

## **Advancing a Reflexive International Relations**

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When scholars identify themselves as studying international politics, they are frequently bound to, or rely on, certain epistemological commitments, which may or may not be made explicit to the reader or, indeed, appreciated by the author. In an effort to understand the political world, researchers draw upon their existing visions and dispositions, but such conceptions and habits may result from, and be shaped by, what they are trying to describe and explain. The struggle for objectivity can thus be characterised as an enduring problem which colours the relationship between the scholar and the research object. Yet within the study of international relations (IR), one is often struck by how the field has tended to lack a sociology of itself, including its participants and multiple relations with political agents and forces (Wæver, 1998; Smith, 2002; Tickner and Wæver, 2009). This is particularly surprising when one considers how IR has experienced a general turn towards more sociological theories and ideas, to the point where constructivism has become a mainstream conceptual approach. But when it comes to turning those techniques of sociology upon themselves, to critically interrogate their own interested actions as cultural producers, many IR analysts are absent. This arguably presents a problem for the examination of world politics. If every scholar carries with them their own social histories, political inclinations, and ideological biases, how can we control for such factors in the research process? How do we minimise the danger that such conditioning may remain hidden from others and yet inform various research choices? In short, how can we objectify the IR theorist for the purposes of enhancing the science of objectivity?

Here, in this paper, I seek to explore these problems and propose an agenda for the practice of methodological reflexivity in IR. As the term suggests, to be reflexive is to actively 'turn or bend back', to take account of the self in relation to other subjects and objects. In broad terms, one can identify this basic research posture in the work of

different IR scholars, particularly those who have addressed issues of gender and other critical perspectives. In debating the notion, I discuss these contributions and how such writers have conceived of the idea of reflexivity. I will argue that an investment in learning reflexivity could reap rewards for two main reasons. First, at the most basic level, reflexivity matters for good research, in terms of not only identifying the choice of subjects and issues to study, but also how the specific problems are treated and, hence, what kind of results can be expected (Leander, 2002). Second, and of equal importance, a reflexive orientation can help reveal how the interested actions of IR theorists can be positioned in relation to a broader struggle for recognition and authority, a struggle which operates within both the academy and the political arena. Advancing the method of reflexivity in IR thus bears upon how we conceive of the politics of dialogue, including questions regarding the legitimation of IR knowledge; the barriers to communication within certain power relations; and the potential means by which critical discourses may be strengthened.

At the same time, this paper also seeks to draw inspiration from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his 'signature obsession' with developing the reflexive method throughout his career (Wacquant, 1992, p. 36). Although Bourdieu was an extremely ambitious scholar who made an important contribution to the social sciences and humanities, the examination of his work in IR has only recently become a focus of attention (Ashley, 1986; Guzzini, 2006; Williams, 2007; Jackson, 2008, 2009; Pouliot, 2010). Within these discussions, however, a particular focus on the notion of reflexivity is almost nonexistent (the exception being Leander, 2002, 2008). Bourdieu is certainly not the first or only scholar to invoke the idea of reflexivity; for instance, one can find similar formulations and traces in the work Émile Durkheim (1895), George Herbert Mead (1934), and Alvin Gouldner (1971). But his concern for continually testing the possibilities and pitfalls of the reflexive method makes him a useful resource for IR scholars. In particular, I will seek to explore how Bourdieu can offer IR theorists certain forms of guidance in terms of mastering the craft of reflexivity. This includes warnings on the risks of personal introspection, as well as the difficulties of building collective enterprises of like-minded critical scholars.

The paper is divided into three parts. First, I debate how IR theorists have explicitly or implicitly adopted the notion of reflexivity. Second, I examine Bourdieu's contribution to the literature. In the third part, I further ground the concept through a focus on the study of international trade politics and the extent to which understandings in this area could be enhanced through the method of reflexivity. I will suggest that reflexivity can be used to better reveal the internal logic of this important field and, in the process, gain a measure of freedom from some of the social determinants of intellectual practice.

