

IR Theory as International Practice/Agency: A Clinical-Cynical Bourdieusian Perspective

Inanna Hamati-Ataya
University of Sheffield

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Abstract:

Adopting a reflexive, praxeological understanding of science that rejects the objectivist epistemic antinomy of theory and practice, this paper offers two complementary Bourdieusian readings of IR Theory that specifically aim to conceptualise the structural position of “periphery” scholars, as well as their extant and potential “space of possibilities” in the discipline. Grounded in a sociological appraisal of IR, the “clinical” approach objectivates IR as a field of international practice wherein the production of theoretical knowledge results from the meeting of different scholarly habitus and their associated positions, with the objective structures of IR and the international system. It highlights the relation between IR Theory and the structural (dis)positions of its authors, the conditions that allow some theories to be objectively possible, meaningful, structuring representations of the world, and the structural constraints imposed on IR theorists. The “cynical” approach suggests how a “clinical” understanding of IR can help marginalised, “periphery” scholars make sense of their “space of possibilities” within the discipline, and develop a praxeological, reflexive attitude that could turn them into efficient international agents capable of promoting different scholarly perspectives. More specifically, the paper argues that their non-native habitus is a potentially subversive capital – and hence a potential agent of structural change.

Introduction:

...scientific analyses...of the intellectual world...are liable to two different readings and uses. ...uses that may be called *clinical*, ...in that they treat the products of science as instruments for a self-understanding shorn of self-complacency; and...uses that may be called *cynical*, because they consist in seeking in the analysis of social mechanisms tools...to guide one’s strategies in the academic field¹.

International Relations (IR) has recently been increasingly interested in itself as a discipline, not merely in addition to its founding interest in its object of study, but more importantly in connection with it. Developing within and from its “third debate,” three bodies of critical literature have begun to converge within its self-assertive margins, announcing what could become a more integrated, but nonetheless plural “reflexive” tradition in the discipline. The first of these literatures is the “post-positivist” critique that emerged in the late 1970s. Aimed at American IR’s “neopositivist” paradigms², and led by Western scholars, it has systematically

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, in Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) 210-211.

² Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

engaged the discipline's core concerns at the theoretical and epistemic levels, targeting foundational assumptions about truth, objectivity, theory, and science³. The second corpus of critical literature, led by feminist and post-colonial research, has put forth the voices, interests, and agendas of disciplinary and social "minorities," both within and outside of "the West." Informed by the "knowledge-power nexus," scholars speaking from the "margins" of IR and the global order have crossed disciplinary boundaries to demonstrate IR's "parochialism," and promote alternative modes of engaging global realities⁴. Finally, and more recently, attempts have been made, mainly by European IR scholars, to turn the discipline into an object of study in its own right, drawing on the history and sociology of knowledge and science to produce a more systematic understanding of its structure and identity, and of the rules, processes, and constraints that govern its (re)production⁵.

Common to these approaches is a characteristic concern for "reflexivity," generally understood as self-understanding or self-critique, achieved by a "bending back" of knowledge⁶. However, the plurality of current conceptualisations of

³ Richard Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism" in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed. Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 255-300; Robert Cox, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Yosef Lapid, 'The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era', *International Studies Quarterly* 33(3) (1989) 235-254; R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Ted Hopf, 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory', *International Security* 23(1) (1998) 171-200; Colin Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴ Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas and Bases: Making a Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); J. Ann Tickner, *Gendering World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); L.H.M. Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations: Conquest and Desire Between Asia and the West* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (London: Routledge, 2004); Siba Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Orders and Institutions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); Naeem Inayatullah (ed.), *Autobiographical International Relations: I, IR* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁵ Hayward Alker and Thomas Biersteker, 'The Dialectics of World Order: Notes for a Future Archeologist of International Savoir Faire', *International Studies Quarterly* 28(2) (1984) 121-142; K.J. Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985); Brian Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998); Ole Wæver, 'The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations', *International Organization* 52(4) (1998) 687-727; Robert Crawford and Darryl Jarvis (eds) *International Relations – Still an American Social Science? Toward Diversity in International Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Jörg Friedrichs, *European Approaches to International Relations Theory: A House with Many Mansions* (London: Routledge, 2004); Knud Erik Jørgensen and Tonny Brems Knudsen, *International Relations in Europe: Traditions, Perspectives and Destinations* (London: Routledge, 2006); Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver (eds.) *International Relations Scholarship Around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁶ Stefano Guzzini, 'A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations* 6(2) (2000) 147-182, 'The Concept of Power: A Constructivist Analysis', *Millennium* 33(3) (2005) 495-521; Anna Leander, 'Do We Really Need Reflexivity in IPE? Bourdieu's Two Reasons for Answering Affirmatively', *Review of International Political Economy* 9(4) (2002) 601-609; Vincent Pouliot, "'Subjectivism": Toward a Constructivist Methodology', *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007) 359-384; J. Ann Tickner, 'On the Frontlines or Sidelines of Knowledge and Power? Feminist Practices of Responsible Scholarship', *International Studies Review* 8 (2006)

reflexivity in IR constitutes an obstacle to the development of a systematic “reflexive” project in the discipline⁷. One important difference is the nature of this “self” called on to achieve “self-understanding,” which refers either to IR as whole, to a particular paradigm/theory, or to individual researchers. Each of these focuses offers invaluable insights for IR scholarship. But as long as they are conceptually and empirically isolated from one another, some important questions will remain unanswered, especially those concerning the relationships between individual scholarship, disciplinary trends, and social/global structures of power.

Inscribed in the scholarly interests and concerns delineated by the convergence of these literatures, this paper is equally informed by the *problématique* of reflexivity, but attempts to address it in a way that helps us understand these different levels simultaneously, by interrogating their interconnectedness. Its first objective is to outline the basics of a reflexive reading of IR scholarship that allows us to objectivate our intellectual attitude and production, by understanding what they owe to the fact of being shaped by, and expressed from, a specific “locus” within the discipline, while objectivating IR as an *internally structured* space that partly owes its identity and mechanisms of (re)production to *exogenous social factors*. To do so, the paper draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology, which enables us to pursue a sociology of IR that is informed by a praxeological understanding of cultural production, and to reflexively objectivate IR scholarship at the junction between micro- and macro-social levels, thereby connecting the different “selves” of reflexive IR’s subjects-objects of inquiry. This “clinical” Bourdieusian reading of IR’s cultural production focuses specifically on IR Theory (IRT).

The paper aims, secondly, to highlight how scholars located in the margins of the field and/or the international system can make sense of the constraints imposed on them as cultural producers. Taking this analysis one step further in an analytically complementary, but purposively different direction, the final objective is to reflect on the “space of possibilities” currently and potentially available to scholars *culturally* located outside of “the West.” This “cynical” perspective draws on the “clinical” appraisal of IR, and complements it with a Bourdieusian understanding of reflexivity as “subversive action,” to explore the means these scholars have of turning their disadvantaged, non-native habitus into an agency of structural change. The clinical-cynical narrative proposed here is itself the product of thinking from the “periphery,” from a self-consciously experienced space of “difference.” It might therefore engage the concerns of scholars who find themselves similarly positioned, as well as those who reflect on the discipline as a whole⁸.

