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Global field and global imagining: Bourdieu and worldwide higher education

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This paper maps the global dimension of higher education and associated research, including the differentiation of national systems and institutions, while reflecting critically on theoretical tools for working this terrain. Arguably the most sustained theorisation of higher education is by Bourdieu: the paper explores the relevance and limits of Bourdieu's notions of field of power, agency, positioned and position-taking; drawing on Gramsci's notion of hegemony in explaining the dominant role played by universities from the United States. Noting there is greater ontological openness in global than national educational settings, and that Bourdieu's reading of structure/agency becomes trapped on the structure side, the paper discusses Sen on self-determining identity and Appadurai on global imagining, flows and 'scapes'. The dynamics of Bourdieu's competitive field of higher education continue to play out globally, but located within a larger and more disjunctive relational setting, and a setting that is less closed, than he suggests.

Keywords: universities; globalisation; global flows; hegemony; USA; Bourdieu

Introduction

Worldwide higher education is a relational environment that is simultaneously global, national and local (Marginson and Rhoades 2002; Valimaa 2004). It includes international agencies, governments and national systems, institutions, disciplines, professions, e-learning companies and others. Although most activity in higher education is nation-bound, a distinctive global dimension is growing in importance, connecting with each national system of higher education while also being external to them all.

Although the global dimension has many roots, it above all derives from the worldwide roll-out of instantaneous messaging, complex data transfer and cheapening air travel. The cross-border dealings of research-intensive universities and the relations between governments on higher education are something more than a mass of bilateral connections. There are networked global systems with commonalities, points of concentration (nodes), rhythms, speeds and modes of movement. In research there is a single mainstream system of English-language publication of research knowledge, which tends to marginalise other work rather than absorb it. There are converging approaches to recognition and quality assurance, such as the Washington Accords in Engineering. The Bologna agreement facilitates partial integration and convergence in degree structures and the diploma supplement in Europe.

The practices that distinguish higher education from other social formations are the credentialing of knowledge-intensive labour, and basic research. We can understand the global dimension of higher education as a bounded domain that includes institutions with cross-border

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activities in these areas. Although this domain is frayed at the edges by diploma mills, corporate 'universities' and cross-border e-learning – and despite its connections with other social formations – its boundedness and disinctiveness are irreducible. A dual of inclusion/exclusion shapes the outer and inner relationships of the domain. This suggests Pierre Bourdieu, who terms such domains as 'fields of power'. Such as field is 'a space, that is, an ensemble of positions in a relationship of mutual exclusion' (Bourdieu 1996, 232).

Any theorisation of this global higher education domain must account for two elements. One is cross-border *flows*: flows of people (students, administrators, academic faculty); flows of media and messages, information and knowledge; flows of norms, ideas and policies; flows of technologies, finance capital and economic resources. Global flows in higher education are exceptionally dynamic and uneven. In the decade from 1995 to 2004 the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship rose from 1.3 million to 2.7 million (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2006, 287). Cross-border research collaborations and institutional partnerships are expanding rapidly (for example, Vincent-Lancrin 2006); when networks grow, the cost rises in linear fashion but the benefits rise exponentially via the increasing number of connections, while 'the penalty for being outside the network increases' (Castells 2000, 71). Global flows constitute relatively visible lines of effect. The other less explicit element is the worldwide patterns of *differences* that channel and limit global flows: lateral diversity in languages, pedagogies and scholarship, and in organisational systems and cultures; vertical diversity including competitive differentiation, hierarchy, inclusion, exclusion and unequal capacity. Global higher education is not a level playing field.

This paper is concerned with a synthetic mapping of the global dimension of higher education and research in terms of relations of power, including self-determining human agency, in order to contribute to understandings of global transformations (Held et al. 1999) in and through higher education. The paper draws on theorisations by Bourdieu and Antonio Gramsci and on discussions of global ontology and agency by Arjun Appadurai and Amartya Sen. Although this is not an empirically-driven study, data from OECD (2006), World Bank (2007) and other sources are used.[1] The paper considers higher education without interrogating its relations with other fields of power in the economy, military, government, polity, communications and elsewhere. Those are matters for further synthesis.

