

George Steinmetz

**Pierre Bourdieu, "On the State. Lectures at the Collège de France 1989-1992". Cambridge: Polity, 2015, 480 pp.**

(doi: 10.2383/79484)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 3, settembre-dicembre 2014

**Ente di afferenza:**

()

Copyright © by Società editrice il Mulino, Bologna. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.  
Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it>

**Licenza d'uso**

Questo articolo è reso disponibile con licenza CC BY NC ND. Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it/>

## Book Review “Focus On Pierre Bourdieu”

On Bourdieu, *Sur l'État*: Field Theory and the State, Colonies, and Empires

**Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State. Lectures at the Collège de France 1989-1992*. Cambridge: Polity, 2015, 480 pp.**

doi: 10.2383/79484

Bourdieu's work on the state, and his work in general, provides a crucial resource for revitalizing the currently stagnant discussions around “state theory.” Where state theory and research became polarized in the 1970s and 1980s around debates between “instrumentalism” and “structuralism” and between “society-centered” and “state-centered” approaches, Bourdieu argues that that state is *both* a semi-autonomous field and one in which the social properties of state officials and civil servants, which are determined partly outside the state field, play a key role in understanding their practices. Bourdieu's work evaporates the supposed division between sociologists who study “soft” topics like culture and those who study “hard” objects like the state. Just as Bourdieu made the body itself – site of matter and effluvia – into society's “mystical writing pad” (to borrow Freud's image), so Bourdieu follows Gramsci (while ostensibly rejecting him) in arguing that the state exercises its power through symbolic domination as well as physical violence [Bourdieu 2015, 7].

The publication of Bourdieu's lectures on the state from 1990-1991 allows us to watch him at work near the pinnacle of his powers and the culmination of his lifelong project of developing his conceptual and methodological approach. We can see how Bourdieu's thinking, which was never static, continued to evolve even over the course of these two years. That said, it is possible to identify certain consistent themes and a steady trajectory of conceptual development in these lectures. One frame that appears here and that helps to make sense of the rest of his work is his integration of what he calls “neo-Kantian” and “structuralist” social ontologies. Bourdieu aligns the first of these with a constructivist understanding of practice, drawing in particular on Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, with its emphasis on the mythopoietic function, on “the fact that the human agent is creative, generative, producing mythical representations by applying mental functions, symbolic forms” [Bourdieu 2015, 170]. The other side of Bourdieu's approach derives from structuralism, with its emphasis on the “coherence of symbolic systems” and their constraining effects on practice. History, then – including historical objects like the state – is the “encounter between two histories” – between creative invention and structural constraint, habitus and objectified structure [Bourdieu 2015, 93].

At this level of discussion Bourdieu's approach is not yet fully distinguished from other approaches that emerged during the same historical period, including Critical Realism [Bhaskar 1986]. The differences lie in the substantive details of his theory of social structure and social subjectivity – his social theory rather than his metatheory. The neo-Kantian dimension in Bourdieu's work takes the specific form of the theory of

*habitus*, defined as a system of internalized mental and corporal dispositions that guide representations and practices. Most important in the present context (and in light of perennial misunderstandings of Bourdieu as a structuralist single-mindedly focused on social reproduction) is that *habitus* allows subjects to improvise, create, and respond to constantly changing circumstances. *Habitus*, Bourdieu insisted, is not “a destiny” [2005a, 326]. Bourdieu dealt at length with the idea of *habitus* and permanent invention. He had recognized that individuals with the same inheritance in terms of capital might respond very differently to their identical inheritances. This led Bourdieu to an ever finer-grained analysis of individual level psychology and pushed him to recognize the similarities between his own thinking and psychoanalysis [Steinmetz 2013].