383-395; Cecelia Lynch, ‘Reflexivity in Research on Civil Society: Constructivist Perspectives’, *International Studies Review* 10(4) (2008) 708-721; Mark Neufeld, *The Restructuring of International Relations Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True, ‘Reflexivity in Practice: Power and Ethics in Feminist Research on International Relations’, *International Studies Review* 10(4) (2008) 693-707; Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, ‘Advancing a Reflexive International Relations’, *Millennium* 39(3) (2011) 805-829; Inanna Hamati-Ataya, ‘The “Problem of Values” and International Relations Scholarship: From Applied Reflexivity to Reflexivism’, *International Studies Review* 13(2) (2011) 259-287.

⁷ Eagleton-Pierce, ‘Advancing’; Inanna Hamati-Ataya, ‘Reflectivity, Reflexivity, Reflexivism: IR’s “Reflexive Turn” – and Beyond’, *European Journal of International Relations* (Forthcoming).

⁸ The reader might need some biographical information to make sense of the author’s “peripheral” locus: born into Arab culture, raised and academically trained in France, having lived in Lebanon and taught at the American University of Beirut, and currently living and working in the UK.

Before turning to the presentation of Bourdieu's praxeological approach that informs this clinical-cynical perspective, I should explain how the correlatives "core" and "periphery" are used throughout this paper. The core-periphery dichotomy has become a central conceptual tool to make sense of differences and divisions within IR, and is the product of a sociological-historical framing of the discussions that fall at the junction of the three above-mentioned literatures. The "periphery" is replacing older references to the "Third World," but is an equally problematic concept. Implicit in the use of the term is its heuristic value in delineating geopolitical *and* geocultural areas that also stand in socio-economic opposition to the "core." The problem therefore lies in the attempt to combine, in one utterance, not merely a set of *different* oppositions (economic, political, academic, cultural), but of *correlated* ones. One runs the risk of assuming precisely what its usage is intended to test empirically, namely, whether academic marginalisation (of ideas and scholars) is related to political/economic marginalisation (of their communities).

Without being oblivious to the performative nature of the "core-periphery" dichotomy and its political-rhetorical effect stressing on difference and power, the paper draws on the sociology of IR to delineate a "core" whose identity is formed by the convergence of geopolitical, social, institutional and intellectual characteristics. Against a monolithic "periphery" that cannot make sense of different positionings outside (and inside) of the core, it acknowledges the existence of different "peripheries" that are located differently with respect to this core, by making explicit what characterises their relational position. This allows us to remain alert to the important conceptual and empirical nuances that a praxeological approach brings forth.

Theory-as-Practice: The Basics of a Bourdieusian Socioanalysis

The past decade witnessed a growing disciplinary interest in Bourdieu's sociology, in light of IR's "sociological," "practical," "cultural," and "reflexive" turns⁹. Ranging from empirical research on international trade, diplomacy, and security, to discussions of epistemology, methodology, and moral engagement, this literature illustrates the scope of Bourdieu's potential influence on the discipline. In particular, Bourdieu's work on reflexivity is gaining visibility in "post-positivist" IR circles. As Didier Bigo recently noted,

[i]f Bourdieu is of any value for the study of international relations today, it is because his main contribution has been to work on the redefinition of the relationship between theory and practice and to insist on the need for academics to engage with this relation in their own research practices."¹⁰

⁹ Guzzini 'A Reconstruction'; Leander 'Do We Really Need'; Michael Williams, *Culture and Security: Symbolic Power and the Politics of International Security* (London: Routledge, 2007); Vincent Pouliot, 'The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities', *International Organization* 62 (2008) 257-288; Peter Jackson, 'Pierre Bourdieu, the "Cultural Turn" and the Practice of International History', *Review of International Studies* 34 (2008) 155-181; Frédéric Mérand, *European Defence Policy: Beyond the Nation State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 'Pierre Bourdieu and the Birth of European Defence', *Security Studies* 19(2) (2010) 342-374; Eagleton-Pierce, 'Advancing'; Special issue on "Bourdieu and the International," eds. Didier Bigo and Mikael R. Madsen, *International Political Sociology* 5(3) (2011) 219-345.

¹⁰ Didier Bigo, 'Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of Practices, Practices of Power', *International Political Sociology* 5(3) (2011) 225-258, 233.

While this particular line of inquiry has inspired many scholars to reflect on the epistemic, methodological, and ethical dimensions of IR scholarship, it has, however, not yet informed any systematic research on the sociology of the discipline, as scholars engaging this sub-field have relied on other approaches borrowed from the sociology of science. This section attempts to make explicit why Bourdieu's sociology offers an interesting complement or alternative.

What makes Bourdieu invaluable for investigating the relationship between (IR) theory and (international) practice is his consistent *praxeological* approach to *theory as practice*, grounded in an epistemic position on the theory-practice antinomy, and in a meta-epistemic position on the problems this antinomy poses to social science. Bourdieu problematises not only scholars' relationship to the social world as a theoretical understanding of practice, but also what is involved and what is at stake in adopting a *theoretical* viewpoint on practice that ignores itself *qua* practice. After a brief restatement of Bourdieu's epistemic stance, the following presentation of his praxeological approach systematically applies his theory-of-practice to theory-as-practice, thereby highlighting its importance for a reflection on IRT as cultural product.

Bourdieu's contribution to the philosophy of social science is his attempt to transcend the antinomy between *subjectivism/phenomenology* and *objectivism*, while retaining their respective epistemic advantages. While subjectivism "cannot go beyond a description of what specifically characterises 'lived' experience of the social world...because it excludes the question of the conditions of possibility of this experience,"¹¹ objectivism "sets out to establish objective regularities...independent of individual consciousness and wills," and hence "introduces a radical discontinuity between theoretical and practical knowledge."¹² A *praxeological* approach aims to retain objectivism's "epistemological break" with commonsense-knowledge of practice (which subjectivism cannot operate), while understanding the *practical* knowledge that subjectivism reconstitutes without objectivating it (and that objectivism necessarily ignores). Acknowledging that both attitudes "are equally indispensable to a science of the social world that cannot be reduced either to a social phenomenology or to a social physics,"¹³ Bourdieu aims to *objectivate* the *practical* knowledge social agents invest in their representations of, and behaviour in, the social world. When this objectivation is applied to scholarly practice – especially one's own – it becomes properly reflexive.

This praxeological position has an important bearing on the study of IR as an academic field, and of IRT as a cultural product. Firstly, it enjoins us to reject explanations that fail to capture and account for the "sense of practice" scholars invest and mobilise in their professional activities – their institutional interactions, academic strategies, and cultural production – as if they were wholly governed by exogenous rules of behaviour imposed by the field itself or by wider social structures. It also rejects first-order accounts of scholarly practice (one's own, as in autobiography, or

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990[1980]) 25-6, emphasis added.

¹² *Ibid*, 26; emphasis added.

¹³ *Ibid*, 25.

others', as in ethnomethodology) that dissociate it from the objective structures that constitute its social conditions of possibility and inform its operating principles.