Bourdieu and the global field of higher education

Arguably Bourdieu's work on higher education (including Bourdieu 1984, 1988, 1993, 1996) is the most sustained of any major social theorist. Rajani Naidoo (2004) uses Bourdieu to analyse the differentiation of higher education institutions in South Africa. She notes, however, that Bourdieu's argument developed in the context of a relatively stable compact between higher education, society and nation-state (Naidoo 2004, 468–469); and he has little to say about the structuring and content of knowledge. Further, much of his empirical research was in the 1960s prior to contemporary globalisation. Can Bourdieu assist our imaginings of global higher education given he is nation-bound and knowledge formation is both primary to universities and quintessentially global? Yes, with some qualifications. The qualifications will be discussed below but Bourdieu's notion of field of power, with agents 'positioned' and 'position-taking' within the field, continue to be a useful starting point.

Polar structure of the global field

For Bourdieu a field of power is a social universe with its own laws of functioning. It enjoys a variable degree of autonomy, defined by its ability to reject external determinants and obey only

its own specific logic. In *The Field of Cultural Production* (Bourdieu 1993, 38–39) he finds that the field is structured by an opposition between the elite subfield of restricted production, and the subfield of large-scale mass production tending towards commercial production. Each subfield has its distinctive principle of hierarchisation. In the elite subfield, where outputs are scarce, the principle of hierarchisation is cultural status, autonomous and specific to the field. In mass or 'popular' institutions the principle of hierarchisation involves economic capital and market demand and is heteronymous, although mass institutions renew themselves from time to time by adapting ideas from the elite sector. Between the subfields are found a range of intermediate institutions that combine the opposing principles of legitimacy in varying degrees and states of ambiguity.

Bourdieu's polarity helps to explain relations of power within national systems, where heteronomy is shaped by governments, market forces and both together. The contrast in South Africa between the more autonomous white English-language universities focused on products for the intellectual field and more heteronomous black universities and white Afrikaans-medium universities (Naidoo 2004, 461) is replicated in the differentiation of the Australian system with its polarity between more autonomous and selective 'sandstone' universities that see themselves as global research players, and more heteronomous vocational and regional institutions (Marginson and Considine 2000, 175–232). Other examples can be cited. Far from making a universal journey from elite to mass higher education (Trow 1974), national systems contain both kinds of institution simultaneously and/or sustain the Bourdieuian polarity inside single institutions. However, the point here is that this Bourdieuian polarity is apparent also in the global field.

In the global subfield of restricted production are the American doctoral universities led by Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Yale, Princeton, Berkeley and others, plus Cambridge, Oxford and a handful of the Russell group. Ultimately they derive global predominance from their position within their own national/imperial systems. *The Economist* (2005) christened them the 'Global Super-league'. These institutions constitute advanced careers almost anywhere in the world. Places are prized by both students and academic faculty. Selectivity is enhanced by modest student intakes, and they concentrate knowledge power to themselves by housing most leading researchers. They head the world in research outputs as measured by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) (SJTU Institute of Higher Education 2007).[2] The top 20 SJTU universities are 17 from the USA, and Cambridge, Oxford and Tokyo. Largely autonomous, their agency freedom is enhanced by the globalisation of knowledge and their pre-eminence displayed in the web, global university rankings and popular culture. The global power of these institutions rests on the subordination of other institutions and nations.

In the opposite subfield are institutions solely focused on revenues and market share. This includes not only for-profit vocational universities such as the University of Phoenix, now active in a dozen countries, but in their global teaching function non-profit universities in the United Kingdom and Australia that provide international education on a commercial basis.