## **I. REFLEXIVITY IN IR: METHODOLOGICAL DEPARTURES**

For some researchers, this call for reflexivity may appear to be not so much a radical departure, but a reaffirmation of existing tendencies and common attitudes. Concerns that were central to Bourdieu, such as the pursuit of ethical research or the critical examination of the relationship between the academy and the political world, have not escaped the attention of some IR scholars. Thus, although not all these researchers may invoke the notion 'reflexivity', one could say that they are conducting, in general

terms, similar practices that Bourdieu supported, only under different names and frameworks. As a prelude to debating Bourdieu's understanding of the method, this part of the paper is organised into a discussion of three distinct, but related, practices of reflexivity explored by IR researchers: autobiographical, institutional, and collective. The theme of dialogue laces throughout these modes. In particular, the discussion pays attention to processes of legitimation and contestation within IR knowledge production and, specifically, the types of engagements researchers have among themselves and with other political actors.

### **Autobiographical reflexivity**

In different critical traditions of IR, one can find researchers who have sought to contextualise their own writing, particularly when they seek to explain to audiences their own research trajectory and how environmental circumstances have shaped certain enquiries. Feminist IR scholars have been key advocates of such approaches and are often found describing to readers 'how they have been motivated to conduct projects that stem from their own lives and personal experiences' (Tickner, 2005, p. 8; also see Enloe, 2004; and Ackerly, Stern, and True, 2006). For instance, in Carol Cohn's (1987) classic account on being a feminist participant observer within a male-dominated US institute for nuclear arms control, she recounts her own initial inexperience and reflects upon the links between language, gendered presumptions, and agenda-setting. Elsewhere, Stephen Gill, as a neo-Gramscian, has remarked how his scholarly interests originally stemmed from not only observing a world of superpower rivalry, but also the 'pernicious effects of the British class system' which served to 'forge a sense of injustice and resistance to illegitimate power that have been driving forces in much of my intellectual and political work'. In other areas, in regards to studying civil society actors, Cecelia Lynch (2008, p. 712) has argued that constructivist scholars have a duty to analyze their own positionality and how 'all assumptions embody ethical ideas and judgements'. Thus, for these authors, reflexive practices are viewed as essential for accounting for various subjective preconceptions and distortions that may infiltrate the decision-making process. The point of such work is to communicate with others, primarily within the immediate field of scholarship, that an attempt has been made to acknowledge autobiographical references and uncover dispositions that have shaped the choice of research questions.

However, notwithstanding these notable attempts at autobiographical reflexivity, a critical appreciation of the role of the self within IR research is not a widespread practice across the field. In the opinion of Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker (2010), who have articulated a desire for an 'autoethnographic international relations', this is primarily because established methodological norms in IR downplay the potential significance of the social conditions of the author. This is clearest in the form of positivistic approaches in which the values and 'idiosyncratic' decisions of the author, if they acknowledged, become conceptually marginalised, in a purposeful move, from the research object (King, Keohane, and Verba, 1994, p. 14). At a deeper level, one could also add that such practices are seemingly ingrained in a conception of the philosophy of science (or misconception, see Wight, 2002) which valorises the intellectual as standing above the social world, capable of abstracting 'facts' from their own values. But as Brigg and Bleiker (2010) rightly argue, one can also find this habit of autonomising the self in other IR approaches that are not inclined towards positivist techniques, indicating the presence of a wider disciplinary norm. Moreover,

even where an aspect of autobiographical reflexivity is explored, it is often limited in scope. For instance, in the cited Gill (2008) text, the class analysis of himself is represented in a brief sketch within the preface; the possibility for an extended examination is seemingly declined.