Bourdieu’s theory of *fields* is strongly related to the “*école française de sociologie*” and to French structuralism, with its attention to defining social objects relationally, its emphasis on homologies, and its definition of social space in terms of unequally distributed social properties and positions [Bourdieu 2013a]. As he explains in his lectures on the state, the idea of field is in the first instance his way of making sense of a sociological commonplace, which is “the idea that the historic process is one of differentiation of the world into spheres” [Bourdieu 2015, 75]. But the field concept becomes much more than that. Starting in the early 1970s Bourdieu elaborated his understanding of fields in a series of empirical research projects. Fields come to be defined as relatively autonomous realms in which a particular activity is pursued for its own sake (“*en tant que*”) – for example, law as law, art as art, etc. [Bourdieu 2009, 127]. A field is defined relationally as “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions.” And in “highly differentiated societies, the social cosmos is made up of a number of such relatively autonomous social microcosms,” each of which is subject to “a logic” that is “specific and irreducible to those that regulate other fields” [Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993, 97]. The field is a sort of game, one that all of its players agree is worth playing. It is organized around competition for a particular form of symbolic capital. The resources various actors bring to a given field are rooted in the generic species of capital that exist in the social space as a whole, but they are transformed as a result of activity within the field. The hierarchy and value of different generic species of capital in their local inflections (symbolic capital) varies by field and over time.

Everything about a field, including its very existence, is open to revision on the basis of struggles and changes inside and outside the field. If the field is space of objective positions, this does not mean that the array of positions is static. Instead, individual and collective strategies may create or eliminate entire positions or transform the overall balance within a field – say, a shift from dominance by autonomous positions to the less autonomous pole. At the limit a field may be taken over by actors located at the heteronomous pole and thereby lose its autonomy altogether and merge with another field [Bourdieu 2015, 319]. Fields may be killed off by external forces. As Bourdieu also reminds us that fields may be destroyed by entirely internal struggles [Bourdieu 2015, 319]. Elsewhere he discusses the danger of a field ossifying into “an *apparatus* or *corpus* [...] when all movements go exclusively from the top down [...] such that the struggle and the dialectic that are constitutive of the field cease” [Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993, 102]. The foundation of basic agreement that underpins all disagreements in a field, which Bourdieu calls its *illusio*, may collapse. Even where there is basic agreement of

this sort, a field may be riven by violent struggles to impose the “dominant principle of domination,” that is, to define the relative ranking of different performances and perceptions. The more dynamic fields are prone to continuous small revolutions, exhibiting a constant churning of dominant and dominated groups. Fundamental conflict of this sort defines *unsettled fields*.

One of the unresolved questions in Bourdieu’s early work on fields in the 1970s and 1980s was the problem of understanding relations among fields. Although he did discuss the pull of the “temporal powers” (the state, the economy, the military, etc.) on relatively autonomous cultural fields, he did not initially have an answer to the question of how victories in the ongoing struggle for the “imposition of a dominant principle of domination” [Bourdieu 2009, 129] and hierarchical relations among different fields might be locked into place at least temporarily. Nor had he clarified how, or whether, the state<sup>1</sup> and the economy<sup>2</sup> could also be treated as fields. It is here that Bourdieu’s turn to the state marks an important new stage in the evolution of his thinking.

The other piece of this evolving framework is the notion of the *field of power*. Bourdieu developed this in his course at the Collège de France in 1985-1986 and in *The State Nobility* [Bourdieu 1989], where he defined it as “a field of power struggles among the holders of different forms of power,” more specifically among the generic forms of power like economic capital or cultural capital – powers that are “capable of being exercised in different fields” [Bourdieu 2009, 128]. The field of power is “the place where holders of [generic] capital confront one another, among other things over the rate of exchange between different kinds of capital” [Bourdieu 2015, 197]. As the editors of *On the State* note, “the steady focusing of his work on the state” starting around 1984 was due to Bourdieu’s “work on the genesis and structures of the fields” [Bourdieu 2015, 380].

Bourdieu refuses to define the state by its functions, defining it instead as a meta-field, and characterizing its specific form of capital as a “meta-capital” granting “power over other species of capital,” including economic capital, and “especially over the rates of conversion between them (and thereby over the relations of force between their respective holders)” [Bourdieu 1999, 57-58; 2015, 345]. As a result, the state is able to take “cross-field measures” such as changing the rates of exchange among capitals [Bourdieu 2015, 198]. Given the state’s dominance of other fields, it follows that the state is the precondition of the differentiation of society into multiple, semi-autonomous fields [Bourdieu 2015, 201] and the site of struggles for power over those fields.

