy. Along similar lines, Lebaron (1997) analyses the role of international changes in the academic economics for the transformation of the “French field of economics”. He traces the transformation of a field dominated by qualitative Keynesian economists to one dominated by economists drawing on formalized econometrics of a neo-classical stamp, showing the role played by international changes that create capital (diplomas and titles) on which French economists in dominated positions could rely to renegotiate the status and logic of the national field of economics. Finally, Bourdieu-inspired scholars have explored the transformations that have occurred as elites have drawn on “capital” accumulated abroad to maintain their position and renegotiate the status of

different forms of capital in the national field. Analyses carried out along these lines include that of the internationalization of the Brazilian elite (Loureiro, 1998), of the Bolivian elites (Poupeau, 2004), of the Latin American elites more generally (Dezalay and Barth, 2002) and of the French elite schools (Lezuech, 1998). But it also includes the analysis of the transformation of public administration (Saunier, 2004) and of French political career paths (Kauppi, 1996, , 2005).

The reverse side of the coin linking the international and the national is asking the question—not about how the international shapes the national but—the other way around. National *habitus*/field are pivotal in shaping the establishment of international/transnational fields. Along these lines, Bourdieu inspired scholars have showed the significance of national *habitus*/field for the emergence of and the specific form taken by for example international humanitarian law (Madsen, 2007), of an international legal orthodoxy and consensus (Dezalay and Barth, 2002), of European integration (Georgakakis, 2008), of a transnational professional field of economics (Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2006), of a European level immigrant policy (Guiraudon, 2001), of transnational policing networks (Bigo, 1996), or of a transnational anti-corruption discourse (Coerdray, 2004). These studies have in common that they analyze how internationalization strategies are shaped by the logic of the field and structured by the related *habitus*. The interaction of this multiplicity of strategies gives substance and shape to emerging international and transnational fields. The European level immigration policy is shaped by the (nationally based) strategies of the administrators that promoted it. Just as the studies linking the international to the national draw the link back to the international again, so do these studies also return to the implications of these nationally based strategies constructing the international/transnational for the national fields. The construction of a European level immigration policy alters the nature of national fields.

This stylized presentation underlines the extent to which *habitus*/field have been used to study processes of direct relevance to international studies but often outside the confines of IR/IPE as

academic disciplines. The studies just quoted are the work of sociologists, lawyers, economists and anthropologists speaking to their own field and publishing their research in the relevant journals.

Habitus/Field in International Relations and International Political Economy

From the early 1990s, *habitus/field* appear also inside the IR/IPE, the scholarly disciplines usually associated with international studies. Paradoxically, the integration of *habitus/field* is theoretically driven, rather than inspired by or developed in dialogue with the extensive work of direct relevance to international studies just cited. Bourdieu's position as a key contemporary social theorist is the main driving force. The 1980s is a period of intense theoretical search and development in IR/IPE during which scholars read widely in philosophy, political theory and also social theory as indicated by the use of the expressions "epistemological-", "reflexive-", "linguistic-", and "sociological"-turn to describe the period. Bourdieu and his main concepts of *habitus/field* were drawn into IR—and continue to play a role there—because of their contribution to the theoretical discussions in the field. His "constructivist structuralism" has been used for example in the discussions about how to understand to the inside/outside division (Ashley, 1989, Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008), power (Guzzini, 1998, Holzscheiter, 2005, Leander, 2005), practices (Pouliot, 2008), the role of "culture" (Jackson, 2008) as well as for programmatic statements for international studies (Mérand and Pouliot, 2008).

This primarily theoretical interest in Bourdieu has been accompanied by an expanding body of work deploying the notions of *habitus/field* in international studies in novel ways and in direct dialogue with established IR/IPE theories. *Habitus/field* have been used to study classical aspects of interstate relations, showing the importance of breaking with the strictures and assumptions usually involved in studying these issues. One way of doing this has been to conceive of the international society of states (or some aspect of it) as a field with its own "stakes at stake", its own power positions and its own *habitus*. Along these lines, *habitus/field* have been used to

analyze democratic peace (Götze, 2006a), foreign policy (Hopf, 2002), European security and defense policy (Mérand, 2008), European diplomacy (Adler-Nissen, 2008), financial markets (Hassdorf, 2005), and “cultural security” (Williams, 2007). By way of expanding one of these examples, Williams breaks with central assumptions both in constructivist and in mainstream IR/IPE when he focuses in on the “cultural *strategies*” i.e. the struggles over symbolic power in the international security field to explain not only the general but (so he contends) growing significance of the “cultural field” for international security. On the way he also manages to link these struggles to the survival/transformation of NATO, the disciplinary practice of liberal democratic peace thinking and the ascendance of neo-conservative thinking in US policy making.