### **Institutional reflexivity**

But maybe the focus on introspective interrogation is not the best approach for practicing reflexivity. In terms of enhancing our appreciation for patterns of dialogue in IR and, in particular, the organisation of agendas deemed ‘mainstream’ or ‘orthodox’, to what extent do we need to widen the lens of analysis? For some IR researchers who exhibit reflexive tendencies, they choose to focus not (or not only) on the social coordinates of the individual but, rather, the academic field itself and its position in the political world. In this sense, the attention shifts from personal considerations to a series of larger related enquiries around the nature of epistemology and pedagogy. Debates on the ‘proper’ relationship between IR and ‘policy relevant’ knowledge can be highlighted as one enduring question in this area. A number of writers, representing different theoretical perspectives, have discussed the ways in which ‘being useful’ to the policy world should be examined for understanding the co-constitutive relationship between knowledge production and power (for instance, see Wallace, 1996; Smith, 2004; Walt, 2005; and Büger and Villumsen, 2007). Perhaps most visibly, under the leadership of Ann Tickner, such questions framed the 2007 International Studies Association (ISA) Convention on the theme ‘Politics, Policy and Responsible Scholarship’. In her keynote address, Tickner (2006, p. 392) argued that interdependent power relations should always be scrutinised, including the advisory services many IR analysts have provided to modern politicians. In this light, she claimed that all scholars bear ‘responsibility for being critically reflective about how the knowledge we teach to our students has been constructed historically and the research traditions to which we subscribe are formulated.’

Take, as one prominent case, the relationship between IR and the political field in the US. In Stanley Hoffman’s (1987 [1977]), p. 10) famous essay on IR as an ‘American social science’ one can see how the analysis of institutional reflexivity is present in his discussion of the special state-civil society relations within the US. Among his claims, Hoffman points to those IR academics and policy officials who move between university positions and seats of government; as well as the existence of foundations which tie together the ‘kitchens of power’ with the ‘academic salons’, creating in the process a ‘seamless pluralism’. Inspired by Hoffman, other authors have also investigated the extent to which IR is characterised by a US or larger Anglo-Saxon ‘hegemony’ and what consequences this generates for the diversity of scholarly debates (Holsti, 1985; Wæver, 1998; Crawford and Jarvis, 2001; Friedrichs, 2004). For Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver (2009, p. 2), the gravitation pull of the US on the field of IR, such as in terms of access to prestigious journals, has tended to marginalise how IR is practiced in the rest of the world. In broad terms, therefore, the ‘periphery’ is either excluded from established outlets of IR scholarship or, what is produced on the Third World is often negatively defined (for instance, seeing concepts of sovereignty or security as ‘deviations from IR normality’ when applied to some Southern countries). Thus, the way in which dialogue is policed and curtailed, often in implicit moves, has a notable bearing upon the structure of knowledge production in the IR field.

## Collective reflexivity

The third approach to reflexivity can be considered a reformulation of an old problem: to what extent, and how, can scholars engage in practical political dialogue beyond the trappings of the academy? Collective reflexivity, in this sense, points to the ways in which academics encounter, challenge, and potentially aid a variety of political actors. For instance, in George Lawson's (2008, p. 31) call for a 'public IR', he speaks of the need for researchers to conduct 'normative, politically engaged work' involving 'multiple publics', incorporating not simply the powerful but 'everyday' movements and citizens (see also Hobson and Seabrooke, 2007). Moreover, for him, an approach to public IR could experiment with different modes of communication, such as via online media, in order to enrich sources of dialogue with voices that are not always represented in established publications. In a different respect, collective reflexivity can also be understood as a response by IR academics to different threats to their scholarly 'freedom', particularly under conditions of persecution and violence, but also in regards to more subtle ideological agendas. Such problems were, for instance, the subject of a recent special forum in *International Studies Perspectives*. In a piece by Martin Heisler (2007, p. 355), he argued for action to confront such threats, including 'fostering transnational civil society (TCS) activities and, where appropriate, engaging in transnational contention for projecting the values of academic freedom in the subject area of international studies'. Heisler proposed that the ISA in particular could collaborate with groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch where necessary.

In sum, one can see how the engagement with reflexive practices is part of the agendas of different IR researchers. The methods of autobiographical, institutional, and collective reflexivity are inter-related and, when considered in this sequence, represent increasing degrees of critical ambition. Still, these interventions are not mainstream in the field at large and there still remains 'strikingly little disciplinary sociology done in and on International Relations' (Tickner and Wæver, 2009, p. 11). It is on this note that we can turn towards Bourdieu as a potential source of inspiration for further refining and applying the practice of reflexivity to IR.