From here Bourdieu moves on to an even more general set of theses. The state is the “great reservoir” and legitimate monopolizer of *symbolic power* and the “central bank” of *symbolic capital* – defined as “the form of capital that is born from the relationship between any particular kind of capital and those agents socialized in such a way as to be familiar with and acknowledge this kind of capital” [Bourdieu 1993, 39; 2015, 191].

<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu did suggest in 1982 that “the field of state institutions, by virtue of the very struggles of which it is the site, can produce policies that are relatively autonomous in relation to what would be a policy narrowly and directly conforming to the interest of the dominant” [Bourdieu 2015, 380-381].

<sup>2</sup> The problem of treating the economy in field-theoretic terms is addressed in Bourdieu [2003]; see also Desan [2013].

This concentration of symbolic power allows the modern state to effect acts of secular *consecration* and to unify mental structures and cultural habituses [Bourdieu 2015, 216]. The state is the very “foundation of both the logical and moral conformity of the social world” [Bourdieu 2015, 4]. It is the key source of *symbolic violence* – practices that naturalize socially arbitrary distinctions.

If we stayed at this level, Bourdieu’s theory of the state might seem to identify a sort of *deus ex machina* conceptualized at the same level of generality as the theory of the “capitalist state” in the cruder forms of Marxism that he criticizes. But while making these apodictic proclamations about the state, Bourdieu also insists that the state is itself a field, a “space of agents and institutions that have this kind of meta-power, power over all powers” [Bourdieu 2015, 367]. The plurality of “agents” and “institutions” points to one of the general features of Bourdieusian fields, which is that they are always arenas of struggle, riven by differences.

Bourdieu begins his lectures on the state by mixing general claims with fine-grained studies of particular examples of policymaking. Specifically he calls attention to the “typically bureaucratic form of consultation that is the ‘commission’” [Bourdieu 2005b, 104; 2015, 17-22; 24-26]. These commissions underscore the state’s basic power to mandate or name, and they show how the state, by creating a commission, “enables the bureaucracy to transcend its own limits and apparently to enter into discussion with the outside world without ceasing to pursue its own ends” [Bourdieu 2005b, 119]. In his study of commissions charged with reforming French housing policy in the 1970s, Bourdieu moves immediately to the terrain of struggle and differentiation, first sketching the commission’s “space of positions” and then tracing its connections to the “space of position-taking.” He uncovers a basic opposition between, on the one hand, a pole occupied by representatives of the Ministry of Finance and private banks, and on the other hand a pole representing the Ministry of Infrastructures and “all the agencies connected with the development of social housing” [Bourdieu 2005b, 114]. Overshadowing both poles, but ultimately pushing the entire field in a more “liberal” (that is, pro-market) direction, is a group of “bureaucratic revolutionaries” who are characterized by their “major bureaucratic inheritance” and who are often the sons of senior officials and part of a “bureaucratic nobility,” giving them a superior “sense of the bureaucratic game” [Bourdieu 2015, 20; 2005b, 118]. Many of them are often “bureaucratic heroes” who enable the group “to believe [...] that there is a group consensus on a certain number of values that are indispensable in dramatic situations in which the social order is deeply challenged” [Bourdieu 2015, 29].

By opening his lectures with a case study of what seems at first glance to be a rather dull matter, Bourdieu establishes some of the basic arguments he will pursue throughout the lectures. At the level of particular acts of public policymaking there is often a wide array of contending actors, each endowed with differing resources and “unusual strengths” [Bourdieu 2015, 32], and each pushing very different agendas. Like any field, the state has to be analyzed relationally as an array of positions whose meanings and identities are defined in relation to all other positions. Positions are filled by (or aligned with) persons, of course, and this poses a whole set of additional problems. The structure of positions inside the state field tends to be homologous to the structure of the field of power, without being reducible to the latter. Bourdieu asks us to focus on how state offices

and para-statal fields are staffed and to ask about “the properties that are needed to be effective in this field” [Bourdieu 2015, 18]. Agents’ habituses and social properties are transformed in preparation for their entry into the state (in the French *grandes écoles* or analogous educational institutions in other countries), and they continued to be remade once they are inside the state field. Bourdieu encourages us to ask about the specific *habitus* of state officials and different groups of officials in different branches of a state. He asks how bureaucratic dispositions evolve as individuals circulate in these spaces and “successively occup[y] various functions,” coming to carry “their whole itinerary in their habitus” [Bourdieu 2015, 18]. As officials accumulate field-specific “administrative capital,” their positioning in the field may change correspondingly.

