# Becoming International: On Symbolic Capital, Conversion and Privilege

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## Abstract
The 'international' can be conceived of as a highly sought after symbolic capital. People seek to internationalise their curriculum vitae or resumes, study international subjects, get international diplomas, travel internationally, obtain international jobs. As symbolic capital the 'international' can be converted into 'profit' complementing other forms of capital (economic, cultural and social capital), deployed in struggles for social domination. It is used as a strategy of social positioning and social domination quasi-globally, but it is not recognised everywhere in the same way. We are particularly interested in the unequal distribution of this symbolic capital, the way differential conversion rates and social boundaries operate in the generation of social inequalities. For this, we will work with and against Bourdieu, in analysing the 'international' as a source of a highly contextual form of symbolic power, deployed in a variety of social group formations, but with uneven, differential effects, a naturalised and disguised form of domination. Ultimately, this article problematises how claims to 'internationality' operate in social relations and power-struggles and provides an analytical framework hereof.

## Devenir international: capital symbolique, conversion et privilèges
« L'internationalité » peut se concevoir comme un capital symbolique ardemment recherché. On cherche à internationaliser son curriculum vitæ, à étudier des sujets internationaux et à obtenir

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des diplômes internationaux, ainsi qu'à voyager et à obtenir des postes à l'international. En tant que capital symbolique, « l'internationalité » peut être convertie en « profit » et compléter d'autres formes de capital (économique, culturel, social) efficientes dans la lutte pour la domination sociale. Elle est employée comme stratégie de positionnement social et de domination sociale au niveau global (ou quasiment), mais on ne la reconnait pas partout de la même façon. Nous nous intéressons particulièrement à la distribution inégalitaire de ce capital symbolique et à la manière dont les taux de conversion et les frontières sociales opèrent dans le processus de création des inégalités sociales. Pour ce faire, nous nous inscrirons dans la lignée de Bourdieu tout en se démarquant de lui, cela en analysant « l'internationalité » comme source éminemment contextuelle de pouvoir symbolique, pouvoir à l'œuvre dans la formation de divers groupes sociaux et provoquant des effets inégaux et différents qui font le lit d'une forme de domination dissimulée et perçue comme naturelle. L'objet de cet article est au fond de problématiser la façon dont les revendications « d'internationalité » opèrent dans les relations sociales et les luttes de pouvoir et d'offrir un cadre analytique à l'étude de ces questions.

**Mots-clés**
International, Bourdieu, inégalité

**Volverse internacional: capital simbólico, conversión y privilegio**
Lo «internacional» puede concebirse como un capital simbólico particularmente valorado en la actualidad. Se trata de internacionalizar los currículums, estudiar temas internacionales, obtener diplomas internacionales, así como viajar y trabajar internacionalmente. Como capital simbólico, lo «internacional» puede convertirse en «beneficio» y complementar de esta forma otras formas de capital (económico, cultural o social) en las luchas por la dominación social. Lo «internacional» es por tanto utilizado casi globalmente como estrategia del posicionamiento y de la dominación social. Sin embargo, no goza del mismo grado de reconocimiento en todas partes. Nos interesa la distribución desigual de este capital simbólico, y particularmente el modo en que las tasas de conversión y las fronteras sociales operan en la reproducción de desigualdad social. Con tal fin, desde una perspectiva cercana pero crítica de Bourdieu, analizamos lo «internacional» como fuente de una forma de poder simbólico (que depende en gran medida del contexto), que se utiliza en la formación de grupos sociales diversos, pero con efectos varios y desiguales, como una forma naturalizada y oculta de dominación. Finalmente, nuestro artículo problematiza el modo en que la afirmación de «internacionalidad» opera en las relaciones sociales y las luchas de poder, proporcionando al mismo tiempo un marco analítico a través del cual estas cuestiones pueden ser abordadas.

**Palabras clave**
Internacional, Bourdieu, desigualdad

## Introduction

International Relations are about everyday social relations. The 'international' serves as a critical signifier in social relations, where claims to internationality function as a means of social differentiation among peers, colleagues and across social groups. An international expert, for example, has a higher standing than simply an expert. Here, the attribute 'international' suggests a more extensive and comprehensive knowledge, deployable

across the globe, across multiple social contexts. It implies a professional and a social distinction. An international education, whether at home or abroad, equally denotes, something globally valid and hence distinct and better than the normal pathway of education. In this sense, the attribute of the international shapes our everyday aspirations, choices and social strategies.[1] Becoming international (internationalisation), we observe, is a strategy for social positioning, a means of upward social mobility: students seek to internationalise their studies, and professionals internationalise their curriculum vitae, careers and social networks. What does the international mean in our daily social relations, when we are searching for educational opportunities, or when we are competing for professional positions? How do social agents seek to position themselves in social spaces through the international? What cultural repertoires are inherent to the international? How do they relate to elite values? How does the international form social boundaries? How can we make sense to claims of people to 'be' international and what is the path to 'becoming' international? These are some of the questions that we will pursue in this article.

Here, our engagement with the international adds a new dimension to the present literature. Many before us have sought to understand the plentiful and polysemic uses of the 'international'. We seek neither to define nor to contest the international (whether it exists or not, whether it is unitary or fragmented, whether it is part of a global order or not).[2] From a sociological point of view, the international cannot be a distinct analytical field, but must focus on relations, processes and power, as scholars of international political sociology have consistently stressed.[3] We follow their Bourdieu-inspired analytical framework in seeking to analyse 'the various ways power aggregates, concentrates and circulates' in a world that is fragmented and heterogeneous, but also interconnected and focus along with them on 'struggles, disjunction and connections'.[4] Ultimately, there is nothing inherently international, but nonetheless the international provides a means of social distinction and hierarchy (as an analogy, we may think of race). Rather than working from a specific definition of the international through which we would try to make

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1. Corporations and organisations equally compete through strategies of internationalisation, and universities are all the more attractive as they claim to be international. We will not engage with this in detail due to the constraints of the article.
2. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979); R.B.J. Walker, *After the Globe, Before the World* (London: Routledge, 2010).
3. Didier Bigo and R.B.J. Walker, 'Political Sociology and the Problem of the International', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 35, no. 3 (2007): 725–38; Tugba Basaran, et al., eds., *International Political Sociology: Transversal Lines* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2017); Mathias Albert, David Jacobson and Yosef Lapid, eds., *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). See also works of scholars on globalisation, mobility and transnationality, in particular Zygmunt Baumann, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, no. 2 (1990): 295–310.
4. Didier Bigo 'International Political Sociology: Rethinking the International through Dynamics of Power', in *International Political Sociology: Transversal Lines*, eds. Tugba Basaran et al. (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2017), 24.

sense of social practices, we build on the ways in which 'international' properties are attributed to individuals, groups, norms in everyday social relations in order to analyse how this 'international' operates. The 'international' that emerges does not refer to a pre-existing reality, but is relational, part of our daily lives, our daily struggles, a means of social positioning.