There is a range of institutions in intermediate positions (Figure 1). Some universities have elite roles in their national field and compete in the global research stakes while building high volumes of full fee-paying international students (category 2b); some other national leaders lack a strong global presence (category 4a). Beneath both groups are ostensibly teaching-research universities for whom the research mission is subordinated to cross-border revenues (category 4b). For-profit institutions vary in the extent to which they sustain a global role (categories 3, 6, and 8). Other institutions are solely nation-bound but nevertheless affected by the global field, for they are subordinated by it (categories 7 and 9).

Bourdieu's notion of a differentiating field of power that includes/excludes is closer to the dynamics of higher education than is the neo-liberal imaginary of a universal market. However, in some respects the polarity differs from Bourdieu's description. Anglo-American universities have not adopted the French division between high intellectual schools and those preparing the

AUTONOMOUS SUB-FIELD of elite research* universities, prestige- not profit-driven ***Notes*** 1. autonomy relative to *global* field 2. elite teaching-only liberal arts colleges feed into category 1	***1 The 'Global Super-league':*** *Much of American doctoral sector and a few high prestige universities in UK. Prestige derived from stellar research reputation and global power of degrees [Harvard U, Cambridge etc.]*	***2b Elite non U.S. national research universities with strong cross-border roles:*** *Prestige-driven non profit research universities at national level. Global presence in research; cross-border students some on for-profit basis [U Sydney, U of Warwick]*	***4b Teaching-focused export universities:*** *Lesser status non-profit universities, commercial players in global market: lower cost/quality foreign education at scale. May have minor research role [Oxford Brookes, U Central Queensland]*	***3 Elite and globally focused for-profits:*** *Prestigious fully for-profit institutions operating globally, largely teaching focused with some research. National exclusivity and global power creates autonomy vis a vis 6. Very small group. [Indian IITs, IMs]*	***6 Lesser prestige teaching only global for-profits:*** *Fully commercial operators actively building export markets, low cost mass production, no research [U Phoenix, DeVry, various global e-Us]*	***HETERONOMOUS SUB-FIELD of institutions providing commercial vocational cross-border education* (includes for-profits & revenue-driven units of non-profits)**
	2a Less globally engaged American doctoral universities *Global prestige and some research, marginal foreign engagement and cross-border students [some U.S. state universities]*	***4a Nationally-bound elite research universities:*** *Prestige providers in one nation. Research intensive, varying global research roles. Inward looking. Nationally competitive with segment 2b, not 1. [U Buenos Aires, many in Europe and Japan]*	***5 Teaching-focused national universities*** *Largely teaching focused institutions, marginally global in research and/or cross-border teaching [most Malaysian public universities, some Canadian community colleges, etc.]*		***8 For-profits with minor global functions:*** *Commercial operators focused on local market with some cross-border students. [some private industry training in Australia]*	
			7 Non-profits without global agendas: *teaching-focused, local demand orientation. No cross-border role. [largest group, especially in importing nations]*		***9 For-profits without global agendas:*** *local degree mills, no cross-border students. Large category in some nations [Brazil, Philippines]*	

Figure 1. Polar field of global higher education, after Bourdieu.
Note: Horizontal axis maps autonomy/heteronomy. Vertical axis maps degree of global engagement. Numbers signify order of status in the global field.

business elite. The Super-league universities combine the two functions, increasing their weight and integrating them closely at the centre of economic and political power. Further, elite universities, particularly the US Ivy League, are not just status dominant but *economically* dominant *vis-à-vis* mass producers. The Super-league command extraordinary resources: for example, the Harvard endowment, the commercial presence of American research universities in bio-science. Nevertheless Bourdieu is right to state that more autonomous universities are less commercial in temper. Super-league universities do not expand willy-nilly to maximise market share like a capitalist business. Their authority derives not from their equity price but from their selectivity and knowledge. They maximise not sales but research impact. Their lodestone is not revenues but social power. Where they run commercial suboperations, the resulting tensions are absorbed within the institution, playing out inside research programmes that are alternately fundamental and commercial (the two are mixed together almost irretrievably in bioscience) and in the cultural differences between arts/disciplinary science and business studies.