A somewhat different path is followed by scholars who draw on *habitus*/field-inspired thinking to open up IR/IPE to novel ways of exploring issues that belong to the less conventional IR/IPE agenda. *Habitus*/field have hence been used to explore security governance by looking—not at states—but at the security professionals who govern and shape security through their transnational institutional (public) and market (private) networks and collaboration (Bigo et al., 2007, Leander, 2008, , 2009). The conceptual couple has been drawn in to analyze the bureaucratic policy making informing diplomacy, for example by looking at the constitutive role of the body for diplomatic hierarchies (Neumann, 2008). Finally, *habitus*/field have been used to explore the complex area and processes where non-state actors and especially NGOs interact with state agencies to reshape international policy agendas as for example in the emergence of an international discourse on whaling (Epstein, 2008, chapter 3), the way the discourse about civil society creates new forms of symbolic power that pave the way for reshaping social hierarchies in China (Götze, 2006b), and or the way different categories of actors have mobilized symbolic capital to shape the dual transition processes in Eastern Europe (Pop, 2007).

These studies make important contributions to the debates in their specific area of international studies. The establishment of the international political sociology section of the International Studies Association and the launching of the journal by the same name confirm that work inspired by sociologists (including Bourdieu) is no longer a marginal part of international studies. Work with *habitus*/field in international studies may be less familiar than work on the security dilemma or the on uni-polarity, but it has ceased to be a marginal reserve of a few, isolated scholars. This raises the question if anything can be said—on the basis of the rapidly growing accumulated knowledge—about the advantages of working with fields and *habitus* and the scope for dealing with disadvantages that the usage has revealed.

Transcending the Inside/Outside and Public/Private Dichotomies

The advantages of working with fields and *habitus* in international studies are similar to those of using the notions in other areas of the social science: *habitus*/field hold the promise of breaking with, or circumventing, the fundamental dichotomies of social analysis as emphasized above and specifically the potential to focus attention on symbolic power/violence and its omnipresence in social relations. However, in addition to this—and more specific to work in international studies—working with *habitus*/field is an effective way of breaking with two dichotomies that are defining for the discipline but whose problematic nature has long been acknowledged and criticized: namely the inside/outside dichotomy and the public/private dichotomy.

One of the virtues of working with *habitus*/field international studies is that these concepts provide a pragmatic and practice-oriented approach to the nature of the inside/outside dichotomy. The boundaries and locus of fields have to be contextually and empirically studied and are always susceptible to change. The boundaries of a field are seen through its effects. By implication, there is no reason to assume that the boundaries of a field coincide with those of the state (or inversely that

they do not). Whether *habitus*/field transcend national borders or not—and what role the state plays—becomes an empirical question. Fields and *habitus* have no built in “methodological nationalism”. Because of the centrality of the state as an institution conferring titles, positions and a form of national culture (not least through the educational system), it is probable that in most fields national boundaries will be significant; a probability heightened by pivotal role (implicit or explicit) of the inside/outside distinction in most political and social theoretical thinking. This said, how much and in what ways this division matters is a question that can be raised and studied by thinking in terms of *habitus*/field. Neither concept rests on the centrality of this division as a point of departure. The inside/outside divide becomes integrated through its practical relevance.

Habitus/field do not supersede the inside/outside divide but they provide the means for asking what roles these play in contextual practices, how they shape power relations and when they may become partly irrelevant. *If* practices are more “de-nationalized” than thinking about them, *habitus*/fields may prove useful guides. By not imposing an inside/outside grid on the analysis of politics and societies, they can help scholars discover and analyze practices conventional academic training in international relations/international political economy may obscure.