We seek to discern how social distinctions are created through the circuits of the international, how social boundaries are formed, how social groups are differentiated, how people are recognised as 'international' and the strategies for 'becoming international'. We argue that being international serves here as a hidden marker of class, a disguised form of domination, productive of inequalities, appropriated by elites and aspired to by others, in various social contexts. In this sense our analysis is close to scholarship that investigates the international through global forms of power, domination and inequalities, including works on dependency, empire, imperialism and postcolonialism, scholarship that is particularly critical of the promise of the international in the current global order, as well as its previous (colonial) formations.[5] Just as colonialism cannot be analysed purely as a structure or an order, but requires equally an approach that incorporates everyday social interactions and social relations between colonisers, colonised and the multiple intermediaries in particular contexts, we have to analyse the international as a social formation in everyday lives and particular contexts. The international is productive of inequalities in particular social contexts, as marker of class relations, which may or not pre-exist the international as a marker.

Unquestionably, the contemporary configuration of the international has strongly been shaped through the West and Western cultural norms. Here, postcolonial literature – stressing symbolic and material domination and inequalities[6] – has provided us with the means to address the limits inherent to the global circulation of the international as social resource. The creation of the orient and the occident, of the West and the rest, the coloniser and the colonised, the expat and the local, has always been mutual. Being international is translated in many of these specific encounters, in particular historical and contemporary social contexts. Nonetheless, to equate the West (or anything else) with something called the international would end up dissimulating what needs to be understood: the mechanism of invisibilisation through which the international operates in everyday social interactions. The international is an unstable configuration, configured and reconfigured in multiple social contexts. Historical valuations of education, upbringing

5.  Justin Rosenberg, 'International Relations in the Prison of Political Science', *International Relations* 30, no. 2 (2016): 127–53. Iver B. Neumann and Ole Jacob Sending, '"The International" as Governmentality', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 35, no. 3 (2007): 677–701. Craig J. Calhoun, 'The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 869–97.
6.  Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 2001); Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Routledge, 2013).

and other cultural factors create some kind of a consistency of who is considered inter-national, but ultimately a particular social context configures social relations, and hence allows certain people to become international.

As we argue, there is no such thing as a standardised international capital that is globally valid or only *one* international. Contra approaches to power that emphasise globally homogeneous structures of inequalities, we propose an analysis that focuses on the international as simultaneously a marker of particular class relations and the veil that allows dissimulating these relations under a guise of universality. It is at the inter-section of these two dimensions, that the international becomes a relational operator. The international here is particular and in this sense we may very well be dealing with its plural formations, temporally and geographically, or the *internationals*. Capturing the international as marker and principle of invisibilisation of class relations allows us to focus on the plural formations of the international, the widespread (but not homoge-nous) uses of the international and the significance of the international as an operator in our everyday social lives. In this article, we propose a form of analysis of the interna-tional through a Bourdieusian framework that allows us to analyse the multiple forma-tions of international(s).

What are the implications here? First, we note that international relations are about everyday social relations. The international is socially significant. It is a marker of social relations and hierarchies. Second, the social context determines when something is labelled international. Third, we observe that internationality is not equally accessible to all. It provides some with opportunities for social mobility, while excluding others from the benefits thereof. The international is productive of (disguised) inequalities. Hence, fourth, we seek to explain the unequal distribution of this resource. The international is not an innocent concept, but is fundamental to various social orders as a marker of class relations. As a marker, it can be deployed to affirm, rupture or innovate social formations and social relations. Thereby, the international is deployed in class struggles for access to symbolic and material resources. As a last point, to be furthered in a later article, this opens up the path to self-reflexivity and questions our roles as international scholars, international students and possibly future international experts.

We pursue our argument as follows: in the first part, *Problematising the International*, we engage with connotations of, and hence the meanings and representations conveyed by, the international. It serves to highlight the social significance of the international. What does it mean to analyse the international through its social uses, as a marker that conveys status? What is the relation between geographic mobility and social mobility? Here, we suggest problematising the international, not as a place, movement or spatial relation, but as a symbolic ordering principle. We highlight why the 'international' con-ceived as a category of social classification requires more conceptualisation. In grap-pling with these issues, in the second part, *The International as a Symbolic Capital*, we will recapitulate Bourdieusian engagements with social mobility and (re)production, analysing, with and against Bourdieu, the symbolic power of the international as being premised upon a highly contextual form of symbolic capital. Here, we will also argue against the notion of a unitary 'international capital'. Subsequently, in the third part, *Conversion Rates of the International*, we seek to illustrate and explain the uneven dis-tribution of this symbolic capital. In particular, we provide a historical understanding of

how differential conversion rates and social boundaries have been set, in the absence of the state, mainly through post(colonial) symbolic inheritances.

## Problematising the International

In contemporary societies, we encounter an enigmatic aspiration to 'be(come) international', conveying a social status and access to privileges, in some ways evoking aspirations of being ennobled or bestowed a royal title in the past. The international is perceived as a means for upward social mobility. Even quotidian decisions, such as the choice between international and local vacations, international and local languages, international and local jobs, reveal a preference and valuation of a particular scale over others, certain dispositions, an acquired taste. As Bourdieu has brilliantly demonstrated, however, judgment of taste is never simply an individual preference, but taste serves as a marker of social class and is reflective of one's position in a social hierarchy.[7] It is in this sense that we would like to engage with the international as integral to the ordering of social relations, and understand its ramifications for social mobility and stratification: how does the international relate to markers of social status and hierarchy, how does it produce differential social (im)mobility, how does it lead to a 'sense of one's place'[8] in societies and how does it circulate across social spaces? Ultimately how is the international embodied and materialised through unequally distributed social properties?

While much has been written on the international, what it is and how it should be defined, our question is rather how the international, in everyday interactions and uses of the term, has come to be vested in people and things, how it has come to describe their attributes and properties and how, by so doing, it has reordered (or accompanied the reordering of) the power relations between them. In this endeavour, we need to understand how references to the international operate in all social relations. Most of us will spontaneously and unreflectively agree that some people are international because they travel, work in international settings, are accustomed to intercultural communication, are expatriates, or have multiple nationalities. Hereby, we suppose that strategies of internationalisation are accessible to all if only one seizes the chance: by establishing oneself elsewhere, learning about foreign cultures, getting to know the wider world. In all these instances, the international is linked to a particular understanding, geographical mobility and cultural encounters. It is these ideas that we want to problematise in light of their tendency to create arbitrary hierarchies between the things, cultures and people thus labelled.

### On Geographic and Social Mobilities

The late Zygmunt Baumann writes that 'the freedom to move (…) fast becomes the main stratifying factor' and how '[b]eing local in a globalized world is a sign of social

7. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
8. Ibid., 141.

deprivation and degradation'.[9] Mobility however, does not have homogenous effects. The mobility of some people is framed as a problem, the mobility of others is seen as desirable. In Baumann's parlance some are 'vagabonds', others 'tourists'. The relation between geographic and social mobilities is more complex, however.