Secondly, when taking into account these objective structures Bourdieu warns against two reductionisms. The first is the type of "internalist" explanation that looks at a community of scholars as isolated from its social environment, and therefore uses the field's own intersubjective system of values and norms (*doxa*) to analyse its cultural production. A typical example is telling the story of IR as one of successive *debates*, and explaining them on the basis of their *intertextuality*, or of their protagonists' *arguments*. The second reductionism is the opposite, "externalist" explanation (characteristic of Marxist analyses), that directly transposes, into the academic realm, the social, economic, and political divisions and structures of power of the field's social environment. Such an explanation ignores the social specificity of academic fields, which exist *qua* differentiated fields precisely because their own rules and social objectives provide them with a relative social autonomy. Neither of these perspectives can explain why specific individuals and groups involved in IR's discussions and debates hold the positions they do, the way they do, at the time they do, nor explain the disciplinary meaning and value of "debates" within IR's history and historiography – that is, why and how their intellectual "stakes" become *intellectual stakes*, worth transmitting to every new generation of scholars.

To understand sociologically how individual and collective cultural products come into existence is an ambitious project that Bourdieu pursued against a backdrop of competing philosophical and disciplinary traditions – mainly phenomenology and structuralism. The concepts he gradually crafted, through a combination of empirical research and reflexive-epistemic inquiry, are relevant to IR's own discussions. In particular, the notions of "field" and "habitus" signify Bourdieu's rejection of the concepts of "structure" and "agency," of the teleological and utilitarian explanations associated with them respectively, and of their alleged antinomy: field and habitus are *mutually constitutive* and therefore impossible to conceptualise or objectivate independently of each other.

Because the habitus are "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" that are "structured" by the fields wherein they are constituted, they are

predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes *without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them*.¹⁴

The social fields that produce the habitus and are equally dependent on them for their constitution and reproduction/transformation are "field[s] of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in [them]," and "field[s] of struggles wherein agents confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of the field[s] of forces."¹⁵ As fields of forces, they are structured by the distribution of capital among their members. This defines an agent's position within a field, which in turn delimits a given "space of possibilities": the possible strategies an agent has within *a given configuration* of the field, to "play" the

¹⁴ Ibid, 53; emphasis added.

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 32.

game by investing his/her capital in it, through “position-takings” that are necessarily *relational*, since they depend on an agent’s position with respect to *others* within a *structured* space.

The relationship between habitus and field helps us understand IRT-as-practice by objectivating the “correspondence between two homologous structures”: that of its products – understood in terms of “genres, forms, styles and themes” – and that of IR viewed as a field of forces *and* a field of struggles.¹⁶ This entails relating the space of IR “conceived as a field of position-takings” and the space of authors/paradigms/theories “conceived as a system of differential positions in the field”¹⁷:

The strategies of the agents and institutions that are engaged in [scholarly] struggles, that is, their *position-takings*..., depend on the *position* they occupy in the structure of the field, ...which, through the mediation of the constitutive dispositions of their *habitus*..., inclines them either to conserve or to transform the structure of this distribution, hence to perpetuate the extant rules of the game or to subvert them.¹⁸

The structure and evolution of a field are not, however, strictly dependent on endogenous factors. Fields are more or less *autonomous* from their social environment, depending on their permeability to exogenous forms of capital and “stakes”; and the social sciences are characteristically less autonomous than other academic fields. Because their methodologies have a weaker social authority than those of the “sciences,” and because they investigate the social world itself, social scientists coexist and compete with other organised groups involved in producing and promoting alternative representations of the social order – especially journalists and political actors. As their own production is of particular interest to agents involved in the “field of power,” which is “the space of the relations of force between the different species of capital”¹⁹ (economic, political, symbolic) in any society, their activities are constantly subjected to exogenous social imperatives, objectives and control. A typical consequence of this lesser autonomy is that social scientists’ field-specific capital is never sufficient to determine their *entry*, *position* and future academic *trajectory* in the academic field, not least because academic “competence” and legitimacy are partly defined and validated by external social standards.

However, while these exogenous interests, representations and values contribute to shaping the scholarly field’s specific development, they do so through a “refraction” operated by its own structure and *doxa*²⁰. In other words, social and political problems are not imported into the field as such. They rather inform the constitution of properly “academic” (scientific) problems, formulated in academic terms according to the field’s own standards and language. Academic debates – especially epistemic/theoretical ones – are therefore “lived” by members of the field

¹⁶ Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques: Sur la théorie de l’action* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 70-71.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 69-70.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 71; my translation.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 56; my translation.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 68.

as *intellectual* struggles concerning representations of the world, rather than as *social* struggles in the world: IR's debate-narrative is how the discipline's historiography registers its internal struggles on its own terms, thereby misrepresenting part of what is really "at stake" in these seemingly intellectual encounters²¹.

What is invested, then, in a theoretical *perspective on* the world, are individual and collective dispositions themselves structured by a given *position in* the world. As the history of these dispositions is "forgotten," that is, internalised and normalised, they become efficient as structuring systems of practices and representations, producing practical, consensus-building taxonomies²². Feeding back into the social world its own representations, mediated by the field's position in it, the field functions as an agent of the social order insofar as its operating logic remains invisible to its members, who thereby unknowingly participate in its reproduction by ignoring the praxical dimension of their scholarly viewpoint, and what this viewpoint owes to being the product of a particular position within that order.

To understand the production of IRT reflexively, then, is to understand the objective structuration of IR, and reconstitute the praxical meaning that informs IR scholars' *position-takings*, in relation to their position in the game and what the game and its stakes mean from *that* position.

IRT-as-International-Practice: A "Clinical" Appraisal

A systematic Bourdieusian study of IRT would need data about the discipline, its members, and its relation to the "fields of power" that are currently inexistent or scarce, not least because they need to be generated from a Bourdieusian perspective in the first place. Drawing on the knowledge we do have about IR, this second part will outline some main themes and lines of inquiry that inform a wider, on-going project based on such a Bourdieusian framework. As this "clinical" appraisal entails the objectivation of the field from a distance, by "suspending," as much as possible, the *illusio* that gives value, and associates valuable stakes, to *this* very discussion, it will deal equally with all manifestations of IRT – mainstream and dissident – including *this* author's own preferences and scholarship.

IR's Field(s) of Forces

At the global level, IR is neither an international discipline, nor a symmetrical one in terms of cultural production. Since Stanley Hoffmann's famous *Daedalus* article²³, its American "identity" has been repeatedly confirmed, and the nature of its internal divisions empirically revealed – pointing to important differences that allow us to draw a nuanced map of how "peripheral" IRs are positioned with respect to its American "core" and to one another.

²¹ These different points explain Bourdieu's rejection of positivist analyses of academic "institutions" à la Merton, or constructionist ones à la Kuhn, which treat academic communities and struggles as either isolated from their wider social environment, or governed by internal rules of becoming exclusively inscribed in the scientific doxa.

²² Ibid. p. 95.

²³ Stanley Hoffmann, 'An American Social Science: International Relations', *Daedalus* 106(3) (1977) 41-60.