## II. BOURDIEU AND REFLEXIVITY: POSSIBILITIES AND WARNINGS

In the social sciences, the progress of knowledge presupposes progress in our knowledge of the conditions of knowledge (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 1).

As with any effort to discuss Bourdieu and apply a concept strongly associated with him, it is helpful to be aware of his larger scholarly ambitions. At a higher level of abstraction, he argues that reflexivity is needed for the purpose of objectifying the very conceptualisation and action of scientific objectification. When Bourdieu speaks of 'enhancing the science of objectivity' this does not, therefore, mean a defence of forms of objectivism, such as positivism. Rather, reflexivity aims to illuminate a more profound need to think through, and break from, the many dilemmas and biases contained in *both* objectivism and subjectivism. For instance, objectivist accounts, such as those produced in the rational actor tradition, often project images of agents engaged in purposeful calculation when it may be more accurate to define their

behaviours as experimental or non-intentional. At the same time, purely subjective accounts also have problems, such as often over-emphasising the individual as a category of analysis to the expense of groups and structures. In other words, reflexivity offers a strategy of ‘participant objectivation’ for Bourdieu, focusing on ‘objectivizing the subjective relation to the object which, far from leading to a relativistic and more-or-less anti-scientific subjectivism, is one of the conditions of genuine scientific objectivity’ (Bourdieu, 2003a, p. 282).

How, then, does Bourdieu argue reflexivity should be practiced? In what ways does he offer IR researchers potential new enquiries and subjects of analysis, and where does he issue cautions on particular interpretations of the method? In regards to the first sense of reflexivity, the autobiographical meaning, Bourdieu is not opposed to questioning how, for instance, geography or class may predetermine certain scholarly judgements and interests. One can see this explained in his own *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (2007, p. 100) in which he attempts a social analysis of his own career trajectory. At one point, he speaks of the significance of having a ‘*cleft habitus*’ torn between ‘high academic consecration and low social origin’. Bourdieu argues that such conditions – born the son of a Béarnese postmaster who rose to work among the Parisian intellectual elite – tended to ‘institute, in a lasting way, an ambivalent, contradictory relationship to the academic institution, combining rebellion and submission, rupture and expectation’. Thus, this type of evaluation provides those who seek to better understand Bourdieu’s *oeuvre* some insights into the social contexts that have informed his thinking.

However, as soon as one engages with this type of reflexive method, problems regarding practical boundaries appear. Put simply, what exactly is necessary to note within such a self-analysis and, perhaps most crucially, where does the researcher stop? As Bourdieu (1999) was willing to underscore, one is never able to eradicate all potential sources of prejudice or deconstruct all the cognitive schemes that can shroud the scholar. At best, one should perhaps try to exercise, as Leander (2008, p. 25) has expressed it in her reading of Bourdieu, ‘epistemological prudence’; that is, to be as conscious as possible of the motivations involved in research practices and how such motivations structure the results that are obtained. But where this mode of reflexivity becomes problematic or, indeed, unproductive is when the researcher sinks into a mindset of navel-gazing divorced from a larger political context and, in particular, practical politics. For Bourdieu (2003a, p. 282), this ‘explosion of narcissism sometimes verging on exhibitionism’ was present in postmodern writing, not only in anthropology but other fields of the social sciences. One can speculate here, as a warning, how dialogue, when defined in terms of cultivating exchanges across the sub-fields and factions within IR, could be undermined by excessive autobiographical reflexive methods. Every IR scholar is encumbered by his or her individual past, but such history needs to be scrutinised in the context of the relations of institutions that are tied to the subject.