For some, geographic mobility means escaping from restraining social stratifications, and a possibility of repositioning, as historically for many labourers from Europe leaving the metropole for the (former) colonies. The colonies provided them with the possibility to become white (Europeans), a position of social distinction. Others came to Europe to escape social stratification in the United States; as James Baldwin underlines, moving to Paris allowed him to become American, no longer solely an African-American. For others again previous social status is unacknowledged because it is framed through homogenizing new social categories, as for many Syrians escaping war, who simply become 'refugees', or Sub-Saharans crossing the Mediterranean becoming 'migrants'. Their previous social status in these cases remains untranslatable. Contrary to this, being 'expatriate' often amounts to a relative increase in status in one's new social environment, a status that may be lost by returning home.

All of these experiences illustrate that social stratification and social repositioning through mobility are complex experiences. Geographic mobility does not establish social mobility per se. As Bourdieu might have expressed it, the rate of return of strategies of mobility depends on where one comes from (in both geographical and sociological sense), how one invests in the international and where one expects to enjoy the possible benefits. These elements also highlight that, with regards to mobility, two aspects need to be distinguished. On the one hand, to the extent that there is re-location (permanent or temporary), mobility implies one assumes a position in a new social space, a space in which one's position will be determined by new coordinates and criteria. This new position might be a function of the position one had previously, but it does not need to be so. Many other factors might be involved. On the other hand, the experience of moving itself has an impact on one's social status: for instance, to move back after having left is not to unmake one's departure but rather to bring with oneself the re-positioning effect that comes with the experience of an 'elsewhere'. Both aspects are of interest in relation to the international.

In the modern world, long-distance mobilities produce variable effects on social situations. It is however usually only when they are seen to succeed as strategy of social promotion that we speak of them in terms of internationalisation. In the vernacular, the 'international' status is attributed only to some, excluding those who fall under alternative classifications, such as refugees or migrants. Mobilities are not valued in a uniform manner. A German 'expat' working in Afghanistan is likely to be labelled 'international', whereas an Afghan working at a factory in Germany is more likely to be called a 'guestworker', 'refugee' or 'foreigner'. When the 'international' will be described as a 'foreigner' in Afghanistan the word will take on a negative connotation, whereas qualifying the Afghan in Germany as 'foreigner' rather than as 'international' will easily come across as a mere statement of fact, as something obvious. Yet both have proven to be

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9.  Baumann, *Globalization*, 2.

mobile. Rather than seeking to understand local and international (or global) in geographical terms, we must hence here try to capture these categories as signifiers of social relations. The experience of 'be(com)ing international' should not solely be interpreted in relation to the act of passing (inter)national borders.

## On Internationalisation

In light of the above, we see at least three reasons for which the process of becoming international needs more thorough analysis for its diacritical function to be understood. The first reason is that it paradoxically does not necessarily imply expatriation or mobility:[10] an American who has studied at Harvard and works in Silicon Valley would not have any difficulty highlighting the international value of his business practices, diplomas and linguistic skills in his/her professional milieus, this irrespective of place, although he may never have left the US.[11] This also implies that particular countries endowed with important symbolic power in most of these milieus, precisely like the US, do not necessarily display a high level of transnational circulation of their political and economic elites,[12] a fact that nuances Baumann's above-mentioned focus on the global mobility of elites. This example also highlights the importance of perceived provenance and the relational nature of the international status.

The second reason pertains to the relation between the material and symbolical dimensions of the international. From the traditional class-belongings of diplomats to the liberal internationalism of diverse fractions of the West European bourgeoisies, there has been an assimilation of certain international proclivities to elite (high society) culture. Their affinity for, and valuing of, the international – international trends, associations, literature, jobs – has played an important role in their strategies of material accumulation. At the same time, this very accumulation of material capitals (economic, cultural…) is a crucial predictor of what, in the context of most symbolic exchanges, will be seen as successful strategies of internationalisation as opposed to mere ventures into vagabondry. Once we see the 'international' as having affinities with questions of social status rather than as simply linked to crossborder mobility, we might wonder what the exact relation between the symbolic and material dimensions are. Is it primarily the material success of a certain type of practice that gives it an international aura or is it the elite's 'international ethos' that gives access to networks of acquaintance that are highly instrumental to strategies of accumulation (as for the traditional European aristocracies)?

The third reason is linked to the fact that strategies of internationalisation are ambiguous in relation to social positioning. It has been noted that class-differences that would 'normally' be obvious are easy to overlook in 'expat' communities of people of different

10.  Robert K. Merton, 'Patterns of Influence: Local and Cosmopolitan Influentials', in *Social Theory and Social Structure*, ed. Robert K. Merton (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957), 441–74.

11.  Frances Vavrus and Amy Pekol, 'Critical Internationalization: Moving from Theory to Practice', *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education* 2, no. 2 (2015). Available at: http://preserve.lehigh.edu/fire/vol2/iss2/2. Last accessed October 20, 2017.

12.  Anne-Marie Wagner, *Les classes sociales dans la mondialisation* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007).

geographical origins. Indeed markers of social distinction are to a great extent bound to (geographical) place and fixated by state-imposed social categories. As a consequence, they do not travel well. Yet at the same time, to become part of these 'expat' communities is locally usually a marker of social promotion, in particular when the expats are from the Global North in a country of the South. As a result, social distinctions are at the same time downplayed within 'international' milieus and yet inherent to strategies of internationalisation. To 'become international' is as much to escape class-assignations as it is to (re)position oneself in a world ruled by these assignations.

It is in the light of the above-mentioned three points that we suggest problematising the international, not as a place, movement or spatial relation, not even as a principle of political ordering of the world,[13] but as a symbolic ordering principle that shapes social power between groups and individuals. More specifically, the international here refers to a contextually recognised resource that conveys social distinction and increases the value of diplomas, knowledge and titles, ultimately a type of symbolic power. To a certain extent, the 'symbolic power of the international', i.e. the social recognition of the privileges that come with the social appropriation of the 'international', is inseparable from the international/local distinction and its vertical representation. As a social attribute, the 'international' only makes sense within a relational social economy. Delicacies require fast food, beautiful requires ugly, the distinguished requires the vulgar, in the constitution of oppositional categories, and by that social hierarchies. Equally the international requires as its counterpart the local, as a marker of social relations. Symbolic power here operates by construing the international in abstract scalar relation to the national and local. The international does not have *a priori* content when referring to the social properties of individuals, groups, expertise etc. It is only when this distinction takes the form of distinctive attributes embodied by social agents that it becomes a power resource.

What all of this highlights is that social meanings attached to the international have come to be linked to unequally distributed social attributes. It is foremost because 'to be international' is 'naturally' perceived as being at the top of a vertical relation to what (and whom) is local, that internationality is bound up with contextually efficient strategies of social positioning. This power of the international, we argue, is best described as a form of symbolic power, a power to speak from a supposedly more universal perspective and hence also a power that justifies the unequal distribution of material capital. Even though access to this symbolic power is at least partly conditioned upon the possession of other capitals (economic, social, cultural), we are here particularly interested in its symbolic economy and the distribution of the symbolic capital involved. What then are the properties that grant access to this peculiar form of symbolic power? As we shall see, some of them are dependent on geographic mobility and circulation, others are independent of them. In fact, there are no globally recognised criteria of internationality. On the contrary, the criteria are highly contextual, variable and heterogeneous (and yet not random). Ultimately, criteria of access to the 'power of the international' are fragmented.