Based on indicators of global institutional visibility, such as journal publications, textbooks and course syllabi, studies conducted in the past three decades have shown that American scholars, methodologies, and theories overwhelmingly dominate the discipline²⁴. Micro-analyses of local production in different parts of the world also corroborate the “hegemony” of American IR, which has become “simultaneously a single local instance of the field and an integral component of everyone else’s universe.”²⁵ On the other hand, however, Western peripheries, which enjoy some autonomy because of local disciplinary traditions and independent academic institutions, are clearly less subjected to this “hegemony” than non-Western ones, which are especially dependent on the United States (US) for theoretical imports and institutional validation²⁶. In the other direction, American IR is more likely to be influenced, if at all, by its closer geoeconomic periphery (the United Kingdom, Western and Northern Europe) than by farther sources of scholarship²⁷, and its academic system is largely independent from external influences.

The narrowness and asymmetry of this market of cultural exchange contributes to reinforcing the discipline’s Western-centric characteristics. Not only is IR predominantly informed by Western philosophical and epistemic traditions, the very themes that constitute its object of study are far from representing “global” realities. Issues of relevance to “Third-World” politics and scholarship – identity, development, poverty, health – remain marginal, and when they do appear in mainstream publications, it is usually from the perspective of Western interests²⁸. Even conventional subjects like war and security seem to often succumb to Western policy-informed taxonomies²⁹.

Together, these elements suggest that while IR as a global discipline is undeniably shaped by the influence of its American centre of production, it cannot, however, be envisaged as a single “field of forces,” like a homogenous set of

²⁴ Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline*; Waeber, ‘The Sociology’; Ersel Aydinli and Julie Mathews, ‘Are the Core and Periphery Irreconcilable? The Curious World of Publishing in Contemporary International Relations’, *International Studies Perspectives* 1 (2000) 289-303; Crawford and Jarvis, *International Relations*; Andrew J. Enterline, ‘Balancing Theory Versus Fact, Stasis Versus Change: A Look at Some Introductions to International Relations’, *International Studies Perspectives* 5 (2004) 23-39; Marijke Breuning, Joseph Bredehoft and Eugene Walton, ‘Promise and Performance: An Evaluation of Journals in International Relations’, *International Studies Perspectives* 6 (2005) 447-461; Tickner and Waeber, *International Relations Scholarship*.

²⁵ Tickner and Waeber, “Conclusion: Worlding Where the West Once Was” in *International Relations Scholarship*, 329.

²⁶ Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline*; Waeber, ‘The Sociology’; Tickner and Waeber, ‘Conclusion’, 336-7.

²⁷ Alker and Biersteker, ‘Dialectics’; Thomas Biersteker, ‘Eroding Boundaries, Contested Terrain’, *International Studies Review* 1(1) (1999) 3-9; Alfredo Robies, Jr., ‘How “International” Are International Relations Syllabi?’ *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 26(3) (1993) 526-528; Inanna Hamati-Ataya, ‘Contemporary “Dissidence” in American International Relations: The New Structure of Anti-Mainstream Scholarship?’ *International Studies Perspectives* 12(4) (2011) 362-398.

²⁸ Caroline Thomas and Peter Wilkin, ‘Still Waiting After All These Years: “The Third World” on the Periphery of International Relations’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6 (2004) 241-258.

²⁹ Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, ‘The Post-Colonial Moment in Security Studies’, *Review of International Studies* 32(2) (2006) 329-352.

concentric circles of “peripheries” centred on its American “core.” Where national traditions exist and are supported by a relatively autonomous academic system of validation and promotion, as in the UK, Scandinavian countries and some Western European ones, the academic and intellectual parameters of American IR have weaker effects on local productions, which reduces their influence to the level of global recognition and debates. But in areas such as Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and parts of Asia, academic marginalisation is more problematic, as it results from a combined cultural and institutional dependence that is often the product of enduring colonial structures clashing with local concerns and aspirations³⁰. A comprehensive sociology of the discipline would have to analyse these different fields of forces in order to avoid any simplifications. Nonetheless, insofar as American IR is a common denominator to all of them, a clinical appraisal of global IR requires some understanding of its American specificities, as these contribute to shaping the whole field’s and its members’ “space of possibilities.”

American IR is currently divided between a “mainstream” scholarship, represented by the consensus between leading neopositivist approaches – specifically neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism – and clusters of marginal ones informed by Critical Theory, critical Constructivism, and other forms of “post-positivism.”³¹ Despite the gradual diversification of “dissident” scholarship, it is easy to recognise older patterns of disciplinary orthodoxy characteristic of American IR since at least the Behavioural Revolution³². The core’s mainstream has witnessed only three major transformations since the turn of the twentieth century, namely, the rise of Realism, its Behavioural scientificisation, and its unthreatening assimilation of neoliberalism. These trends are intimately related to the status of the US as an international power, and the strengthening of the relationship between the American *academy*, the American *state*, and major American *philanthropic agencies*, the latter having a particularly important role in mediating, and bringing to fruition, the dependence of academic agendas on political ones³³. To this one should add the academic struggles that American IR and Political Science fought to delimit their turf against *other* social sciences.

This socio-intellectual history has an important bearing on the current structure of American IR’s field of forces. Firstly, it explains the importance of non-field-specific capital (political and economic) within it, and the weight exogenous

³⁰ Philip Altbach, ‘The University as Centre and Periphery’, *Teachers College Record*, 82(4) (1981) 601-621; Viswanathan Selvaratnam, ‘Higher Education Co-operation and Western Dominance of Knowledge Creation and Flows in Third World Countries’, *Higher Education* 17(1) (1988) 41-68; Henk van Rinsum, “‘Wipe the Blackboard Clean’: Academization and Christianization – Siblings in Africa?”, *African Studies Review*, 45(2) (2002) 27-48; Tickner and Waever, *International Relations Scholarship*.

³¹ Hamati-Ataya, ‘Dissidence.’

³² Alker and Biersteker, ‘Dialectics’; Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline*; Waever, ‘The Sociology’.

³³ Albert Somit and Joseph Tanenhaus, *The Development of American Political Science from Burgess to Behavioralism* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967); John G. Gunnell, *The Descent of Political Theory: The Genealogy of an American Vocation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993); Stefano Guzzini, *Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); Inderjeet Parmar, ‘The Roles of Carnegie and Rockefeller Philanthropy in the Development of the Realist Tradition in American International Relations and in the United States’ Rise to Globalism’, *International Studies Association’s Annual Convention* (Chicago, 2007).

social actors (government and funding agencies) have on the distribution of resources, the allocation of symbolic recognition, and the framing of academic agendas. Secondly, it underlies the development of the field's intersubjective system of academic and intellectual values, thereby shaping what counts as valuable and legitimate field-specific (scientific) capital. These doxic standards are typically embodied in a series of value-laden antinomies – science-vs-philosophy, practice-vs-theory, descriptive-vs-normative, facts-vs-values, objectivism-vs-subjectivism, objectivity-vs-ideology, value-freedom-vs-bias, etc. These define, in normative-binary terms, what the discipline favours or rejects, and hence establish and legitimate specific hierarchies by setting ontological, methodological, and axiological orthodoxies. Central among these are the value allocated to empirical, quantitative studies (and hence to those who can understand and generate them), the centrality of state-centric, policy-relevant themes of inquiry, and the adherence to “ethical neutrality” as the corollary of scientific “objectivity.”³⁴