## Elaborations of Bourdieu’s Theory of the State

Like other fields, the state is “a site of ongoing struggles between groups” and individuals. But while internal conflicts in cultural fields are primarily directed toward other field members or at specialized outside groups like audiences or critics [Bourdieu 2013b, 615-646], action in the administrative field is oriented largely toward imposing the state’s will on society at large.

A second specific difference concerns access to the state field. The rules governing entry into fields like literature or poetry are relatively informal. A newcomer may eventually penetrate to the very heart of these cultural fields if he or she has the appropriate social properties, habitus, and practices. In contrast, participation in the state is controlled by formalized legal rules. It is difficult for anyone to enter the state field without being elected, statutorily empowered by formal rules of succession, or actively nominated or invited by current office-holders (the exceptions are coups d’état and revolutions, but even here field-like dynamics continue to regulate access to power). Bourdieu underscores this point in his discussion of mandated official roles and delegation of power [Bourdieu 2015, 300], but it deserves to be put at the forefront of his theory of the state.

This last point is related to the fact that state is not just a field but also a *formal* organization, or a congeries of formal organizations. Most of its structural positions are statutorily defined posts. Even if the state is a formal organization, however, analysts cannot ignore the less empirically obvious question of defining field-specific “statist capital.” There is no reason to assume that the formal, legally defined structure of organizational positions, the array of offices and job descriptions, corresponds to the distribution of bureaucratic capital. Indeed, the relationship between the statutory level and the deeper sociological levels of power should be an object of social-historical investigation.

Bourdieu gave a very schematic answer to this question in his suggestion that the state’s functions are divided into a “left hand” and a “right hand.” The former includes welfare policies, education, the lower courts, and so on. This sector tends to recruit primarily from the “minor state nobility,” richer in cultural capital than economic capital. At the state’s “right hand” we find financial functions and ministerial cabinets that recruit

mainly from the “upper state nobility,” a group that displays “considerable amounts of both cultural and economic capital” [Swartz 2013, 143]. This analysis points to a *homology* between the field of power and the state’s functions and departments. Rather than simple “instrumental” control of the state by non-state elites, Bourdieu suggests an elective affinity between certain state offices and bureaucratic roles and actors with particular social properties.

If we take Bourdieu’s more sustained work seriously, however, and use Bourdieu to further elaborate his ideas, we should be led to look for points of *disjuncture*, points where social properties do *not* map readily onto the grid of state offices and jobs. For example, it would be more consistent with Bourdieu to argue that the polarization between cultural and economic capital might be further divided in both the right-hand and the left-hand sectors of the state field into autonomous and heteronomous poles. (Contrary to a more mechanistic structuralism however there is no reason to expect such divisions to reproduce themselves *tous azimuts* and at each hierarchical level). Government experts in “left-hand” administrative subfields like education or social insurance may be further subdivided into heteronomous and autonomous poles: public higher education nowadays, for example, is split between defenders of market-based approaches and corporate practices versus those who insist that universities should be defined by their own semi-autonomous criteria.

Another place in which we can use Bourdieu to revise Bourdieu concerns his language of “state field,” “bureaucratic field,” and “administrative field.” His interchangeable use of these phrases is misleading, and not simply because state activities often take a non-bureaucratic form. Put simply, historical and sociological studies of states need to undertake a much more systematic analysis of the political apparatuses or formal institutions that make up a state, as well as the different departments into which these apparatuses are sorted.