Along similar lines, working with *habitus*/field in international studies is helpful for questioning the relevance, nature and empirical role of the public/private divide in international politics. There is no need to assume that politics takes place in the public sphere, that the public sphere defines and defends the common good or that regulation is necessarily carried out in the public sphere. On the contrary, thinking in terms of fields and *habitus* turns the location of politics and regulation into a question of verifying where practices are actually occurring. It also relieves the private and the public of their respective connotations. Bourdieu called political science “the science of depolitization”, underlining the extent to which uncritically accepting a definition of politics reducing it to public, state policy—accepting to see like a state—was complicit in masking

power relations and complicit in limiting resistance to domination. Along similar lines he suggested with the phrase “the mystery of the ministry” that the minister has the capacity to (mysteriously) produce the community and the interests s/he claims to represent. Unveiling that “mystery” by studying politics (or better phrased symbolic power/violence) has been a key ambition among those who have studied politics through the lens of *habitus*/fields. Similarly, unveiling and explaining the working of the “invisible hand of the market” has been a key motivation for those using *habitus*/field to study the economy. The illusion of market neutrality is effectively debunked by showing that markets are regulated by “homologies” among the *habitus*/fields of producers and consumers—rather than the invisible hand of the market—tending to perpetuate symbolic power/violence relations. This strategy of analysis usefully shifts attention away from the issue of whether or not there is a shift in division of labor between the public and the private, to more substantive issues and particularly to the issue of what any such shift entails in terms of symbolic power/violence relations.

Habitus/field are “thinking tools” (as Bourdieu called his concepts) providing a relatively straightforward way of breaking with the inside/outside and public/private dichotomies. This is no minor advantage for international studies and particularly for its more empirically oriented parts. Scholars in the discipline are routinely struggling with the question of how to work around these dichotomies for example when analyzing politics and regulation in a globalizing world, when analyzing contemporary warfare or when studying global markets such as those in finance.

Research Ahead

The scope for extending the use of *habitus*/field in international studies is considerable. Literally any aspect of international studies could be revisited through the lens of the *habitus*/field with the aim of analyzing symbolic power/violence. However, the challenges confronting those who

undertake this kind of work are also considerable. Besides the challenge of engaging complex empirical work which always involves painstaking and time consuming information/data gathering, there are theoretical challenges related to the use of Bourdieu's thinking tools. Some of these stand out with particular clarity when his work is transposed to international studies. To conclude this article, three of these will be discussed by way of indicating areas where international studies scholars could go beyond "using" concepts to make potentially significant contributions to their clarification and development.

The Hierarchy of Fields

In international studies—possibly more than in other areas of the social sciences—the hierarchical relation of different spheres of social activities is a salient issue. Relying on *habitus*/field to analyze symbolic power/violence presupposes a clear understanding of which field is determining for the social relations in question and for shaping the *habitus* of the people concerned by the study. Looking at the legal field for example, it has its own historically rooted and evolving logic and "rules of the game", it is held together by an understanding of the stake at stake (the appropriate practice of justice) and it is present/produced by the actions and strategies structured by the *habitus* of those in the field. However, as people are always part of many fields at the same time, this is never an entirely straightforward exercise to determine to what extent the legal field (rather than say the field of the family, of the tribe, of the educational system or the market) is determining for behavior.

Scholars working with *habitus*/field deal with this partly by suggesting that there are "meta-fields" that play a role in shaping other fields. For example the educational field or the cultural field play a central role in shaping other fields as they provide definitions of legitimate knowledge (regarding law in this case) and sanctioned by instituted titles (LL.B, LL.M or J.D.) that

play a fundamental role for power relations in the field. The field of education is therefore indirectly tied to the field of law. Which fields are meta-fields is a historical and contextual question. In a society where traditional or tribal law dominates, the educational field may be less relevant than honorary titles or lineage. To think about the determination of the relationship between fields and of which fields become “metafields” those working with *habitus*/field use the idea of a “field of power” where the “exchange rates” of capital transferred from one field to another (diplomas or lineage transferred to the field of law) struggled over.

In international studies the question of the hierarchy among fields and hence of how the “field of power” can be conceptualized arises with particular intensity. To continue with the example of law: the educational and cultural fields that impinge on the transnational field of international law are more numerous than at the national level. The struggle over which law applies involves a wide array of judicial traditions and nationally based diplomas as well as the specific tradition of international law. Correspondingly the *habitus* of the people engaged in the field is bound to show the effects of the field, but in a complex and varied way. Some of them are bound to resist the field very strongly and reflect the field in a mainly negative way. The resulting complexity is a real challenge. Scholars usually find themselves led either to ignore the national level or to ignore the transnational one even though they are acutely aware of the limitations entailed in this choice. In their mapping of the European insecurity field e.g. Bigo and colleagues (2007) end up mapping “only” the hundreds of EU level institutions involved. Inversely, the special issues of *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* on globalization focuses entirely on the national background and individual biographies that shape behavior of transnational actors.