Position and position-taking

Within a field of power, agents compete for resources, status or other objects of interest. Bourdieu describes an inter-dependency between the prior positions of agents and the position-taking strategies they select.

> Every position-taking is defined in relation to the *space of possibles* which is objectively realized as a *problematic* in the form of the actual or potential position-takings corresponding to the different positions; and it receives its distinctive *value* from its negative relationship with the coexistent position-takings to which it is objectively related. (Bourdieu 1993, 30; emphasis in original)

Position-taking is the 'space of creative works' (p. 39). This is not an open-ended free-wheeling creativity. Only some position-takings are possible, identified by agents as they respond to changes in the settings and the moves of others in the competition game. Agents have a number of possible 'trajectories', the succession of positions occupied by the same agent over time, and employ semi-instinctual 'strategies' to achieve them. Agents respond in terms of their 'habitus', their acquired mix of beliefs and capabilities, and in particular their 'disposition' that mediates the relationship between position and position-takings (Bourdieu 1993, 61–73).

This schema is consistent with much of the evidence on the decisions of university executives as they strive for relative advantage (for example, Marginson and Considine 2000, 68–95). Bourdieu's concepts of positioned/position taking can be applied in situated case studies (Deem 2001) of the strategies of universities each with its distinctive habitus. Specific national trajectories can be identified in, say, China, Singapore and Australia (Marginson 2007). Nevertheless, there are questions about how much room is left for self-determining agency. Bourdieu claims a reciprocity between structure and agency. 'Although position helps to shape dispositions, the latter, in so far as they are the product of independent conditions, have an existence and an efficacy of their own and can help shape positions' (Bourdieu 1993, 61). 'The scope allowed for dispositions' is variable, being shaped by the autonomy of the field in relation to other fields, by the position of the agent in the field, and by the extent to which the position is a novel and emerging one, or path-dependency has been established (1993, 72). But the 'in so far as' creates ambiguity. Bourdieu also fails to distinguish hierarchy from overwhelming power within a field such as higher education. This problem will considered first, before returning to agency.

Gramsci and global university hegemony

Here Bourdieu is usefully supplemented by Antonio Gramsci with his notion of *egemonia* (hegemony). Gramsci couples and contrasts two regimes of power. The first is domination or

coercion by the open state machine, the 'State-as-force' (Gramsci 1971, 56). The second is hegemony, 'the "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group' (1971, 12). Hegemony is secured primarily in civil society, including education (Gramsci 1971, 12). It is a social construction in the realms of intellectual reason, institutions and popular culture in which a certain way of life and thought is diffused. There are parallels with Foucault's (1991) distinction between political sovereignty and government as the conduct of conduct permeating all aspects of life. Like Foucault, Gramsci emphasises that the two regimes constitute mutually dependent strategies. Rule by consent is ultimately underpinned by rule by force (Gramsci 1971, 10).

Civil institutions like universities are analytically distinct from the state (political society) but intertwined with it. Tradition is an active, shaping force in making hegemony. Certain meanings and practices are selected into the common tradition. Elite universities secure their role as manufacturers of tradition, distinct from other universities, with symbols of venerability such as roman numerals and baroque stone. Does Gramsci see hegemony with its grounding in city states and nations as potentially global? Yes.

> Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which a nation is composed, but in the international and worldwide field, between the complexes of national and continental civilizations. (Gramsci 1971, 350)

In one respect, however, Gramsci's theorisation has dated. He saw the USA as lagging behind because it 'has not yet created a conception of the world or a group of great intellectuals to lead the people within the ambit of civil society' (1971, 272). This is no longer the case. American not European universities lead global civil society, installing a conception of the world consistent with American economic, political and military power. More to the point, Gramsci remarks that hegemony can vary in the degree of integration it facilitates. Although hegemony mostly presupposes that account is taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which it is exercised, there is the hegemony of the Italian *Risorgimento*, which does not feel the need to secure concordance between its interests and those of the dominated groups or engage with their specificities such as languages and ways of life 'They wished to "dominate" and not to "lead"' (Gramsci 1971, 104–105). This argument is more contemporary, more indicative of the forms of American hegemony.

Manifestations of American hegemony

The instrumental strength of the United States in higher education is massive compared with all other nations. It has the third largest population, the largest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a GDP per head of almost US$42,000, and spends the highest proportion of GDP on tertiary education – 2.9%, about $360 billion, in 2003. The next largest spender is Japan at $51 billion. The United States invests seven times as much on tertiary education as the next nation (Table 1).

This overwhelming concentration of resources explains little in itself but is a condition for many things. How is US hegemony in higher education manifest? Hegemony is not top-down in the manner of a military command. It is accumulated in worldwide networks dominated by American institutions that define not just scholarly and managerial agendas but the idea of a university in this era. Hegemony is enabled by and expressed in American global geo-strategic mobility; that freedom to go anywhere and intervene in other national sites while maintaining territorial control of the homeland. This paper notes four aspects of US hegemony: research concentration and knowledge flows, the global role of English, and American universities as people attractors and as exemplars of ideal practice.

Table 1. US GDP, GDP per head, spending on tertiary education, leading researchers and research universities, compared with the next 10 OECD nations on spending and the five largest nations.

	Population, 2005 (millions)	GDP in PPP terms, 2005 (US$ billion)	GDP per capita PPP, 2005 (US$)	Proportion of GDP on tertiary education, 2003 (%)	Spending on tertiary education PPP (estimated), 2003/2005 (US$ billion)	Thomson-ISI 'HiCi' researcher, 2007	Research universities in SJTU ranking, 2006		
							Top 50	Top 200	Top 500
USA	296.5	12,409.5	41,854	2.9	360	3837	37	84	167
Japan	128.0	3943.8	30,811	1.3	51	246	2	9	32
Korea	48.3	1056.1	21,868	2.6	27	3	0	1	9
Germany	82.5	2417.5	29,309	1.1	27	243	0	15	40
France	60.7	1829.6	30,120	1.4	26	157	1	6	21
Canada	32.3	1061.2	32,885	2.4	25	175	2	8	22
United Kingdom	60.2	1926.8	32,007	1.1	21	444	5	23	43
Italy	57.5	1667.8	29,019	0.9	15	75	0	6	23
Mexico	103.1	1052.4	10,209	1.3	14	14	0	1	1
Spain	43.4	1133.5	26,125	1.2	14	18	0	1	9
Australia	20.3	643.0	31,642	1.5	10	105	0	6	16
China[a]	1311.4	8787.2	6701	n.a.	n.a.	18	0	2	14
India[b]	1095.6	3815.6	3483	0.7	27	11	0	0	2
Brazil	186.4	1627.3	8730	0.8	13	4	0	1	4
Russia	143.2	1559.9	10,897	0.7	11	5	0	1	2
Indonesia[b]	221.6	847.4	3842	0.3	3	0	0	0	0

Note: PPP, purchasing power parity; n.a., data not available. [a]Includes Hong Kong, excludes five universities from Taiwan. [b]Proportion of GDP spent on tertiary education in 2004 for India and Indonesia. Spending on tertiary education estimated using 2005 GDP data and the 2003 proportion of GDP allocated to tertiary education.
Sources: World Bank (2007), OECD (2006), Thomson-ISI (2007), and SJTU Institute of Higher Education (2007).