Bourdieu also neglects to make a basic distinction between the sectors of the state involved in *formulating* policy – through decrees, parliamentary legislation, court decisions, or administrative elaboration by bureaucracies or committees – and the lower level sectors involved in *implementing* policy. This distinction is familiar to students of public administration and “street level bureaucracy” [Lipsky 1980] or “*la politique au guichet*” [Dubois 1999]. Just as social policies continue to be transformed at the “street” level as they are implemented, so colonial native policies were sometimes revised at the point of contact with their addressees [Steinmetz 2007]. Bourdieu does allude to the distinction between policymakers and policy implementers [Bourdieu 2015, 11] and insists that the state “is not an *apparatus* [...] capable of converting every action into the simple *execution* of a rule,” but he does not sufficiently attend to the outer circles or bands of the state field where policies are put into effect.

This suggests that we need to distinguish at the very least between the wider state field, which includes lower-level public employees, and the administrative field or narrower state field, which consists of policymakers – heads of state, upper-level officials and bureaucrats, judges, and legislators. Bourdieu does distinguish between the administrative or bureaucratic field and the political field of parties, interest groups, lobbies, elections, and parliaments [Bourdieu 2000a; 2015, 379]. Bourdieu defined the political field as “the site in which, though the competition between the agents involved in it,

political products, issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events are created – products between which ordinary citizens, reduced to the status of consumers, have to choose” [Bourdieu 1991a, 172]. The political field is “the relatively autonomous world within which struggle about the social world is *conducted only with political weapons*” [Bourdieu 2015, 335, my emphasis] – as opposed to bureaucratic weapons, for example, or journalistic weapons.

This paves the way toward a systematic sociology of dynamics within the core of the state meta-field and its various subfields, the various outer reaches of the state (implementation), and the surrounding fields of power and politics. We need to push Bourdieu’s distinction between the political field and the bureaucratic field inside the state, distinguishing between career civil servants, elected officials, appointed officials, and actors mandated to sit on temporary commissions. Elected officials may bring a political capital into the state that sometimes can stand up to accumulated bureaucratic capital. We should also begin distinguishing among different subfields within the state, each governed by different rules of entry and perhaps by subfield-specific stakes and varieties of symbolic capital. These subfields may correspond to different ministries or departments but may also overlap (as with the competition among different ministries to control French colonial policy during the Fourth Republic) [Chafer 2011, 277-281].

Bourdieu’s approach also needs to be made more specific in *spatial* terms. After all, the state is the spatialized or territorialized social object *par excellence*. With the exception of ancient “marcher empires” and current states like the ISIS Caliphate, states have always been defined by being centered in a more or less stable manner in one specific place. There are other social objects that resemble states in this respect, including cities, regions, and empires, but these are all located in the same class of geopolitical objects as states. Bourdieu mentions the spatial structure of the state in his first lecture [Bourdieu 2015, 9], and touches on the idea of territory in distinguishing between “State 1” and “State 2,” but space tends to be treated here as a container for social practice. Fields themselves differ in their degrees of territorialization. Studies inspired by Bourdieusian field theory have long focused on the spatial transfers (and failed transfers) of practices, projects, individuals, habituses, and forms of symbolic capital [Bourdieu 1991b; Steinmetz 2010]. One of Bourdieu’s first projects in 1960 after entering Raymond Aron’s Centre européenne de sociologie was focused on “the transfer of European institutions to countries previously colonized.” We can find references to spatial processes throughout Bourdieu’s work. But field theory needs to begin asking how social space is actively produced.

## Extending Bourdieu’s Approach to Colonies and Empires

Bourdieu’s mature theoretical approach also provides a fruitful starting point for thinking about some of the analytic puzzles raised by colonial states and empires. In my own research I have tried to extend this approach to the historical socioanalysis of colonies and empires. Bourdieu’s concepts help to explain shifts and variations in colonial native policies in terms of struggles among different actors, with different powers and



properties, inside the relatively autonomous realm of the colonial state [Steinmetz 2007; 2008]. If the state can be understood as a kind of meta-field, as Bourdieu argues, then it also makes sense to extend the field concept to colonial states and entire empires. Field theory suggests a theoretical and methodological framework for analyzing metropolitan states and their colonial offices, overseas colonial states, and the relations among different colonies within a single empire [Steinmetz 2015a].