Steering between Scylla and Charybdis is not easy. Some guidance—in the shape of a better conceptualization of the “field of power” or perhaps more realistically a multiplication of practical research strategies to accommodate the high level of complexity inherent in international

relations—is essential to the future development of *habitus*/field inspired work in international studies. It is a task that lies largely ahead to which scholars in the field are likely to contribute significantly.

The Status of Habitus

A second and related question, posed with particular intensity when *habitus*/field are used in international studies, is that of the status of the *habitus*. *Habitus* as used in the Bourdieu-inspired literature has the virtue of linking the agent and the field; of transcending the actor/context dichotomy. It is this transcending nature that makes it so useful for conceptualizing the translation of field effects and *doxa* into individual strategies and behavior. Because it transcends the actor/context divide, one may work with the *habitus* both at the agent level (to think of people with varied histories, genetic characteristics, and lives shaped by their individual participations in many different fields) and at the field level (as reflecting, reproducing and reshaping the logic of the field and its *doxa*). However, in practice this linking and transcending is far from straightforward as it is difficult to assess how determining the *habitus* actually is for agency. This point is often made with regard to the neglect (or denial) of the role played by talent and feelings that are not the product of positions and dispositions in a field (Lahire, 1999). The point here is slightly different. It pertains to the particularity of working with *habitus* in complex, highly diversified and internationalized/transnationalized societies.

Working with the *habitus* in stable, traditional societies is relatively straightforward. Most of those involved spend most of their existence in a relatively restricted number of fields whose effects can therefore readily be observed in the way the *habitus* functions as a “structuring structure” on understandings and behavior. Considering the situation of the person who is the object of most international studies this is no longer the case (viz. for example the Colombian migrant

worker in the US, the Canadian soldier in Afghanistan, the OECD career officer or the War-on-Want activist). The number of fields in which the person is involved is considerable and they may change often. One would think that the *habitus* would still to some extent reflect the rules of the game and the logic of the specific fields in which the person is engaged and from which s/he would have integrated basic understandings and behaviors. However, the link between the resulting *habitus* and individual strategies and/or rationales for action becomes moot. What kind of strategy—or better what range of strategies—the *habitus* creates a disposition for is difficult to foresee because of the multiplicity and complexity of the fields to which it is tied.

Perhaps even more critically, presuming that one manages to overcome the difficulty of making the *habitus* play its role transcending agency and structure, the question remains to what extent one can use it as a heuristic device beyond a single individual. In relatively undifferentiated societies, individuals are tied to a common overarching context even if they are engaged in different fields. This provides a certain commonality and continuity in the *habitus*; there is a homology between fields as Bourdieu would insist. This is not the reality for many of the people of concern to international studies. Colombian migrant workers come from a wide range of backgrounds, as do career officers in international bureaucracies, soldiers, NGO activists or diplomats. Hence, even assuming that one could overcome the non trivial difficulties involved in analyzing and describing the *habitus* of one individual from one of these categories, the question is how useful this analysis would be for the analysis of other members of the same category. If the *habitus* turns out to be useful for understanding one person only, one may well wonder how useful it is as a heuristic device and if the work and energy that goes into its analysis is well invested.

Scholars using *habitus*/field in international studies have sometimes chosen to ignore this diversity; imposing homogeneity by neglect. But this pragmatic strategy amounts to discarding the relevance of the *habitus* for the analysis of strategies, interests and actions. By the same token it

deprives the concept of its utility for transcending the individual/context divide which amounts to depriving the *habitus* of its analytical interest. More explicit reflection by scholars working with the *habitus* in international studies on the status of the concept is therefore called for. That reflection still lies ahead. It is vital both for the development of *habitus*/field work in international studies and for the theoretical advancement in thinking about how to use the *habitus*/field in the analysis of differentiated, rapidly evolving contemporary societies.

The Theoretical Contribution

Finally, *habitus*/field made their way into international studies as contributions to unraveling and ongoing theoretical debates in the discipline. Yet, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, considerable work remains to be done regarding the relationship between these concepts and other approaches in the field. Searching such clarification is a precondition for clarifying what theoretical contributions can reasonably be hoped for and should be sought when working with *habitus*/field in international studies.