In this regard, reflexivity, for Bourdieu, does not refer so much to personal, idiosyncratic moments of introspection but, rather, the organisational and mental structures that shape the work of researchers (Swartz, 1997). What needs to be objectified, therefore, are the social conditions that have formed the theorist and, in particular, how their relative position in the professional universe shapes their interests and investments. It is here that Bourdieu offers IR scholars inspiration for

more penetrating political critiques of their field, particularly when he wears his cap of education sociologist. Two points can be noted. First, institutional reflexivity means developing awareness for how academics, like other cultural interpreters, owe something to their position in a social space ‘where all define themselves in part in relational terms, by their distance and difference from certain others with whom they compete’ (Wacquant, 1992, p. 39). It is well acknowledged that scholars struggle in multiple ways for attention, praise, and objective titles. But Bourdieu was keen to expose those moments when this constant jockeying for recognition could cloud and distort the research process, leading to a public motivation (such as aspiring for social or political change) that was disconnected from a potentially more important private motivation (increased power in the field, including denying others such status). Since the former motivation has greater legitimacy according to the principles of the field, he argues that scholars have a stake in underplaying the pursuit of the latter motivation. In short, they have ‘an interest in disinterestedness’ (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 110).

Second, as has been noted, institutional reflexivity brings attention to how the academy is situated in relation to other structures of power in society. One could argue that the academy often appears to be intimately embedded in the political at every level (structural, institutional, and personal), but the depth and quality of this embeddedness clearly varies and requires careful delineating. Nevertheless, it was one of Bourdieu’s (1996) major arguments that the education system in France had become the most efficient mechanism for (re)producing social hierarchies and ensuring that a ‘state nobility’ was perpetuated across generations. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that his *Homo Academicus* (1990b), a study of the inner politics of the elite Paris universities, complete with dense statistical analysis, provoked intense domestic criticism since it was shedding an intimate spotlight on these types of processes. The challenge for Bourdieu was always to explain how such an arbitrary organisation of social affairs was conducted and, in particular, came to acquire a considerable degree of legitimacy. In short, these investigations were undoubtedly ambitious and brave, but also empirically rewarding for mapping in detail the forms of power and recognition at work within and around the French academy.

Could one envisage IR – including its scholars and institutional ties to networks of political and economic power – being subjected to a similar critical dissection? In one respect, the Wæver and Tickner (2008) planned three-volume book project on ‘Worlding Beyond the West’ represents the kind of large-scale commitment needed for a sociology of IR. But there are other empirical enquiries, at different scales of analysis, that could provide insights into the process of IR knowledge production and the types of dialogue that become either ‘established’ or ‘marginalised’. Take, as one example, the relationship between research funding bodies, frequently associated with the state, and IR academic agendas. What social and political problems merit the economic and symbolic capital that funding provides, particularly in an environment of constrained government finances? How are these problems constructed over time and who has greater control over the levers of supply and demand in the intellectual market? How is the craft of successful application writing mastered, particularly within elite institutions that capture large resources? What concerns get downgraded, trivialised, or even forgotten because they cannot be easily squared with the definition of ‘policy relevance’ (which often passes under-examined, not least by those who utter it so frequently)? In a Bourdieusian social world, these are the types of questions

a reflexive method would pose. They could help uncover those mechanisms of academic consecration that are often hidden from view and, thus, disclose the specific interests of intellectuals and how, depending upon the context, such interests may align or dovetail with the interests of the state.

Yet, for Bourdieu, the craft of reflexivity does not, and should not, stop at this point. As with the previous attention to calls for a ‘public IR’ that moves away from ‘cloistered scholasticism’ (Lawson, 2008, p. 34), Bourdieu himself was a very prominent activist intellectual. From the 1980s, he became increasingly visible both in France and elsewhere as a contributor to various causes of the ‘political left’ (although, in a somewhat humorous manner, he often said that he was located on *la gauche de la gauche*, the left of the left). He made a range of interventions, including opposing the Russian suppression of Solidarity in Poland in 1981, supporting the strikes in France in 1995 and, by the turn of the century, backing various ‘alter-globalisation’ groups (see Swartz, 2003; and Poupeau and Discepolo, 2004 for a more detailed history). In part, these actions were an outcome of his continuous thinking on the relationship between reflexivity and public intellectuals. As one of his closest colleagues Loïc Wacquant (1992) expressed it, the call for ‘scholarship with commitment’ (Bourdieu, 2003b, 2008) can be linked to Bourdieu’s most ambitious reading of reflexivity: to encourage critical theorists to engage in practical problem-solving in the political world beyond the Ivory Tower.