IRTs as Position-Takings in the Field of Struggles

These normative-binary terms imposed by the core's mainstream are recurrent nodes of contention between those who have an interest in preserving the rules of the game by promoting their worldview as “natural” and “objective,” and those who have an interest in changing them by undermining these assumptions³⁵. For the dissidents of IR's “second debate,” the strategy was to interpret the extant version of objectivity as “unscientific”; for newer generations of dissidents since the “third debate,” it is about either denying the validity of “objectivism,” or portraying the core's “objectivity” as a hidden “parochialism.” Since the doxic antinomies that define disciplinary norms underlie and support IR's internal *hierarchies*, these antinomies are typically the object of these symbolic struggles and “debates.” Informed by their positions in the discipline and the social world, by a complex set of dispositions shaped by these multiple positions, and by the (institutionally unacknowledged) forms of capital they have inherited and acquired through their social and academic trajectories, “dissident” IR scholars promote themes, methodologies, and ethical attitudes that either challenge these antinomies, or reverse the values associated with their constitutive positions³⁶. This process relies on a set of mutually legitimating narratives, and is accompanied by the production of new meta-classifications meant to create a legitimate space for these alternatives.

The meta-level is required for a redefinition of “objectivity” or “knowledge” (the field's central values) that would allow the coexistence of different epistemologies alongside objectivism (constructivist, post-structuralist, critical realist, pragmatist) and simultaneously legitimate the introduction of new, qualitative methodologies that can better account for the “complexity” of international politics (interpretative, historical, sociological, philosophical). IR's object itself is characteristically redefined as encompassing “multiple” realities – material *and* ideational, collective *and* individual, structural *and* agential, strategic *and* ideological,

³⁴ Steve Smith, The United States and the Discipline of International Relations: “Hegemonic Country, Hegemonic Discipline”, *International Studies Review*, 4(2) (2002) 67-85; Hamati-Ataya, ‘The “problem of values”’.

³⁵ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 140-1.

³⁶ Hamati-Ataya, ‘Dissidence’.

practical *and* normative. This, in turn, entails a redefinition of the “international,” either through the introduction of new objects that are of particular relevance to the dissidents’ own concerns and expertise – gender, development, culture, language, values – or through the reinterpretation of classical ones, such as war, security, or diplomacy.

Typically, the narrative required to justify and legitimate anti-mainstream discourse is one of “crisis” (or “malaise,” as in the Behavioural dissidence of David Easton): there is something fundamentally wrong with the discipline that needs to “urgently” be addressed, something that undermines its very identity and vocation³⁷. The discipline is portrayed as fundamentally at odds with its object of study, which entails that its representations and social identity be *problematized*, *politicized*, and even *moralized*. In contemporary IR, this is reflected in accusations of “political hegemony,” “parochialism,” “social irrelevance,” and “political collusion,” and the consequent calls for a “post-Western,” “plural,” and “responsible” discipline³⁸.

The efficacy of this narrative lies in presenting an alternative that is not merely “different,” but somehow “superior” to the dominant view, whose flaws are therefore portrayed as resulting from some sort of *epistemic deception* or *ontological myopia*. The symbolic efficacy of Critical Theory’s, Constructivism’s, Feminism’s, and Post-Colonial Theory’s strategies of “delegitimation” rests on their ability to manipulate this meta-level to their advantage. And the culmination of this critical, superior meta-narrative is undoubtedly the promotion of “reflexivity” itself, subtended by the symbolic power of a “know thyself” that can strategically be targeted at the mainstream.

As IR itself cannot provide the tools of its own criticism, these are selectively borrowed from other disciplines – often from their own *dissident* production. The new “-isms” and traditions are supported by a novel literature and a pantheon of “key figures” – e.g., Foucault, Bourdieu, Bhaskar, Said – that become the object of a new, exclusive expertise. The process of creating a disciplinary space for these alternatives therefore becomes mutually constitutive of the recognition of this new expertise as legitimate academic capital.

As the space of dissident scholarship develops from within the discipline’s many peripheries, its actors become increasingly interested and involved in one another’s research, giving the impression of a natural adequacy between their respective approaches and supporting literatures – typically and symbolically labeled today as “post-positivist,” “critical,” or “reflexive.” An example is the recent convergence of the sociology of IR, as the position-taking of pretenders within the core and its Western periphery, and post-colonial IR, as the position-taking of pretenders in non-Western peripheries. The *homology* between the *positions* of these

³⁷ Tickner, ‘On the Frontlines’; Steve Smith, ‘Singing Our World Into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11’, *International Studies Quarterly* 48(3) (2004) 499-515.

³⁸ Susan Strange, ‘ISA as a Microcosm’, *International Studies Quarterly* 39 (1995) 289-295; Stephanie Neumann (ed.) *International Relations Theory and the Third World* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998); Smith (2002); Arlene Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently: Notes from the Third World’, *Millennium* 32(2) (2003) 295-324; John M. Hobson, ‘Is Critical Theory Always for the White West and for Western Imperialism? Beyond Westphalian Towards a Post-Racist Critical IR’, *Review of International Studies* 33 (2007) 91-116; Giorgio Shani, ‘Towards a Post-Western IR: The *Umma*, *Khalsa Panth*, and Critical International Relations Theory’, *International Studies Review* 10 (2008) 722-734; George Lawson, ‘For a Public International Relations’, *International Political Sociology* 2 (2008) 17-37; J. Ann Tickner and Andrei Tsygankov, ‘Responsible Scholarship in International Relations: A Symposium’, *International Studies Review* 10 (2008) 661-666.

marginals *qua pretendere* creates a space of intersubjective understanding that translates their aspirations into a *common* academic project, aimed at combining “critical, disciplinary self-reflection at the core and the periphery’s revolt against IRs [*sic*] concepts.”³⁹

In this and other instances, dissidents are not unaware of what their academic endeavours owe to their structural positions and specific socio-intellectual concerns. What they often fail to appreciate, however, is what these endeavours owe to the *relationality* of their positions. Every time the status of a pretender changes in the field of forces, the remaining space of anti-mainstream criticism is restructured accordingly, leading to convergences (as mentioned above) or divergences and new “turns.” Yesterday’s *pretenders* – Critical Theory, Constructivism – have been partially assimilated intellectually and/or institutionally as legitimate *contenders*. As a result, new dissident strategies have formed, and new lines of attack been drawn: *Critical* against *Conventional* Constructivism⁴⁰, and *Post-Colonial* critiques of *Critical* Theory⁴¹. IR scholars’ space of possibilities in IR’s *field of struggles* is, then, constantly redefined according to changes in the structure of IR’s *field of forces*, which affect their *relative* position, and therefore constantly reshapes their *position-takings*, beyond the subjective meaning these have for them.