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13. John Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations', *International Organization* 47, no. 1 (1993): 151.

Let us be clear: the international is not an unambiguously positive social attribute for all symbolic resources are inherently fragile[14] and dependent on time, place and their specific uses. Accordingly, current anti-globalist xenophobia is sometimes seen as reversing the symbolic scale valuing the international in favour of a general valuation of 'local rootedness' and 'cultural authenticity'. This form of populism does, however, not necessarily undermine our analysis. It can on the contrary be analysed as a form of (politically instrumentalised) popular *ressentiment* towards what is rightfully seen as a principle of domination. In this regard anti-globalist populism is caught up in the contradictions of the dominated: simultaneously wanting to change principles of domination and irredeemably reproducing these very principles when doing so.[15] The systematic scapegoating and stigmatisation of foreigners and refugees rather than of one's country's imperialist past (and sometimes present) offers a good illustration of this. The 'negative symbolic capital'[16] these stigmatised groups are afflicted with is linked to them being framed as 'foreigners', 'vagabonds', a 'fifth column serving foreign interests', not to them being able to lay a claim on universality. The stigmatisation of these groups is precisely what allows us to say that mobility and circulation is not coextensive with the symbolic resource of the international. To say that anti-globalist populism by definition questions the international as principle of domination would ultimately be like saying that hate towards the wealthy undermines the importance of money or economic power.

## The International as Symbolic Capital

Until now, we have mentioned Bourdieu only cursively. His work is however most useful for our endeavour: it helps us inquire how social domination is legitimated and perpetuated through symbolic power,[17] and, in particular, how 'being international' is a source of contextual power, a specific symbolic power. Our use of the Bourdieusian framework equally requires, however, that we take a number of precautions and question some of his assumptions: specifically, the ideas that (a) any analysis in terms of fields is to be set in the context of a state coextensive with a field of power; (b) conversion rates (or 'laws of transformation') of capitals apply to different types of capital in a same field of power rather than for one type of capital circulating between different fields of power; and (c) that for each capital there needs to be a neatly identifiable field where the value of this specific capital is what is centrally at stake. Before we can advance to these stages, we need to clarify some concepts.

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14. Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 56.
15. David L. Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 236.
16. Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 241; Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics and Intellectuals*, 105–6.
17. Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Loïc Wacquant, 'Foreword' in *The State Nobility: State Schools in the Field of Power*, Pierre Bourdieu (Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press, 1996), ix-xxii.

## Forms of Capital

Bourdieu uses the word capital to refer amongst others to: (a) economic capital, i.e., resources that are directly convertible into money; (b) cultural capital, that is the objects (paintings, books…), qualifications (diplomas…) and acquired dispositions and 'background knowledge'[18] that attest to the mastery of the scientific, linguistic or artistic codes of a given society or social space; and (c) social capital, that is the resource constituted by usable networks of acquaintances based on mutual recognition and the 'pooling' of the capitals of all its members, for example membership to private societies or a family name indicating social pedigree. All these capitals confer specific powers but also symbolic power, i.e. the surplus of power created when one is socially seen to be justified in what one does, says or possesses. The effectivity of these capitals does not only manifest itself in their immediate use but also through the socially recognised meaning of their mere 'possession':[19] for example, an individual known to be very well connected in decision-making circles (social capital) will be endowed with a 'natural' authority (symbolic power) even when he might not try to mobilise these networks. In this sense symbolic power is a transubstantiated form of social, but also economic, cultural and theoretically any other capital.

Significantly, the 'international' as a set of specific properties will more or less consensually be seen to enhance the value of one's capital. As such, these properties – for example having gone to an international school or working at an international organisation – add a surplus of symbolic power to social capital, a symbolic power that is not inherent to this social capital strictly defined, but that is linked to the way in which it is socially perceived. These attributes confer a particular symbolic power to social agents, a power that 'operates only inasmuch as those who undergo it recognize those who wield it'.[20] In this sense these specific properties can be analysed as symbolic capital, this type of capital being akin to a credit granted to a social agent and that legitimates beforehand his use of other capitals. To analyse these attributes as symbolic capital gives way to interesting paradoxes when transposing the reasoning from a 'methodologically nationalist' framework to a perspective highlighting circulations between fields of power. Indeed, when being a function of mobility, this symbolic capital necessarily circulates in a space that has not been unified by one single state. As a specifically *symbolic* capital

18.  Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice. The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International Practices', *International Theory* 3, no. 1 (2011): 1–36.
19.  Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 172; Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital' in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–58.
20.  Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 148. See also Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, 'Symbolic Power and Social Critique in the Making of Oxfam's Trade Policy Research', in *Expert Knowledge in Global Trade*, eds. E. Hannah et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Hannah Hughes, 'Bourdieu and the IPCC's Symbolic Power', *Global Environmental Politics* 15, no. 4 (2015): 84–102.

dependent upon subjective recognition, the logic of attribution and valuation of this symbolic capital then becomes highly heterogeneous, discontinuous and unstable.

## Symbolic Capital Beyond the State

In grappling with the link between symbolic capital and the attribution of 'international' properties to things and persons, the use of Bourdieu is quite self-evident and yet paradoxical. In his analysis Bourdieu focused almost exclusively on social domination and classification in the French system. His work on social domination is marked by methodological nationalism, a tendency to enclose 'society', social relations and class struggles within the limits of state power, neglecting imperial, colonial and transnational forces.[21] Even transnational flows were never an important part of Bourdieu's work except in his late years in his critique of neoliberalism.[22] If we want to analyse the international as a marker of social relations, however, we need to puncture the state-monopolised field of power and the stasis that has largely defined the traditional sociological imagination.[23]

In order to engage with the international as symbolic capital, *with* Bourdieu we will explore the mechanisms of social domination, but also *counter* Bourdieu, assess their relevance for an understanding beyond a statist vision.[24] A useful starting point may here be Bourdieu's own categories of local and traditional presented as forming systems of opposition with the exotic, cosmopolitan and modern in his explorations of taste.[25] They appear as precursors to studies on social reproduction of national elites through strategies of internationalisation. The international is in Bourdieu's own studies not analysed in terms of symbolic capital. Nonetheless, as a spatio-temporal system of classification, the local/international dichotomy serves as a factor of distinction in a geographical, but also in a temporal sense, separating the traditional from the modern. Here, Bourdieu's thinking coincides with thinking class in terms of cosmopolitanism of elites that predates the modern state.

While Bourdieu's own works only sketch an idea of the international, more important for our purposes are the few works that specifically analyse 'international capital', or sometimes labelled 'transnational capital'. Contrary to others, this set of scholars do not see the 'international' as a meta-field that somehow escapes the national,[26] a purely

21. Didier Bigo, 'Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of Practices, Practices of Power', *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 225–58; Victoria Loughlan, Christian Olsson and Peer Schouten, 'Mapping' in *Critical Security Methods: New Frameworks for Analysis*, eds. Claudia Aradau et al. (London: Routledge, 2014), 23–56.

22. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant, 'New Liberal Speak: Notes on the New Planetary Vulgate', *Radical Philosophy* 105, no. 1 (2001): 2–5.

23. See also Michael Burawoy, 'For Public Sociology', *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 1 (2005): 4–28.

24. Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France (1989–1992)* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2014).

25. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

26. Rebecca Adler-Nissen, 'Introduction' in *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*, ed. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 1–23.

international field of power. Rather their intention is to move the framework of analysis beyond the state (as the delimitation of fields of power) by integrating transnational actors and relations.[27] An important part of the literature here focuses on transnational elites, that is reproduction strategies of a national, but increasingly transnational elite, highlighted by Dezalay and Garth for legal professionals and Madsen for the field of human rights.[28] Dezalay and Garth argue that '(i)nternational strategies allow actors to take advantage of the national value of "international capital" – degrees, expertises and networks with international credibility – in order to build their own positions at home',[29] while simultaneously creating professional elite networks that are transversal to fields of power. Wagner makes an important contribution by including much wider class dynamics (than national elites) when moving beyond the state's field of power.[30] Extending her analysis to various national classes, including working class, she demonstrates how strategies of internationalisation vary according to initial social position. For non-elites, restrained in national social orders, globalisation opens up new means of social mobility, even though not nearly as successful in their strategies of internationalisation as national elites already well endowed with various forms of capital.

Steinmetz equally analyses various classes in different fields of power, the metropolitan and the colonial, and investigates how class conflicts in Germany were transferred and transformed within the colonial field of power.[31] He focuses on the competitive dynamics between the German nobility, capitalist bourgeoisie and the cultivated middle class, the form of capital they brought to the German colonies and their specific class-mediated ways of conceiving the colonised. A particular aspect stands out here: competitive class dynamics are explored in multiple related fields of power, highlighting questions of conversion. Indeed, 'the forms of capital each group brought to the colonies did not function in the same way in the metropole but were translated into the particular language of the field. (Conversely, colonial symbolic capital could not be imported back

27.  Didier Bigo and R.B.J. Walker, 'Political Sociology'; Niilo Kauppi and Mikael Rask Madsen, *Transnational Power Elites: The New Professionals of Governance, Law and Security* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

28.  Mikael R. Madsen, 'Transnational Fields and Power Elites: Reassembling the International with Bourdieu and Practice Theory', in *International Political Sociology: Transversal Lines*, eds. Tugba Basaran et al. (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 106–25. See also Didier Bigo, Philippe Bonditti and Christian Olsson, 'Mapping the European Field of Security Professionals', in *Europe's 21st Century Challenge*, eds. D. Bigo et al. (London: Ashgate, 2010), 49–65.

29.  Yves Dezalay and Bryant G. Garth, *The Internationalization of Palace Wars: Lawyers, Economists, and the Contest to Transform Latin American States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 313.

30.  Anne-Marie Wagner, *Les classes sociales*.

31.  George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); George Steinmetz, 'The Colonial State as a Social Field: Ethnographic Capital and Native Policy in the German Overseas Empire before 1914', *American Sociological Review* 73, no. 4 (2008): 5.

into the metropolitan field without further efforts at conversion)'.[32] In his analysis, the colonial state as a semi-autonomous field is 'entwined with the metropole via the colonial field of power',[33] but also connected to neighbouring colonial fields as well as to a global field of colonial strategies. The multiplicity of fields, the multiplicity of classes, transformations and conversions are precisely the strand of literature that we want to develop further in our analysis of the international.

While we largely agree with the encounters of Bourdieu with the international, achieved in these studies, they assume the circulation of something like an 'international capital'.

## Contextualising Symbolic Capital

Although the Bourdieu-inspired literature on the international sometimes seems to convey the idea that there is something like a globally valid 'international capital', it goes without saying that all capitals are context-specific. From country to country, from place to place, capitals may circulate more or less fluidly and see their value and conversion rates vary. In the case of symbolic capital this is all the more the case as it is solely dependent on subjective recognition in order to operate. What might be a symbolic resource in one place, might be a liability in another. An Afghan who has studied and worked in France might in the 1960s (in the absence of the military interventions that characterise subsequent periods) have been seen as having international connections when coming back to his country. Inversely, a French person who at the same time would have worked in Afghanistan and gotten to know many influential Afghan decision-makers would not necessarily have been seen as having 'international contacts and connections' when coming back. This random example illustrates that we are dealing less with a form of globally valid 'international capital' than with a highly contextual form of symbolic power. Having worked for an international NGO in Rwanda might prove a crucial asset to getting a position in one of the specialised agencies of the UN, and having worked for such a specialised agency might be a crucial asset for a Norwegian to get a permanent position in his country's administration, but having worked for either might not have a significant impact on the ability of a US or French official to get a promotion.

The concept of 'international capital',[34] in particular when focusing on its symbolic dimension, is then probably a misnomer. Paradoxically, even though the notion might make sense within the borders of one 'national' context, it is quite problematic when considering what scholars refer to as multinational spaces or transnational relations. We are indeed dealing with a type of resource, a symbolic capital, that is neither 'internationally' recognised nor produced. Other types of capitals (economic, social, cultural, technological etc.) circulate more easily and are consequently central in Bourdieu-inspired accounts of international relations.[35]

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32. Ibid., 12.
33. Ibid., 10.
34. See for example, Dezalay and Garth, *The Internationalization of Palace Wars*; Wagner, *Les classes sociales*.
35. Trine Villumsen Berling, 'Bourdieu, International Relations and European Security', *Theory and Society* 41, no. 5 (2012): 451–78.

At the same time, one cannot separate totally the symbolic power of the international from other capitals. Indeed the path that for example leads to important positions in international organisation or to an international work experience in countries 'ranking high' in one's professional sector requires (unpaid) time, financial resources (economic capital), social networks (social capital) but also an embodied aptitude to interact in international milieus (cultural capital).[36] It is hence very capital-intensive. Material investment alone does however not account for the successful accumulation of international experiences. Resources that already have an international symbolic value – international diplomas, certificates of international traineeship, certificates of international voluntary work – also play an important role as institutionalised symbolic capital of the international. The amounts of economic, social and cultural capital necessary to constitute this symbolic capital (and vice versa) will determine the 'laws of transformation' following which the one can be transformed into the other.

There however remains a more structural element that influences the distribution of chances encountered by such strategies globally. Indeed as we have already highlighted, the value of any material or institutionalised symbolic capital for the constitution of international symbolic power will also crucially depend on the provenance of those who invest these capitals and the place in which they invest them. Provenance can hence also be approached in this context as a symbolic capital of the international, a symbolic capital the value of which varies with place following conversion rates that are all but random. These conversion rates flow from historical factors, in particular histories of colonial imperialism. We will in the following focus on the role of postcolonial configurations in setting these laws of transformation while complementing and substantiating this by provincialising the international: that is to understand internationalisation as a 'local' strategy (Part 3).