It is here, however, that Bourdieu issues some warnings on the potential for generating such activity; points that, indeed, have value to those who wish to advance a form of public IR. To clarify, in parallel with Lawson (2008, p. 27), Bourdieu is not advocating the strengthening of an army of ‘media-savvy IR public intellectuals’ who are often removed from detailed ‘grounded’ scholarship. Those ‘*fast-thinkers* who offer cultural “fast food” – predigested and prethought culture’ were to be condemned in his view because they transmitted, rather than critiqued, the received political ideas of the moment (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 29, original italics). They often acted, in subtle ways, to broadly legitimise and insulate powerful interests from more intensive forms of scrutiny. In terms of collective reflexive ideas, Bourdieu had some notable successes, such as *The Weight of the World* (1999) project where a team of researchers investigated the everyday lives of workers in the context of neoliberalism. When published, this massive sociology volume eventually sold over 100,000 copies and triggered a substantial debate on social policy in France. But other grander ideas, including a proposal for an ‘International of Intellectuals’ to break free from dominant institutional frameworks, failed to lift off the page.

In light of these experiences, Bourdieu was somewhat pessimistic on the chances of developing collective reflexivity; that is, a large-scale mobilisation of activist intellectuals. He often struggled with the question of why there were relatively few activist intellectuals who sought to mobilise others, or submitted themselves to a process of enhanced dialogue and organisation. At a deeper level, he argued that this pattern could be partly explained by pointing to how the scholastic vision of the world contains presumptions and privileges which tend to work against direct, political activism. What does this entail? As understood by Wacquant in conversation with Bourdieu (1992, p. 39, original italics): ‘The *intellectualist bias* which entices us to construe the world as a *spectacle*, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically, is more profound and more

distorting than those rooted in the social origins or location of the analyst in the academic field, because it can lead us to miss entirely the *differentia specifica* of the logic of practice'. In other words, the scholastic gaze was a central problem for Bourdieu for two reasons. First, it is an orientation that necessitates the theorist separating themselves from practice in order to obtain an 'external' and supposed 'superior point of view'. But the danger of this is that the scholar starts to conflate and confuse practical knowledge with theoretical knowledge (to take the things of logic for the logic of things, as Marx put it). Second, to recall an earlier point, Bourdieu argues that intellectuals tend to be 'blinded by their own professional ideology' (Swartz, 1997, p. 274), as with appeals to universality or neutrality, rather than probing how their own career trajectories are often strongly shaped by the self-interested accumulation of honours and distinctions. In no way do such problems disable all ventures of collective reflexivity. Rather, Bourdieu is trying to highlight how academic dialogues with the social world may be constrained in deeper and more enduring ways than is conventionally assumed.

### III. PUTTING REFLEXIVITY TO WORK IN THE TRADE FIELD

In this final part of the paper I turn the attention towards a specific issue area in IR: the politics of international trade. The objective is to offer a sketch, largely through a series of propositions, for how the methodology of reflexivity could be conducted and what research outcomes may be derived. In part, trade politics is selected because it represents a 'hard case' for reflexivity, with the appeal to sociological techniques of analysis only very recently entering this area of scholarship (Wolfe, 2005; Lang, 2006, 2007). Notwithstanding a general movement towards political critique – such as signalled by the emergence of a multitude of critical observers of the World Trade Organization (WTO) – I would suggest that the trade field continues to valorise only certain forms of knowledge and position-taking, which are, at the same time, often an expression for control over particular types of power, including academic authority. The trade field is thus an interesting site for studying how the craft of reflexivity could be practiced because it continues to display features of an 'insider' community, complete with certain rules or codes of participation between authoritative agents.