Nonetheless, Bourdieu failed even to address the specificity of colonial states, aside from the very formulaic claim about the peculiarity of French colonialism as being based in the Revolutionary rhetoric of universalization and a brief comment about French rule in Kabylia [Bourdieu 2015, 146, 357, 224]. This is unfortunate since Bourdieu missed a chance to return to his own earlier work on Algeria, which painted a picture of an extremely non-universalizing colonialism in Algeria. Here Bourdieu's own thinking seems to be a victim of the "state mind" that he analyzes at the outset, since the French state set out to deny the very coloniality of the colonial Empire starting in 1946, rebranding it the "French Union" and then as the "French Community." Bourdieu, who was one of several dozen French sociologists specializing in the study of colonized societies before 1965 [Steinmetz 2015b], would fail to connect this to the topic of the state. "Everything was conquered," he writes [Bourdieu 2015, 174]. Sometimes this is metaphorical, but in a deeper sense he is showing that the same methods apply to the formation of states, colonies, and entire empires.

Bourdieu's approach needs to be reconstructed in several ways to make it more useful for students of states, colonies, and empires. The first revision, to which I have already alluded, concerns *geographic scale*. The scale of fields (or social spaces) cannot be assumed to be coextensive with the nation-state, but often extends beyond those boundaries. Historical studies inspired by Bourdieu have recognized this fact, though they have not yet remapped fields according to the spatial scales of empire (exceptions are Steinmetz [2007; 2015a]; and Go [2011]). The metropolitan state itself is divided into different scalar levels ranging from central to regional to local. The state's extensions can also be followed beyond its borders into overseas colonies, foreign consulates and embassies, military bases, and extraterritorial zones and bases. The fields and spaces of colonial officialdom and imperial trade spanned entire empires, producing fields with extremely complex shapes and octopus-like tentacles reaching out in all directions. Scientists also moved among colonies and sometimes among empires [Lambert and Lester 2006; Steinmetz 2015b].

A second revision of Bourdieu concerns the definition of *empires* as opposed to *states* and *colonies*. This is not a minor revision, since empires have been a more typical form of polity than states in world history. Bourdieu focused in his lectures entirely on the historical genesis of the modern state, and this led him to study the transition from what he saw as the *dynastic* state to the *bureaucratic* state in modern Europe. Empires figured only as precursors of modern states – as the "vast and weakly controlled states ... that other theorists call empires" [Bourdieu 2012, 213], and he located these at the "peripheries." Bourdieu argued that the Russian, Chinese, Ottoman, Roman, and other large land empires differed from modern European states insofar as they did not integrate their subjects into political or economic "games" beyond their narrow localities [Bourdieu 2015, 187]. These empires were a sort of "superstructure" that "allowed social units

with a local base to remain relatively independent” [*ibidem*]. But Bourdieu completely ignored the distinguishing features of empires--their expansiveness and the inbuilt asymmetrical power relations between conquering core states and conquered peripheries. He elided the words empire and state, speaking of “*ce type d’empire, d’état*” (“this sort of empire or state” [Bourdieu 2012, 126]). But empires are more than giant states, and are more than the forerunners of modern states. Modern colonial empires were asymmetrically structured assemblages of states and other geopolitical formations. The state that Bourdieu mainly has in mind is the conventional, democratic, bureaucratic, western nation-state. Here again Bourdieu’s thinking seems to mirror the French “state mind” which effaced the fact that there was a French colonial empire spanning the globe until 1962 – even if it had been rebranded with a euphemistic name. Equally odd is any reference to the American Empire, even though Bourdieu’s former mentor had written one of the earliest and most important books on the subject [Aron 1975], and even though Bourdieu’s lectures were given at the height of the Gulf War.