First the flows, concentrations and asymmetries in research knowledge. In 2001 US scientists and social scientists published 200,870 journal papers, Japan 57,420, the United Kingdom 47,660, Germany 43,623, China 20,978 and India 11,076. In Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation, there were 207 papers. Not much knowledge flows from Indonesia to the USA (National Science Board 2006). Further, whereas in 2001 the USA produced less than one-third of articles it accounted for 44% of citations in the scientific literature (Vincent-Lancrin 2006, 16). US institutions employ 3930 of the Thomson Publishing/Institute for Scientific Information (Thomson-ISI) 'HiCi' researchers that shape the SJTU rankings, compared with 456 in the United Kingdom, 256 in Germany, 253 in Japan, 18 in China, 11 in India and zero in Indonesia. Harvard has 183 HiCi researchers, more than France; Stanford has 134 and UC Berkeley has 85. There are 45 such researchers at Cambridge, and 29 at Oxford (Thomson-ISI 2007).

Second, American universities are the global hub of the communicative environment and are supreme in and through academic language. Institutions in all world regions have partial linkages with other regions but routinely link to US universities (Castells 2001). In hegemony 'great importance is assumed by the general question of language, that is, that is, the question of collectively attaining a single cultural "climate"' (Gramsci 1971, 349). Bourdieu puts it more sharply (1993, 20): establishing a canon is an act of 'symbolic violence' that occludes the norms it displaces and the underlying power relations sustaining it. Certain practices are legitimated as naturally superior and made especially superior to those who do not participate (Bourdieu 1993, 24). English is the first language of one-sixth of the world but the sole global language of research, marginalising Latin, German, French and Russian. It is often used in Masters programmes in non-English-speaking Europe and Asia. It dominates the managerial literature and the Internet.

Third, US universities are extraordinary global attractors of talent. American institutions are open and flexible. They provide superior scholarships and salaries. Foreign doctoral assistants have become essential to American research; the United States is the main site for postdoctoral places and short-term academic visits, and also draws later career migration. Universities in the American doctoral sector focus less on generating revenues from foreign students than on attracting the best people. Whereas 13.4% of all students enrolled in UK tertiary education in 2004 were foreigners, in the USA the proportion was 3.4% (OECD 2006, 303). But almost one-third of the foreign students entering American doctoral universities were doctoral students. In 2004/05 the American doctoral sector enrolled 102,084 foreign doctoral students. Almost two-thirds received financial assistance from their US university (Institute for International Education 2006). Having positioned itself as the world graduate school the USA then keeps one-half of its foreign doctoral graduates, including more than one-half of those from the UK. From 1987 to 2001 the stay rate for foreign doctoral graduates in science and engineering rose from 49% to 71%, reaching 96% for China (OECD 2004, 159). In 2003 three-quarters of European Union citizens who obtained a US doctorate said they had no plans to return to Europe (Tremblay 2005, 208). Net brain-drain in higher education is a problem for all nations except the USA. In using global people flows in higher education to boost knowledge power rather than accumulate capital, American universities decisively positions themselves in Bourdieu's subfield of restricted production as against mass or commercial production, distinguishing themselves from other English-speaking countries.

Fourth, there is the primarily American content of the norms of university and system organisation. The policy imagination everywhere is infused with two idealised institutional models that embody Bourdieu's opposing subfields and are based on a selective reading of US practices. One is the high-status not-for-profit private research-intensive university; selective, a magnet for donors and focused on research and graduate education (the Ivy League). The other is the for-profit vocational institution with broad-based training in business studies and perhaps

technologies, health and education; expansionary, spare and efficient, 'customer-focused' without academic frills like research (the University of Phoenix). In policy circles these two ideal types have each been earmarked for organisation as a particular global market. Global hegemony extends not just to normalisation of a single model but to the continuing reconstitution of the global field as a whole.