*The meaning of IR(T) in a non-Western Periphery:
A disjointed sense of practice*

What is invested in these disciplinary struggles are IR scholars’ dispositions and sense of practice, which are shaped by their location and trajectory outside and inside of IR. Scholars located differently, and who come to IR through different trajectories, are differently disposed *vis-à-vis* its doxa, and the field itself is differently disposed *vis-à-vis* their dispositions and practice⁴². A Bourdieusian sociology of the discipline would therefore investigate the formation and nature of IR scholars’ social, intellectual, and academic dispositions; how they affect their cognitive worldviews, career choices, ethical attitudes, and overall academic “being”; and the extent to which, and ways wherein, academic structures undermine or promote the scholarly practices they inform. While IR scholars’ autobiographical/autoethnographic accounts make explicit the kind of existential conditions that shape academic trajectories and choices⁴³, these need to be understood *sociologically* by moving beyond their subjective meaning as *lived experience*, in order to understand *how*, and through what processes, they affect scholarship, and expand or limit scholars’ space of possibilities within the discipline.

Following Bourdieu’s analysis, a non-reflexive, *subjective* appraisal of practice is one that lacks an understanding of its objective conditions of possibility

³⁹ Waeber and Tickner, “Introduction: Geocultural Epistemologies”, in *International Relations Scholarship*, 1-31, 3.

⁴⁰ Ted Hopf, The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory, *International Security* 23(1) (1998) 171-200.

⁴¹ Hobson, ‘Is Critical Theory’.

⁴² Hamati-Ataya, ‘Dissidence’.

⁴³ E.g., Inayatullah, *Autobiographical*.

and operating principles, and therefore succumbs to the immediacy, or immediate “truth,” of lived experience. A non-objectivated practice explains itself on its own terms, according to the logic of the field within which it is constituted and performed. The practical (and reproductive) efficacy of a field’s doxa lies precisely in its ability to shape scholars’ sense of practice according to this “logic of logic” that perpetuates “misrecognition.” This is gradually achieved through the training students undergo to become “IR scholars,” which requires them to acquire the field’s specific capital in the form of cognitive and technical competences – knowledge of IR’s history, debates, predominant theories, and methodologies – along with the *illusio* or faith in its disinterested, “objective” appraisal of the world.

Outside of the core, and especially in non-Western peripheries, the great diffusion of American/Western IR facilitates the peripheries’ assimilation of IR’s history, discourse, and parameters, which are reproduced and spread through its textbooks and primary literature. One would assume that such an engagement with the scholarly *problématiques* of the core increases periphery scholars’ ability to master its language and participate in its discussions – that is, that it aligns their space of possibilities with that of their core counterparts by giving them access to IR’s *specific capital*. However, this assumption ignores the praxical meaning invested in IR’s past theoretical struggles. The socialisation core students undergo “to be in the game” is meaningful because their perspectives and training are already shaped by the field’s *past*, which structures their *present* encounter with it: when IR’s literature and history are passed onto *them*, it situates their present, by reaffirming what they gained throughout its history through those debates and developments, within the history of *their* social setting; it therefore also justifies the extant state of IR, the value of its taxonomies and representations, and incoming students’ *legitimate place and vocation* within it.

But for scholars coming from, and doing IR in a different location with a differently constituted habitus, the history of IR, its debates, and its dominant theories appear awkward at best⁴⁴. This incongruity is most visible in those “core-like/core-bound” non-Western peripheral academic institutions that uphold the standards of the core’s curriculum to keep students updated on the central discussions of the field, through the core’s textbooks, with the hope that they will *assimilate* the discipline. The problem, however, is that the habitus of the non-native is a non-native habitus. Faced with “the curriculum,” and subjected to the doxic principle that theoretical debates follow a “logic of logic,” a non-native invests a sense of practice that is disjointed from the meaning the history of the field has for those who have direct stakes in it and whose habitus *it* made. From outside this internalised history, the sense of practice invested into disciplinary debates remains invisible to an external participant, who will take them for what they claim to be – an intellectual competition for the *understanding* of reality. As long as the meaningfulness and validity of given theoretical positions is assessed on this *logico-representational* basis alone, the persistence of seemingly “weak” or “invalid” theories will appear *unintelligible* to an outsider who is so disposed that these can only be assessed *qua theories*.

IR scholars who have taught theory in non-Western contexts have probably experienced this disjunction, along with the pedagogical dilemmas it creates. How, for example, does one explain to students not only what Neorealism is, and where it comes from, but also its resilience to successful criticisms of its *logical* and *cognitive-representational* features? As they grapple with these issues, students are taught to

⁴⁴ Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently’; Inayatullah, *Autobiographical*.

manipulate IR's *meta-narratives* as well. But unless they reflexively understand the objective conditions that underlie their own, and others', sense of practice, meta-explanation only reinforces the doxic power of the "logic of logic."

A quote from the Masters thesis of a former student at the American University of Beirut (AUB) – one of these "core-like/core-bound" institutions – helps illustrate the paradoxes of this peripheral (dis)position:

Graduate students are normally socialized into a field in which, in the vast majority of situations, they are required to continue, and in which they are rewarded for continuing, the Neorealist legacy, while perhaps giving a cursory nod to the concerns of its challengers. Having been taught a more open and contested version of this IR at AUB, perhaps because of the distance from mainstream IR schools, the Neorealist intransigence presented itself as a puzzling aspect of contemporary International Relations⁴⁵ [;]

and hence a "puzzle" worth solving. The meeting of a peripheral habitus with the field's structure creates disjointed *expectations*. On the one hand, the assimilation of the core's *doxa* gives periphery scholars the confidence that they have acquired the "competence" to participate in the discussion. On the other, the distance that separates them from the core is deceiving, because the distanciation from the core's "stakes," without a simultaneous distanciation from the *illusio* the core creates, gives them the impression of possessing a *superior, critical meta-viewpoint* that reproduces the *objectivist* epistemic illusion, as if distance from the core permitted better understanding of the cognitively problematic aspects of constructs like Neorealism.

But Neorealism, like all IRT, does not solely operate on the basis of its intrinsic *logic* or *correspondence* with reality. It functions, for the members of the field, as a position-taking in a given moment of its history, connecting their habitus to the necessities of their position and the field's past and extant stakes. For this reason, attempts to defeat Neorealism by pointing to its incoherence *qua* discourse or representation are not sufficient. They simply miss an important point: what is really at stake in the symbolic struggles that only those who have fought and inherited them from the inside can manipulate, because the sense of practice that underlies them continues to shape these scholars' relation to their outcomes.

IRT-as-International-Agency: A "Cynical" Perspective

The gradual process of emancipation from "misrecognition" that a "clinical" appraisal of IR permits also raises new questions about our extant and future space of possibilities within the discipline: Are all forms of IR scholarship *equally accessible* to all of us? Do we have *equal chances and hopes* of engaging in them and of doing so successfully? Are the *stakes* involved in choosing between them identical, and do they have the same *meaning* for us all?

⁴⁵ Tarek N. Tutunji, *International Relations and the Philosophy of Science: Defining and Critiquing Neorealism* (MA Thesis, Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2011), 2.