We can also extend Bourdieu’s ideas to draw a distinction between imperial *social spaces* and imperial *fields*. Systems of colonial states were often configured as coherent fields. This meant that imperial officials could move back and forth among different colonial states. In other respects, however, empires were *not* unified fields but congeries of fields that coexisted in less integrated formations that, following Bourdieu, could be called imperial *spaces*. Why call this an imperial *space* rather than an imperial *field*?<sup>3</sup> Recall that all members of a field share a common *illusio* and recognize one another as qualified members of the field, even as they compete for a specific variety of symbolic capital. Movement from one field to another is therefore by no means assured. There were also distinct state fields in each colony, or in particular groups of colonies, which hindered lateral movement by colonial officials. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century British empire, the Colonial Office and Administrative Service was responsible for the colonies in West, East, and Central Africa; India was the exclusive responsibility of the India Office and Indian Civil Service; Sudan was dealt with by yet another distinct branch, the Sudan Political Service; and finally the Dominions Office (1925-1947) dealt with the semi-independent dependences, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Each of these offices guarded its own prerogatives for selecting officials to send to their respective colonies or dominions. Entry into the British colonial service in India was controlled by competitive examination, while selection into the African service was governed by less formal qualifications connected to social class habitus [Austen 1967]. Thus while there was some career mobility at the highest levels between the Indian administration and African governorships, the incommensurability of recruitment practices limited movement at the lower levels of administration. The French colonial empire seems to have had fewer limitations on officials’ movement from one colony to another [El Mechat 2009; Morlat 2010]. But there was an increasing division into technical, legal, and other administrative branches. Construed as a whole, the combination of metropolitan colonial offices and overseas colonial states constitutes an *imperial administrative space*. And since multiple empires usually coexist in the same historical moment, we can

<sup>3</sup> On the usefulness of the distinction between social space and social field in the analysis of social movements see Mathieu [2007; 2012].

speak of a meta-space of imperial administrative spaces, each rooted in a specific national empire but each somewhat commensurable with the others due to racism and alliances. This typically caused colonizers from different empires to draw together around shared European interests and ideologies.

Moreover, the metropolitan colonial office and overseas colonial state fields usually operated with distinct species of symbolic capital. For example, the German colonial state field before 1914 was governed by competition for a kind of ethnographic capital, unlike the German metropolitan state and colonial office, where displays of ethnographic sagacity would be irrelevant at best [Steinmetz 2008]. There was an imperial social space and possibly an imperial field of power that spanned colonies and metropole, but the field of each colonial state was geographically limited to the colony.

We also need to specify that modern colonial empires consisted of a *multiplicity of state fields*. There was always (at least) one state – a European one – in each of the colonies. In colonies organized around “indirect rule”, the conquering European state coexisted with any number of indigenous states, whose powers were curtailed but never nonexistent [Mamdani 1996]. Finally, there was a state in the metropole – those states that have been the main concern of so-called state theorists.

The distinction between the state field and the political field is important to keep in mind when analyzing modern colonial empires because of the severe limits on entry into the narrower state field by the colonized, due to the ubiquity of the colonial rule of difference [Chatterjee 1986], which was the colonial state’s way of legitimating itself to itself [Steinmetz 2007; 2008]. This was true even in the “universalist” French colonial empire, and even after 1945, when partial citizenship was granted to the colonized [Cooper 2014]. The postwar French colonial empire was renamed the “French Union” and “Overseas France,” and the colonized gained the right to participate in elections to colony-level assemblies and to an Empire-wide assembly in Paris. None of these changes meant that the colonized were able to enter the highest offices in the administrative colonial field, however. The colonial Governors or Governors-General and Commandants du cercle remained – with a very few exceptions – white Frenchmen, and the colonial state remained despotic until the very end.

## Conclusion

Bourdieu’s book on the state ties together many of the loose ends of the “structuralist” side of his framework. Field theory was already fully developed, in his mind, even if smaller themes still need to be explored – subfields for example, or the exact meanings of homology and isomorphism, or the questions raised here about territoriality. The last major piece of Bourdieu’s puzzle involved the theory of the creative subject, something he tackled head on in *Pascalian Meditations* [Bourdieu 2000b] and other late work. Readers of Bourdieu would have to agree there nothing could be more antithetical to his thinking than to freeze it in place. We have to continue pushing it in what might be called neo-Bourdieuian or post-Bourdieuian directions. The discussion of his book on the state is one very important place to start.