## Conversion Rates of the International

The value of capital is context-specific, but when moving from one context to another its value is not set erratically. We therefore need to ask what sets the rates following which an amount of symbolic capital (of the international) is converted into another amount when moving between fields of power. Evidently a global institution that officially sanctions exchange rates, similar to the state, is lacking, but this does not mean that they are set in a haphazard way. They are contingent on historical structures and factors. Various histories, amongst populations, countries, regions, languages, cultures are relevant in determining conversion rates and what is considered of higher value, and more importantly of 'international' value. Perceived provenance will hence prove to be an important contextual symbolic capital facilitating the access to the symbolic power of the international.

### The Limits of the International

It is not surprising that in understanding global conversion rates of capitals, colonial histories and postcolonial constellations particularly play a crucial role. They are

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36. Wagner, *Les classes sociales*. See also Nicolas Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers: Human Rights and the Politics of Global Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

certainly not the only determinative factors, but they still largely shape symbolic capital at the global level. We will hence use a postcolonial angle, focusing on Western colonialism, to understand the global circulation of symbolic capital, combined with arising issues of convertibility and one-directional conversion effects. In the following, we will explain how fluctuations of conversion rates are crucial for the symbolic capital of the international and how an important set of conversation rates can be defined as a result of postcolonial configurations. Let us focus on the international expert, deployed globally for purposes of development, humanitarian aid as well as business. There is a way of gaining international expertise linked to a set of factors such as titles conferred by particular institutions, speaking particular languages, having a certain vestimentary style and so forth. These are acquirable by investing diverse capitals. This should not lead us to believe, however, that equal access is guaranteed.

As Kothari succinctly points out, the international practitioner is not valued 'solely because of the extent and form of their knowledge but often because of who they are and where they come from'.[37] Race, gender and other socially constructed criteria can determine the social status in particular contexts, and whether people will be considered local or international, and provide us with a view of the limits of conversion possibilities for some, even if systems appear at the outset meritocratic. Bodies can become bearers and brokers of knowledge, physical characteristics can serve as indicators of the worthiness of knowledge. International can become in certain contexts, such as international development, a 'euphemism for "white" or "western" expatriate'[38] and by implication professional capacities are attributed accordingly, a distinction between white and international and non-white and local drawn.

While cultural capital (i.e., Western degrees, culture and such) can be emulated, is convertible and provides a sense of 'meritocratic' access to the international, a sense of possible inclusivity even if the promises cannot be fully held, when bodies become bearers of knowledge, they clearly become somehow bearers of symbolic capital, heritable and transmissible. Ultimately, both have the effect of privileging a particular form of knowledge, institutions and experts, derivative from 'Western' relations to colonies and empires. The authority of knowledge-bearers derives (in limited terms) from their knowledge, but primarily from their status,[39] associated with certain physical and cultural characteristics. That said, these historically determined conversion rates are not fixed. They depend upon a number of social and professional environments, such as whether the professional group consists of lawyers or international administrators, military personnel or academics. One also needs to be careful not to create a homogeneous view of the 'West' that would reduce it to a geographical construct. The creation of the Orient and the Occident, of the West and the rest as symbolic constructs, is always mutual as Said

37.  Uma Kothari, 'Authority and Expertise: The Professionalisation of International Development and the Ordering of Dissent', *Antipode* 37, no. 3 (2005): 426.
38.  Emma Crewe and Richard Axelby, *Anthropology and Development: Culture, Morality and Politics in a Globalized World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 80.
39.  Hughes, 'Bourdieu and the IPCC's Symbolic Power'.

reminds us. Against Said, however, these creations are not global, but local. Being international is translated in specific encounters.[40]

The importance of postcolonial constellations is especially evident in comparing moves from former metropoles (and associated areas) to the colonies with those who are coming from the colonies to the metropole. The symbolic capital of being of Western origin – being French, German or American – is mobilised mainly outside of their social space of reference, commonly called abroad, and varies with the location. It possesses a higher conversion value in formerly colonised countries and/or societies understood as non-Western. This however can also be the case in areas of Europe. As a French development worker in Prishtina states: 'I like it here. I feel more respected, more important than back home. I am somebody here … not just anybody, not just some easily replaceable lawyer'.[41] The French development worker's capitals have different value in different locations, depending on supply and demand, but also on a symbolic hierarchy built into the relation between his place of provenance and the place in which he invests these capitals, thus justifying strategies of internationalisation. The French development worker can move from being an ordinary lawyer in the national realm through internationalisation to a different class, a temporary nobility. The elite status is limited to the period of his stay within this particular social context that allows him to be identified as international, however. It would be incorrect to assume that this lawyer is part of a transnational elite; possibilities for reconversion from international to national are linked to a loss in capital value.[42] Under these circumstances being international takes place abroad and it is not surprising that many international experts change from country to country, but prefer to remain within their social universe.

As Memmi highlighted early on for Europeans living in the colonies (or we may add ex-colonies), 'Although he is everything in the colony, the colonialist knows that in his own country he would be nothing; he would go back to being a mediocre man'.[43] Retreating from the international is reverting from nobility to being mediocre. The symbolic capital based upon being part of the 'West' is lost upon return. Moreover, the economic capital, even if it remains nominally equal upon return, cannot afford the same lifestyle and hence appears much lower in real terms. The comfortable life 'a place where one earns more and spends less', which goes along with a higher status, a personal car, chauffeur, possibly a security guard, and in general a higher standard of living, a higher social status vanishes. The capital gained in the colonies, and equally post-colonies, is difficult to convert at home. Exit strategies of development professionals generally take into account that capital and positioning acquired within the development field is not easily convertible. Many of the privileges of being international are lost upon exit. This is not a new situation. The life of an international expert in the field of development and

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40. Doty, *Imperial Encounters*.
41. Mojca Vah Jevsnik, *Building Peace for a Living: Expatriate Development Workers in Kosovo* (Ljubljana: ZRC Publishing, 2009), 101.
42. It might however be different for Western elites as highlighted by Dezalay and Garth, *The Internationalization of Palace Wars*.
43. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 105.

humanitarian aid is in many ways similar to that of the colonial administrator, and even a continuation of the latter in their professional trajectories.[44] It is hence important to understand the continuation of practices in knowledge, appointments and privileges, manifesting the necessity to understand the temporary nobility in the field through a postcolonial angle and its influences on the various forms of capital.

Can the international avoid postcolonial privileges? Memmi asks if there is a colonial, i.e., 'a European living in a colony but having no privileges, whose living condition are not higher than those of colonized person of equivalent economic and social status'. His answer is clear and striking: 'A colonial so defined does not exist … for all Europeans in the colonies are privileged … the distinction between deed and intent has no great significance in the colonial situation'.[45] The professional of the international is in a similar situation, whether s/he accepts or denies the privilege, (s)he imports a symbolic privilege, which allows him or her to become a (temporary) nobility. Whether they work for an international organisation, a NGO or are roaming backpackers is hereby irrelevant. 'Internationals' cannot give up their privileges of being more international than others. The international is not only cultural capital, as often portrayed, but functions as symbolic capital. Significantly, investigating the different forms of capital invested in the international shifts the emphasis from technical knowledge and meritocracy, towards an 'international' nobility, bound through the embodied and the cultural spheres. This distinguishes our analysis from many studies that assume that international practitioners accumulate capital across national and international fields and assume the 'international' as a distinct level or playing field.