This is perhaps most urgent when it comes to clarifying the relationships between *habitus*/field and approaches used to study “discourse”. Bourdieu himself is ambiguous on how his approach related to various forms of discourse analysis. On the one hand, Bourdieu’s interest in symbolic power and violence, his contextualization of meaning, his break with empiricism and emphasis on language and practice makes him (and many of his followers) practitioners of discourse analysis. On the other hand, Bourdieu was a notorious critic of post-structuralism which he accused of a double conservatism. According to Bourdieu post-structuralism was a reaction to opening and democratization of university education in the wake of May 1968 which (1) depoliticized education by stressing the “internal” logic of discourse studied in texts (rather than its social anchoring and the role of authorized positions studied in empirical context) and (2) preserved

academic privileges by heightening the role of “postures” and erudite formulations that could not readily be adopted/found by newcomers and outsiders to the field. Against this conservatism, Bourdieu held forth the virtues of “objective social sciences” and references to the process of “objectification” abound in his work. The consequence of this ambiguity is that while some scholars draw on *habitus/field* to answer questions directly tied to discourse analysis others see them as largely incompatible with discourse analysis. Questions about why discourses emergence and become dominant, about the conditions for authorized speech, and about the performativity and symbolic power of language have all been dealt with drawing on *habitus/field*. At the same time, other scholars in international studies have picked up *habitus/field* precisely to escape the focus on discourses and see Bourdieu as a advancing a sophisticated form of structuralism making it possible to counter the influence of discourse analysts partly on their own terrain.

For analogous reasons *habitus/field* also stands in an ambiguous relation to various forms of neo-Marxism. *Habitus/field* analysts often insist on class analysis, on social hierarchies, on forms of domination and on “objectivism” creates many parallels between his work and that of a neo-Marxist stamp (Ryner, 2006). This is particularly true of neo-Gramscian and Althusserian thinkers. Their interest in “hegemony”, in “organic intellectuals”, in “interpellation” and in “false consciousness” resonates well with the analysis of symbolic power/violence through a *habitus/field* analysis. There is a shared interest in revealing the processes that (re-) produce social domination and a commitment to critical/emancipatory scholarship. But there are also major differences. Scholars working with *habitus/field* would resist the idea of “false consciousness” insisting that it is not mainly about consciousness but about the *habitus*. They would find the idea of organic intellectuals too narrow, insisting on the importance of the cultural and educational field in their entirety. Finally, classes play a comparatively smaller role in *habitus/field* analysis than they do in neo-Marxian analysis. When class does figure in the analysis, it is in a guise that puts it at a distance

from the materially based neo-Marxian classes. The notion of capital has lost its unquestioned and ultimate economic reference. To what extent these differences express minor differences or real schisms, is something scholars working in international studies could usefully help clarify.

Disentangling the ambiguous relationship between *habitus/field* and other approaches raising questions about symbolic power/violence is the most direct route to clarifying what *habitus/field* contribute to the critical and constructivist research agenda in international studies but also where the limits of this contribution lay. The last section of this article has given plenty of evidence that these limits need to be taken seriously and merit reflection. However, this article has also given plenty of indications of the significant contribution *habitus/field* can make (and have made) to international studies.

Conclusion

This article has suggested that *habitus/field* are useful heuristic devices for thinking about power relations in international studies. In particular, it has insisted on their utility for conceptualizing the role of symbolic power/violence. The article has shown that analyzing power through the *habitus/field* makes it possible to transcend the distinctions between the material and the “ideational” as well as between the individual and the structural. More than this, the article underscored that working with *habitus/field* in international studies problematizes the role played by central organizing divides such as the inside/outside and the public/private. Even more strongly, the article insisted that working with *habitus/field* can uncover politics not primarily structured by these divides. These are no minor contributions and amply justify the presence of this article in the *International Studies Compendium Project*. They also underscore that the challenges confronting those working with international studies using *habitus/field* merit reflection and debate; not rejection. The contributions show that developing research drawing on *habitus/field* in international

studies is worthwhile for international studies scholars wishing to raise and answer questions about symbolic power/violence.

References and Select Bibliography:

This bibliography contains two parts: 1) a select bibliography of work on *habitus* and field by Bourdieu and others and 2) a reference list of citations used in the text. The select bibliography is more a pointer to further readings than as an exhaustive list. The selective in the title is to be taken literally and not seen as indicating that one or two things might have been forgotten.

Online links:

<http://cse.ehess.fr/sommaire.php?id=227> The site of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* contains tables of content as well as links to the full text of older issues of the journal. Most articles are in French.

<http://hyperbourdieu.jku.at/> A multilingual site for dissemination Bourdieu's work.

<http://www.wikipedia.org/> Wikipedia (in most languages) contains entries on Bourdieu.

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