To return to the mode of autobiographical reflexivity, questions regarding the gender or class identity of specialists in the literature on international trade are conspicuous by their absence. How can one explain this situation? Again, as alluded to, it could be argued that an examination of autobiographical reflexivity is not desirable because the method is too introspective without any 'tangible' sense that it could increase our understanding of trade politics 'out there'. Far from strengthening social science, it may be read as a rather distracting pursuit, without a clearly defined 'endpoint'. More specifically, one could also suggest that such presumptions have been shaped by the dominant systems of knowledge that have historically informed the analysis of trade. A glance at major textbooks is illustrative of this point. For instance, in Bernard Hoekman and Michel Kostecki's *The Political Economy of the World Trading System* (2009), a mainstream volume of more than 700 pages, there is no explicit discussion of how WTO rules as constituted could have detrimental consequences on the livelihoods of women in many countries. The closest one gets to the subject of gender is through a short discussion on labour standards, leading to an impression that the WTO is gender-neutral in its culture and material impacts. A similar limited treatment

is also found in Michael Trebilcock and Robert Howse's *The Regulation of International Trade* (2005), another popular textbook. Thus, since economics and law act as the major gateways for students to study the international trading system (IR being a subservient third), and since each discipline has tended to ignore such categories in approaches to teaching trade issues, it would only be 'inevitable' that gender or class would not be seen as a problem by many theorists, either in explaining trade in the 'real world' or in the own intellectual makeup.

Yet the potential value of autobiographical reflexivity in the study of trade politics should not be so readily discounted. One potentially interesting enquiry would be to question why some scholars choose to study less powerful actors in the trading system (relative to, conventionally, the US or the EU). This is usually justified by stating that such players represent empirical problems and, therefore, are worthy of investigation. Some researchers argue that the WTO Aid for Trade initiative is important because of preference erosion concerns voiced by African countries (Njinkeu and Cameron, 2008). Others have chosen to address strategies of coalition-building pursued by countries such as Brazil and India in recent negotiations (Hurrell and Narlikar, 2006; and Narlikar and Wilkinson, 2004). These are certainly legitimate research enquiries, but are there other motivations which go unstated? For instance, are such research questions informed by a deeper normative conception of justice on the part of the scholar? If so, what is this thinking and how has it been shaped by life experiences? In particular, how can one avoid the risk that the scholar projects under-examined interests onto their research object, such as claiming for the existence of agency when relatively little, or perhaps none, may exist in practice? Does the researcher believe that they have some degree of 'affinity' with the less privileged actor and can, indeed, even speak on behalf of them? If so, where did such presumptions come from and how valid are they?

In terms of institutional reflexivity, there are a number of potential applications and leads that one could suggest. As I have argued, it is important to exercise this form of reflexivity for the purpose of understanding what types of knowledge (and thus position-stances that one could select) become part of the accepted orthodoxy. Monitoring how these complicated processes operate – within organisations such as the World Bank, academic journals like the *World Economy*, conferences such as the annual WTO Public Forum, or media outlets like the *Financial Times* – is not easy. It would certainly be wrong to make blanket or conspiratorial assertions, such as claiming that all forms of knowledge, including 'heretical' propositions on the trading order, are somehow 'co-opted by the system'. For instance, if one examines the connections between a number of prominent trade scholars and the WTO Secretariat, there often appears to be a more circular, complex relationship that does not necessarily result in a weakening of critique. Lawyers like Joost Pauwelyn and Thomas Cottier have gained valuable experience working within or close to the Appellate Body, before returning to teach in universities. In other examples, the Secretariat increasingly conducts various training courses in WTO law in Southern countries, often targeting education establishments. Yet observing these *direct* relationships is only the first step towards mapping the boundaries of the arguing universe and attempting to assess, among other enquiries, how certain ideas and interests may be privileged, either deliberately or unintentionally.