## The Social Reproduction of Hierarchies of the International

One could at this stage argue that the debate on the 'relative decline' of the West and the rise of 'emerging powers' should long since have relegated colonial hierarchies to the past. It is here necessary to give a few clues as to how concretely the link between westernisation and internationalisation has been produced, reproduced and hence maintained in spite of the abovementioned factors. Contra the idea that we would here merely be dealing with two monolithic groups, the 'West and the rest', this will allow highlighting the active role played by 'internationally local' but 'locally internationalized' elites in countries of the global South. It thus offers an interesting illustration of how objective interests and struggles can contribute to the reproduction of symbolical power structures in spite of significant changes in historical context. In other words it highlights the 'stickiness' of history with regards to power-structures. Finally, it underlines that what is at stake in our argument is not simply that the 'expansion of international society' has historically placed the West at the centre of the 'modern international'.[46] What we rather

44. Kothari, 'Authority and Expertise'; Véronique Dimier, *The Invention of a European Development Aid Bureaucracy: Recycling Empire?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
45. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 10.
46. Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'The Historical Expansion of International Society', in *International Studies Encyclopedia (ISA Compendium)*, ed. R.A. Denemark (Chichester:

want to suggest is that the structure of social struggles in the countries of the 'Global South' tend to reproduce the symbolic domination from which they have emerged and in which the symbolic capital of the international, as historically framed, plays an important role.

The emergence of 'internationally recognized' postcolonial states in the 'Global South' has been inseparable from the more or less successful exportation of European state-knowledge (*savoirs d'Etat*) or 'state-governing expertise',[47] a process that continues today through a myriad of more or less interventionist policies.[48] This process already started during colonisation through amongst others the exportation of education systems by colonial powers. We here focus on education because it plays a central role not only in the transmission of knowledge, but also in the (re)production of cultural and symbolic capital[49] as well as in the conformation of subjective 'principles of vision and division' to the institutional necessities of the modern state[50] and 'interstate system'.

The underlying logic of this exportation of state-knowledge was often initially to create 'local' but westernised elites to staff the lower echelons of colonial administrations or through which to rule following the principles of indirect rule, native policies or *politique indigène*. The effects of these policies were twofold. On the one hand they contributed to the naturalisation of Western domination, dissimulating it behind a humanistic narrative of progress and liberation through science, knowledge and education.[51] Colonisation itself was portrayed as an opening up of 'backwards regions' locked up in feudal and archaic structures simultaneously to the international and to modernity. On the other hand these policies forged a 'local' modernist elite with a vested interest, at least in its 'national/local' contexts, in maintaining and reproducing the symbolic power attached to Western education, diplomas and perspective, yet at the same time occasionally critiquing the inequalities thus established between North and South. Ultimately, their legitimacy as power holders became inseparable from the symbolic power, or rather

Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/29745/. Last accessed October 20, 2017; see also Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict and the International System* (Boulder: L. Rienner, 1995).

47.  Yves Dezalay and Bryant G. Garth, 'Hegemonic Battles, Professional Rivalries, and the International Division of Labor in the Market for the Import and Export of State-Governing Expertise', *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 276–93.

48.  Julien Jeandesboz, 'Intervention and Subversion: the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 9, no. 4 (2015): 442–70; Christian Olsson 'Intervention as Practice: On "Ordinary Transgressions" and their Routinization', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 9, no. 4 (2015): 425–41.

49.  Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

50.  Bourdieu, *On the State*.

51.  Véronique Dimier, 'On Good Colonial Government: Lessons from the League of Nations', *Global Society* 18, no. 3 (2004); 279–99; Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein, eds., *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2009); Christian Olsson, 'De la pacification coloniale aux opérations extérieures: retour sur la généalogie des coeurs et des esprits dans la pensée militaire contemporaine', *Questions de Recherche No. 39* (Paris: CERI/Sciences Po, 2012).

the right to confer rights (in this case the right to confer valuable educational titles), vested in states in the global North.[52] Let us here use a concrete example.

Afghanistan is sometimes portrayed as the first Islamic state to become part of the modern interstate system in the 1920s-1930s after having 'liberated itself' from British domination through a 'war of independence' in 1919. This achievement was however to a great extent the result of the joint efforts of Western 'exporters' of state-knowledge and an emerging Afghan state-elite the authority of which was precisely linked to their access to the former's resources.[53] While the relation with these Western experts was initially a source of domestic opposition rather than of symbolic power, this modernist and internationalised upperclass progressively managed to transform its incommodious external source of power into an inheritable set of capitals reproduced through the education of their sons (and later also their daughters) in a select few elite schools located in Kabul but unambiguously tied to the 'West': Amaniyya, a French *lycée* established in 1922 and later renamed Istiqlal; Amani, a German school created in 1924 and later renamed Nijat and finally Ghazi an English school established in 1927. In each of these schools, the learning of the respective European languages was obligatory. A significant number of these students pursued, after secondary school, studies in France, England, or Germany.

Those amongst these modernizing, westernised and internationalised elites who stayed in Afghanistan after secondary school usually pursued their studies in one of the two most prestigious university faculties in Kabul, the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Law, both affiliated to France. Should they refuse either of these, they could always opt for the US-sponsored Faculties of Agriculture, Engineering or Education, the USSR-financed Polytechnic Institute or the Faculty of Science or Economics financed by Germany.[54] The only state-sanctioned knowledge giving access to political power-positions was the one provided by Western and European schools in Afghanistan or abroad, thus setting the country on a course very different from the one of for instance France as portrayed by Bourdieu.[55] As a result, the emerging Afghan ruling elite became more and more dependent on external resources, both material and symbolic, for its own political and social domination. By the same token this elite consolidated the symbolic power relations between former colonisers and colonised.

In a way, one could say that there has been a co-production of Western domination by the strategies of internationalisation deployed by Afghan civil servants, statesmen and members of the intelligentsia on the one hand, diverse Western/Northern professionals of the international engaged in exporting state-expertise on the other. One would however be mistaken in concluding that this co-production was exempt of the type of symbolic

52.  Frances Vavrus and Amy Pekol, 'Critical Internationalization: Moving From Theory to Practice'; Christian Olsson '"Legitimate Violence" in the Prose of Counterinsurgency: an Impossible Necessity?', *Alternatives* 38, no. 2 (2013): 155–71.
53.  Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
54.  Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
55.  Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*.

power that Bourdieu has observed amongst social classes in French schools,[56] thus stressing 'how the dominated accept as legitimate their own condition of domination'.[57] As highlighted by Afghan poet and philosopher Sayyed Bahauddin Majrooh, the one who in Afghanistan went through this Westernizing education between the 1920s and the 1970s was 'neither a complete Westerner nor a genuine Easterner. He became a stranger: a stranger to his own society and even worse, a stranger to himself'.[58] He was simultaneously proud of his education, the sacrifices and efforts he had endured, and dependent on Western resources (symbolic and material); simultaneously contemptuous of Afghan rural and tribal traditions and ashamed of his own origins and primary socialisation.