*Some facts don't matter:
Is empirical research self-defeating?*

A scholarly practice that operates according to the “logic of logic” perpetuates the expectation that the value, and hence visibility, of scholarship are determined by exclusively cognitive standards of validation and “worth.” Non-Western scholars who adopt a utilitarian approach to theory might consider their chances of academic success greater if they invest their local capital (native knowledge, language, networks) in the production of empirical knowledge about their geopolitical region. Those who, on the other hand, think IRT ill-suited to understand and explain what goes on in their part of the world might also decide to mobilise this local capital to produce an empirical knowledge that would *demonstrate* the disjunction between “Western IRT” and international reality. In an attempt to better understand the structural conditions that (de)limit peripheral scholars’ space of possibilities in the discipline, the following considerations highlight some of the constraints that undermine the *disciplinary* and *political* value of such empirically-oriented strategies.

Firstly, the theory-practice antinomy is not just an *epistemic* assumption of most Western social science, but a *practical* principle of organisation of scholarly labour. A paradoxical characteristic of all social sciences is that their autonomy with respect to the field of power does not translate uniformly within them, and IR is no exception. On the one hand, they transpose, within their own doxa, the utilitarian value society allocates to “science” as empirical knowledge. On the other hand, they tend to promote, for their internal audience, their identity as a field, that is, the sum product of their *specific history* – that of the (victorious) struggles that created the field’s specificity *within the academy*. And the privileged realm wherein these struggles take place is not empirical, but theoretical scholarship, which retains its *symbolic power* (prestige) over the rest of the field. This explains why IR “classics” are always works in/on theory, but also the predominance of theories/paradigms despite all successful *empirical* demonstrations of their disjunction with reality. As Bourdieu puts it,

[t]he relative autonomy of the [cultural] field always actualises itself more in works that exclusively owe their formal properties and their value to the structure, and hence to the history of the field, and always disqualifies more the interpretations which, by means of a “short-cut,” authorise themselves to move directly from what goes on in the world to what goes on in the field.⁴⁶

Secondly, because scholars are not equally positioned in the field of forces, the lower prestige of empiry does not trickle down uniformly. In other words, the *empirical scholarship of peripheral scholars* is likely to be viewed as a *peripheral empirical scholarship*. This implicit principle of the division of academic labour is visible in the social sciences’ relational position in the academic field of forces, which constitutes the realm of their *disciplinary symbolic struggles*. A typical illustration is the “Area Studies (AS) Controversy.” What seems to be at stake in this “debate” is the intellectual value of AS; what is really at stake is the preservation of the turf of “the Disciplines,” which are challenged by the interdisciplinarity AS specialists practice. In this opposition, AS is characteristically undermined because of its empirical, micro-studies, which allegedly lack any ambition or capacity to sustain a

⁴⁶ Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques*, 77; my translation.

“systematic” assessment of general social patterns, and hence the advancement of knowledge itself, which is achieved, according to this view’s proponents, through large-scale theorisations and generalisations⁴⁷.

The most indicative discursive manifestation of the hierarchy of labour between core and periphery is the term “(native) informant,” often used to characterise AS scholars and their position in the field of forces dominated by the disciplines. Implied in this term is a series of significant oppositions: a *subordination* to a *client*; a lower professional status between those who produce *information* or merely *collect data*, and those who *creatively* produce *knowledge* and *analysis*; it also implies that the “informant” has no *autonomous agenda*, and therefore cannot contribute to the central discussions that shape the disciplines’ identity and vocation. The informant, in other words, is not *in* the game.

This scholarly perception is not unrelated to the history of AS, often used by *political agents* as precisely that – a *dispositif* of native informants on the societies of the periphery. The history of IR, combined with the academy’s structural connection to the field of power, therefore shapes the core’s dispositions vis-à-vis empirical research produced in/by the periphery⁴⁸. In a non-Bourdiesian, post-colonial parlance, these perceptions support and reproduce the foundations of the “colonial house of IR”:

...those who live “upstairs” by theorizing about “high politics” take little account of those who labor “downstairs” with their data collecting for “low politics” – until some crisis in world politics requires specific, local knowledge. At that point, ethnographic “servants” must produce the information necessary for house members to plug into their theorizing. They treat information as data only, not subject to theorizing or capable of retheorizing existing frameworks.⁴⁹

An additional point, which can only be briefly spelled out here, is that empirical scholarship is a *politically* problematic strategy. The “knowledge-power nexus” refers to how knowledge-production facilitates and shapes power structures, but also to how power structures govern the production of knowledge and its *uses*. Societies located at the higher end of this nexus enjoy a virtuous circle of increased knowledge and power; those at its lower end, a vicious circle the periphery knows all too well. This begs the (political) question of *what* and *whose* interests periphery scholars serve when they produce – or more specifically, *publish* – knowledge about the periphery that *it* cannot benefit from, because it lacks the *objective structures* necessary to turn that knowledge into power (at least a power over its own destiny).

⁴⁷ See Robert Bates, ‘Area Studies and the Discipline: A Useful Controversy’, *PS: Political Science & Politics* 30(2) (1997) 166-169; Rachid Khalidi, ‘Is There a Future for Middle East Studies’, *MESA Bulletin* 29 (1995) 1-7; Mark Tessler, Jodi Nachtwey, and Anne Banda, “Introduction: The Area Studies Controversy” in ed. Mark Tessler, *Area Studies and Social Science: Strategies for Understanding Middle East Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) vii-xxi; Timothy Mitchell (ed.) *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines* (Szanton, DL: University of California Press, 2003); A. Mirsepassi *et al.* (eds.) *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World – Recasting the Area Studies Debate* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

⁴⁸ See Tickner and Waever, *International Relations Scholarship*.

⁴⁹ Anna Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, The House of IR: From Family Power Politics to the *Poiesis* of Worldism, *International Studies Review* 6 (2004) 21-49, p. 38.

And if those who *can* benefit from it are already so developed and positioned as to efficiently transform that knowledge into power – relationally, a power *over the periphery* necessarily – then it is worth asking what *political meaning* such a research agenda practically has for periphery scholars, and whether/how it can be successfully pursued despite the structural and symbolic constraints imposed by the current global order.

*Dispositions as subversive capital:
IRT-as-peripheral-agency*

Of all IR sub-fields, IR Theory is the one that best manifests the marginal disciplinary position of non-Western periphery scholars. After a criticism of “American IR Theory,” post-colonial scholars now target the “Western” foundations of all theorising done in the discipline, even the kind previously perceived as the most “critical” or least “parochial” within the core⁵⁰. IRT is now viewed as “almost exclusively Western,”⁵¹ and the whole of “IR as we know it” as “an effect of a specific [Western] mode of worlding.”⁵²

IR’s “Westernness” is amplified by non-Western periphery scholars’ disengagement from theory. Firstly, to borrow a Weberian formula, the core successfully claims its monopoly over the legitimate production and use of IRT. In the periphery, Western “hegemony” is internalised by scholars and political elites, who “reproduce it by favoring core knowledge as more authoritative and scientific in comparison to local variants.”⁵³ This preference itself results from the long-lasting effect of Western imperialism, namely, the destruction of the periphery’s relation to, and confidence in, its own cognitive traditions.⁵⁴ Secondly, scholars point to the unattractiveness of theory in a “third-world” *existential* setting – problems facing the periphery are too “urgent” to allow scholarship the “luxury” of engaging in abstraction – and to the cultural and institutional barriers that undermine the attempts of those who might try, such as the investment in learning the language and style of the core’s scholarship and getting past its “gatekeepers.”⁵⁵ To this, one should add the dilemmas imposed on periphery scholars by their own academic setting.⁵⁶

However, many scholars consider that the periphery has a strategic *interest* in engaging IRT⁵⁷. This final section aims to show that IRT might in fact be a very

⁵⁰ Compare Alker and Biersteker, ‘Dialectics’ and Hobson, ‘Is Critical Theory’.