The more challenging analytical task is to trace how dominant patterns of dialogue on the trading system are reproduced through agents that are *at a distance* from each other, either spatially, temporally, or both. In particular, this involves searching for the arbitrary particularisms in what passes for the ‘universal’ viewpoint (Eagleton-Pierce, 2009). For instance, a country such as the US cannot obtain its goals in the trading regime simply through repeating its own interested, particular opinions. In order to legitimise its personality, it has to appeal to and, ideally, disguise its own interests under the banner of the ‘universal’ (using frames such as ‘global competitiveness’). One major way in which the US can accomplish this is to draw upon the work of different ‘experts’ who, armed with the tools of Ricardian science, present themselves as ‘removed’ from ‘arbitrary politics’. The Columbia economist Jagdish Bhagwati could be highlighted as an example. Bhagwati has worked tirelessly across four decades to monitor, defend, and refine orthodox theories, classifications, and histories on international trade (Bhagwati, 2003, 2004; and Bhagwati, Panagariya and Srinivasan, 1998). He intervenes in media debates and has consulted for numerous international organisations, including the WTO.

But can we trace any chain of legitimation, or even a link in a chain, connecting Bhagwati’s ideas to the political objectives of the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR)? It would be very difficult, although not impossible. This is because, to apply one of Bourdieu’s (1996) arguments, the symbolic efficacy of any legitimation process is generally enhanced the more the chief consecrator – the US in this case – does not appear too closely tied to the acts of consecration. For sure, a USTR spokesperson may publically praise a Bhagwati commentary in the *Wall Street Journal* and use it for evidence that, say, protectionism should be avoided at all costs. But it is not in Bhagwati’s interest to claim that he is *too close* to the praiser, that he has lost independence from power in the classic conceptualisation, since that could invite charges of partisanship and political bias. Rather, if the question was ever explicitly raised in these terms, his work would probably be put into a ‘global’ context, where all could potentially benefit (of which substantial evidence could be marshalled), thus taking the direct spotlight away from any type of relationship between the hegemon and himself.

Finally, what options exist for engineering collective approaches to reflexivity in the trade field? Most efforts in this respect continue to be individual and sporadic, with little indication of a broader mobilisation. For instance, scholars such as Robert Howse and Walden Bello, respecting different intellectual backgrounds, have offered legal pro bono work and negotiating advice to under-resourced delegations in Geneva. Other researchers have called for an increase in this type of direct policy engagement in order to assist Southern countries. Gregory Shaffer (2006, p. 193), for example, has argued that ‘by working with developing countries on international trade cases, academics would better learn how the WTO process works in practice. They could write contextualized analyses of WTO jurisprudence that are more informed by a developing country perspective’. One can, however, point to groups such as the Canadian-based International Lawyers and Economists Against Poverty (ILEAP), a network of more than 60 prominent trade experts, who aim to improve the technical skills and capacities of Southern countries. Yet, once again, one can debate the organisational strength of this type of collective and, indeed, the extent to which they are offering a critical perspective that is substantially different from the norm.

## CONCLUSION

When viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, one can see in conclusion that reflexivity is more complex and adaptable than might initially appear. I have argued that the concept matters for conducting good research and strengthening objectivity. As a methodological notion, it stems from a phenomenological questioning of knowledge creation, asking the analyst to conduct mutual and self-criticism. In the process of uncovering the deeper motivations involved in the production of research, reflexivity offers for Bourdieu an almost ‘therapeutic function insofar as increasing awareness of the social determinants of behaviour increases the possibility for freedom from the unknown’ (Swartz, 1992, p. 277). But it is a different craft to practice, one that needs to be carried out by degrees. Such benefits are in many ways only truly realised when the attention is shifted away from the individual *per se* to a field analysis of the practice of science. In using the concept, this is perhaps where empirical studies in IR, including the politics of the trading system, should begin. The game-like logic of the academy is mirrored in the game-like logic of politics: both are founded on a relational struggle for recognition and, ultimately, forms of power. In these fields, every viewpoint, for Bourdieu, is a view taken from a particular point in space and time. As I have argued here, it is hoped that the idea of reflexivity can be treated as a ‘horizon’ or ‘guiding principle’ (Deer, 2008, p. 212) to aim at. Through developing the reflexive instinct, one can contribute, in metatheoretical terms, to an IR that uses social scientific techniques in a twin move: to unravel the political world through a simultaneous critical questioning of the scholar in their social milieu.

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