Beyond the specificities of the Afghan case, the role of strategies of internationalisation in promoting 'modernizing elites' in the global South is pervasive. To a certain extent the above-mentioned 'split personality' (but also duplicity) of the 'locally internationalized' elite can still be observed in postcolonial constellations. It is indeed more generally characteristic of the 'transnational brokers' analysed by Dezalay.[59] In the Global South, access to the 'international' is foremost linked to the ability to import knowledge and know-how from (mainly) Western countries and hence to act as brokers, simultaneously connecting the Western professionals of the international to 'local' settings and using these connections to advance their own 'local' agendas.[60] It will then not come as a surprise that even those among these modernising elites that have not travelled, are not mobile, do not have contacts abroad, often still display beliefs, cultural practices and dispositions (the ability to speak and interact with 'ínternationals') that form a symbolic capital of the international. They use claims to the international to consolidate their own power but at the same time, as denounced by Fanon, they thus reproduce principles of domination that irrevocably submit them to Western-produced standards in the name of the latter's universality.[61]

As we have seen, internationalisation is not only a strategy of social promotion in the North/ West. It also consolidates, and is reproduced by, 'national' hierarchies and elites in the global South. Although Western domination is partly contingent on colonial history, there is agency here on the part of the 'locals'. There is a dynamic link between the Westernisation of elites in the South and the reproduction of Western/Northern symbolic domination. Bourdieu himself was very much aware of this link as highlighted by his stance towards the Algerian war of independence in the 1950s and 1960s: against colonisation but at the same time disillusioned as to the revolutionary potential of what many saw as a process of emancipation of the Algerian proletariat. The latter outcome Bourdieu

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56. Ibid.
57. David L. Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 89.
58. Quoted in Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 76.
59. Yves Dezalay, 'Les courtiers de l'international: Héritiers cosmopolites, mercenaires de l'impérialisme et missionnaires de l'universel', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, nos. 151–52 (2004): 4–35.
60. Dezalay and Garth, *The Internationalization of Palace Wars;* Dezalay and Garth, 'Hegemonic Battles, Professional Rivalries'.
61. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

indeed saw as highly unlikely given the extremely dire material conditions of the Algerian peasantry that limited their agency in relation to the Algerian bourgeoisie and the colonial power.[62]

While there are objective alliances between social groups in North/West and South, the relation is asymmetric in at least two complementary ways: on the one hand, Western 'internationals' in the 'Global South' will contextually benefit from a symbolic power that the 'Southerners' in Europe will typically not have. On the other hand, while this symbolic power of Western 'internationals' might not so easily be converted into other capitals once back 'home', the international connections, of for example, Afghan elites are very easily converted into political power in Afghanistan. In this sense, and contra dependency and structural theories of imperialism,[63] there is not necessarily a class alliance between elites of centre and periphery. In the 'Global South', the symbolic power of the international can typically be claimed by experts from the 'Global North' that will not become part of the established elite once back home. Their contextual symbolic power in the 'South' flows from the wider symbolic domination between 'North' and 'South', not primarily from their social origins.

## Conclusion

In this article we have done two things. Firstly, situating ourselves within the wider IR debate on the nature and status of its specific object,[64] we have highlighted one of the lesser analysed dimensions of this 'object': the way in which everyday uses of the 'international' have transformed it into an increasingly central marker of status and hierarchy in social relations. This is particularly evident today since the 'international' in many domains seems to have become a generic quality label as in finances, sciences, education and many other sectors in which the 'internationality' of standards, expertise, norms or best practices are everywhere seen as an obvious quality certification to be strived for. To a great extent this phenomenon can, however, be traced back to the second half of the 19th century.[65] Secondly, we have drawn on this observation to show how the underlying symbolic economy of the 'international' can be analysed through a Bourdieu-inspired framework.

On the first point, we have argued that to define the international is not to engage in a purely academic debate. It is also to engage in struggles of classification in which one is, as an IR scholar but also as a member of wider social hierarchies, inevitably oneself a stakeholder. Dezalay and Garth here, for example, claim that theoreticians of international networks generally avoid questioning the 'internationality' of the type of networks they

62.  Goodman and Silverstein, *Bourdieu in Algeria.*

63.  Johan Galtung, 'A Structural Theory of Imperialism', *Journal of Peace Research* 8, no. 2 (1971): 81–117.

64.  Rosenberg, 'International Relations in the Prison of Political Science'; Neumann and Sending, 'The International as Governmentality'.

65.  Tugba Basaran and Christian Olsson, 'The Symbolic Power of the International: Scalar Effects and Social Relations' (Forthcoming).

are looking at (for example they rarely highlight that access to these networks depends on resources accumulated in the context of highly 'localized' and circumscribed struggles) for the simple reason that such a move would question their own 'internationality' as scholars.[66] They thus tend to dissimulate the geographical and social situatedness of their own ability to claim to be international experts or even to be 'internationals'.

What is at stake in these struggles of classification is not only how one formally defines the international but what is more subtly implied when claiming someone or something to be international. The way in which 'international' properties are attributed to individuals, groups or institutions is reflective and reproductive of pre-existing power positions that have very little to do with formal definitions. This is where our main contribution to the field of IR lies: we highlight how one can account for the international by taking as a point of departure not our individual or disciplinary definitions of it, but the ways in which it has already been given implicit meanings to in the context of everyday social relations. This task is all the more interesting from an IR point of view as it supposes to rid oneself of the 'methodological nationalism' that so many sociologists, including Bourdieu, as well as some IR scholars seem to share: these meanings indeed circulate from place to place, are seemingly recognised everywhere, in spite of disagreements over who or what might embody the 'international'. A wider analysis of the symbolic economy of the international is hence called for.

On the second point, we have approached the international as a distinct type of symbolic resource. This symbolic power of the international can be accumulated in the form of capital, a symbolic capital of the international constituted by titles, diplomas, dispositions and tastes deemed 'international'. We however have steered clear of calling it an 'international capital'. By dealing with it as a particular type of symbolic capital we want to highlight that this capital does not circulate smoothly as for example economic capital generally does. This is not to say that it does not circulate at all. It however does so with significant, but not totally random, discontinuities. It is these discontinuities, and their paradoxical regularities, that we have approached through a postcolonial angle. These regularities indicate that there are global structures, both material and symbolic, that organise the relation between the different social spaces through which this symbolic capital circulates globally. These structures, we argue, are inseparable from global histories of (de)colonisation. They do not amount to a meta-field but rather structure in a loose and yet crucial way the interstices between fields of power. Historical formations of privileges have thus become part of the 'international', including particular nationalities, particular languages and histories. Ultimately, strategies of internationalisation allow some to 'become international', and preclude others, as only some are pre-qualified to participate in the competition for the symbolic capital of the international.

## Funding

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66. Dezalay, 'Les courtiers de l'international', 6.