⁵¹ Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7 (2007) 287-312, 288.

⁵² Waever and Tickner, “Introduction,” 9.

⁵³ Tickner and Waever, “Conclusion,” 335.

⁵⁴ Acharya and Buzan, ‘Why’, 295.

⁵⁵ Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently’.

⁵⁶ Sari Hanafi, ‘University Systems in the Arab East: Publish Globally and Perish Locally vs. Publish Locally and Perish Globally’, *Current Sociology* 59(3) (2011) 291-309.

⁵⁷ Acharya and Buzan, ‘Why’; Mohammed Ayoob, ‘Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism’, *International Studies Review*, 4(3) (2002) 27-48.

reasonable strategy for non-Western periphery scholars, and to offer a Bourdieusian argument for doing so, which rests on the *potentially subversive* power of a peripheral, non-native habitus, if this habitus is understood reflexively and praxeologically.

This relationship between *reflexivity* and *subversion* appears in Bourdieu's own work. As an "objectivation of the objectivating subject," and of "objectivity" as a viewpoint on the social world, reflexivity entails unmasking the "unthought categories of thought that delimit the thinkable and predetermine what is thought [*le pensé*]." ⁵⁸ And this seems intimately related to Bourdieu's view on socially subversive action:

The specific efficacy of subversive action consists in the power to bring to consciousness, and so modify, the categories of thought which help to orient individual and collective practices and in particular the categories through which distributions are perceived and appreciated. ⁵⁹

One merely needs to apply this definition of "subversive action" to scholarship in order to fall back on Bourdieu's definition of "reflexivity."

But to address reflexivity itself from a praxeological, reflexive perspective, is to consider it as a *practice* that results from the meeting of a given habitus with given objective structures. Reflexivity/subversion, then, can be objectivated as a *position-taking* that mobilises the dispositions of agents who are so placed in a given field of forces that reflexivity appears, in purely intellectual terms, as a natural, critical and superior viewpoint on the social world and on scholarship itself. This *position* is none other than that of the marginal pretender, whose perceptions of the "given order" are shaped by the disjunctions between his/her (dis)position and the (dis)positions shaped and favoured by it.

The valuable aspect of this praxeological understanding is that it highlights what the periphery scholar's potentially subversive habitus owes to the fact that it is precisely a peripheral, *non-native* one. From this perspective, the position from which marginals look at the world and at IR(T) is a *potentially privileged* position for the *transformation* of the game, just as that of core scholars is a privileged one for its *reproduction*. The privilege lies in the very *disjunction* affecting their (dis)positions, which makes them less prone to succumbing to IR's doxa, and therefore more likely to be informed by, and promote, alternative "modes of worlding." More than Western dissidents, who share the core's epistemic-cultural assumptions and position within the international field of power, peripheral scholars are *out of place* in IR precisely because they are in *another* place. As long as the core's epistemic, ontological, and deontological assumptions remain IR's standard doxa, this place is a nowhere that is not registered as equal or legitimate. But this nowhere has to be preserved, because it is from these peculiar positions that doxas are challenged, that is, properly *subverted* ⁶⁰.

This potentiality is implicitly referred to by scholars who promote a more inclusive IRT, stressing on what their *different* perspectives can bring to IR. What they can bring is a very different epistemic and praxical perspective they have not chosen, which cannot be willingly espoused by those who are differently

⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Leçon sur la leçon* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), 10; my translation.

⁵⁹ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 141.

⁶⁰ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Minuit, 1990).

(dis)positioned, and which defeats itself when it attempts to be *recognised as such*. One does not have to justify why one sees the world the way one does in order to make one's view *efficient*. The core's efficacy operates, on the contrary, through a collective ignorance of its *praxically particularistic* production. One needs merely to draw on peripheral dispositions, and simply "do" IRT.

However, the privileged position of peripheral scholars is a *potentiality* only. Firstly, the transformation of the rules of a game does not simply depend on the expression of new dispositions. Neither dissident/peripheral, nor mainstream/core scholars can, by their intellectual production alone, transform/preserve the structure of IR. Structural change is never the result of change(s) in one area of a social field, but the outcome of various, convergent changes occurring in different areas inside *and* outside of it. The point, then, is not that if well (dis)positioned, marginal scholars can *effect* change, but that their potential contribution to change is optimal in some circumstances and minimal/null in others. Their habitus will function differently, and therefore produce different outcomes, in different *objective configurations* of the field. The point is to preserve this potentiality and develop it until it becomes *structurally* efficient.

Consequently, the peripheral habitus has a greater potentiality of change inscribed in it if it is preserved as a *differentiated* habitus. This entails that periphery scholars should resist their assimilation into the core/mainstream of the discipline as is sometimes suggested by sociology-of-IR studies. On the contrary, and without the need to celebrate it as such, the peripheries' subversive potential lies in their attachment to their own cultures, to what history has inscribed in their dispositions, and hence to their difference with "Western IRT." It is therefore, indeed, in periphery scholars' *interest* to engage IRT and understand its Western foundations, not to better assimilate themselves in it – another *cynical*, but self-defeating strategy – but rather to prevent such assimilation from depriving them of their *structurally subversive potential*. As the past and current states of the discipline(s) show, the periphery loses at least as much on the ground of theory as it does on those of empiry and real politics. It is therefore perhaps time to think of "the battle for IR theory" as at least an equally "urgent" one to join, for *ignoring* it *is* perhaps the "luxury" that peripheral scholars *cannot* afford.

I need not say that I continually strive to discourage cynical readings and to encourage clinical ones.⁶¹

In lieu of a conclusion this paper will end, as it should have started, with an apology to Pierre Bourdieu, for having pushed this reflexive endeavour beyond its "clinical" limits. Bourdieu was keen on developing reflexivity as an epistemological instrument of self-understanding aimed at cognitive awareness and social emancipation. "Cynical" uses, on the other hand, are dangerous insofar as they turn knowledge into an instrument of social manipulation. While I have used the term in order to make transparent its Bourdieusian origin, and its socio-analytical relation to "clinical" self-inquiry, my purpose was neither manipulation, nor mere intellectual

⁶¹ Bourdieu, *An Invitation*, 211.

gymnastics. The “cynical” – but not cynical – analysis proposed here should rather be construed – and hopefully understood – as a complementary, different exercise in self-understanding: an attempt to “own” the space of our possibilities in the discipline, and conceptualise the means to best pursue our intellectual and moral commitments within the structural constraints IR imposes on us. Neither we, nor the students we advise, have ever found such knowledge in IR textbooks. And yet this is precisely the one we need to acquire in order to emancipate ourselves from the discipline’s own *political order*.