## References

- Aron, R.  
1975 *The Imperial Republic. The United States and the World, 1945-1973*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Austen, R.  
1967 "The Official Mind of Indirect Rule: British Policy in Tanganyika, 1916-1939." Pp. 577-606 in *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, edited by P. Gifford and W.R. Louis. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bhaskar, R.  
1986 *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*. London: Verso.
- Bourdieu, P.  
1991a "Political Representation: Elements for a Theory of the Political Field." Pp. 171-202 in *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.  
1991b "On the Possibility of a Field of World Sociology." Pp. 373-387 in *Social Theory for a Changing Society*, edited by P. Bourdieu and J.S. Coleman. Boulder: Westview.  
1999 "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field." Pp. 53-75 in *State/Culture. State Formation after the Cultural Turn*, edited by G. Steinmetz. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.  
2000a *Propos sur le Champ Politique*. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon.  
2000b *Pascalian Meditations*. Cambridge: Polity.  
2005a "Secouez un Peu Vos Structures!" Pp. 325-341 in *Le Symbolique et le Social. La Réception Internationale de la Pensée de Pierre Bourdieu*, edited by J. Dubois, P. Duran and Y. Winkin. Liège : Editions de l'Université de Liège.  
2005b *The Social Structures of the Economy*. Cambridge: Polity.  
2009 "Champ du Pouvoir et Division du Travail de Domination. Texte Manuscrit Inedit Ayant Servi de Support de Cours au College de France, 1985-1986." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 190: 126-139.  
2012 *Sur l'État. Cours au Collège de France 1989-1992*. Paris: Seuil.  
2013a "Séminaires sur le Concept de Champ, 1972-1975." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 200: 4-37.  
2013b *Manet: une Révolution Symbolique*. Paris: Seuil.  
2015 *On the State*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L.  
1992 *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chafer, T.  
2011 "Friend or Foe? Competing Visions of Empire in French West Africa in the Run-up to Independence." Pp. 275-297 in *The French Colonial Mind*, edited by M. Thomas. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press
- Chatterjee, P.  
1986 *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cooper, F.

2014 *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Desan, M.H.

2013 "Bourdieu, Marx, and Capital: A Critique of the Extension Model." *Sociological Theory* 31: 318-342.

Dubois, V.

1999 *La Vie au Guichet: Relation Administrative et Traitement de la Misère*. Paris: Economica.

El Mechat, S. (ed.)

2009 *Les Administrations Coloniales XIXe-XXe Siècles: Esquisse d'une Histoire Comparée*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Go, J.

2011 *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lambert, D., and Lester, A. (eds.)

2006 *Colonial Lives across the British Empire. Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lipsky, M.

1980 *Street-level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Mamdani, M.

1996 *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mathieu, L.

2007 "L'Espace des Mouvements Sociaux." *Politix* 77: 131-151.

2012 *L'Espace des Mouvements Sociaux*. Broissieux: Éditions du Croquant.

Morlat, P. (ed.)

2010 *Les Grands Commis de l'Empire Colonial Français: Actes du Colloque de Clermont-Ferrand du 14 octobre 2005 Organisé par Les Indes Savantes avec le Soutien de la Fondation Varenne*. Paris: Indes Savantes.

Steinmetz, G.

2007 *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2008 "The Colonial State as a Social Field." *American Sociological Review* 73 (4): 589-612.

2010 "Ideas in Exile: Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Failure to Transplant Historical Sociology into the United States." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 23 (1): 1-27.

2013 "Toward Socioanalysis: The 'Traumatic Kernel' of Psychoanalysis and Neo-Bourdieuian Theory." Pp. 108-130 in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, edited by P.S. Gorski. Durham: Duke University Press.

2015a "Social Fields and Subfields at the Scale of Empires: Colonial States and Colonial Sociology." *Sociological Review* (forthcoming).

2015b "Sociology and Colonialism in the British and French Empires, 1940s-1960s." (unpublished paper).

Swartz, D.

2013 *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*.  
Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

*George Steinmetz*  
University of Michigan