Yet these ideal types confront very diverse national systems and institutions, such as: the participatory universities of Latin American that take in a large slice of national economic, social, political and cultural life (e.g. the University of Buenos Aires and UNAM in Mexico); the German *Fachhochschulen* and high-quality vocational sectors in Finland and Switzerland; and research institutes in France and Germany. These other types and systems are marginalised by world university league tables, which codify the supremacy of the leading Anglo-American institutions, normalise selective science-intensive universities, and favour English language nations because English is the global research language. Like research publication, global rankings are a technology for securing hegemony (Marginson 2007).

Open and bounded

American research-intensive universities are not organised as a national system and are unusually open to foreign personnel, but American exceptionalism and the periodic American isolationism sustain a firm boundary with the rest of the higher education world and American institutions exhibit a remarkable cultural coherence in their dealings with it. Open and bounded. Openness is expressed in the free mobility of talent into the USA and the outward flows of American knowledge, a gift that no one can refuse. Boundedness is sustained by the American-dominated system of research and publishing in English and the abiding sense of national superiority. This is the *Risorgimento*. Rather than engaging closely with non-American institutions to learn the languages of use and build capability, US universities mostly ignore them, leaving them to evolve towards US templates according to their capacity and 'merit'. Scholars outside the USA are under-cited. The worldwide Carnegie survey of the academic profession found that while over 90% of scholars from other nations believed it necessary to read foreign books and journals, only 62% of Americans agreed, much the smallest level among developed nations (Altbach 2005, 148–149). The non-American world is on the periphery of American vision. But, for the rest of higher education, the great American universities loom large in the landscape.

American hegemony in higher education and university research rests above all on knowledge concentrations and flows. (Bourdieu's neglect of knowledge formation helps to explain his neglect of hegemony.) US university hegemony is akin to US domination of communications and the contents of film, television and hand-held media; and to American financial and technological might. It is almost akin to the US global domination of military capacity. Perhaps a case can be made for Anglo-American hegemony in higher education given the role of English, UK research strength and the worldwide authority of Cambridge and Oxford (although middling UK universities have less global clout than their American counterparts). But if there is an Anglo-American hegemony, the United Kingdom is a very junior partner.

Is there a way out? How solidly fixed are worldwide power relations in higher education? This goes to questions of global agency and ontology.

Agency in the global field

From time to time, university and research leaders engage in off-the-wall innovations not fully explained by prior positions and conditions, especially in the global field: for example, the first branch campuses in importing nations, the global schoolhouse strategy in Singapore, the MIT

open courseware initiative. Here limits of Bourdieu's theorisation of agency are apparent, with implications also for his theorisation of the field of power. The problem is not just that the changes in the global setting, the emergence of a worldwide communicative system and a single system of published research have transformed the map of positions and the position-taking options. Bourdieu himself would make that point. Rather, the problem is that he sees agency freedom, self-determining identity, as bound *a priori* by the stratification of class power lodged in the unconscious.

In *Distinction* Bourdieu talks about an opposition between 'the tastes of luxury (or freedom) and the tastes of necessity' (1984, 177). The potential for self-determination is confined to freedom from material necessity.[3] However, while self-determination *is* conditioned by resources and historical relations of power and it is essential to understand these conditions, they do not close the list of possibilities. Self-determining freedom is conditioned also by agency itself, by the imagination and the capacity of agents to work on their own limits. Gramsci knew this, with his emphasis on the will and individual initiative. Likewise Amartya Sen (1985, 1992) distinguishes self-determining agency freedom from resources, freedom from constraint and its other conditions. When these conditions are held constant, the range of choices may still be expanded; in the first instance by thought. To the long list of elements that differentiate self-determination in higher education and condition the map of power, including national GDP and investment, research capacity, language, the volume and intensity of cross-border engagements, and so on, we can add the *creative imagination* of governments, universities, disciplines, groups and individuals. In contrast, for Bourdieu 'strategy' is not based on conscious imagining and deciding so much as on learned dispositions, the habitus. The range and limits of possible position-taking strategies, appropriate to the position of each agent, is burned into the mind and conditions every action. Agents move instinctively in response to changing possibilities. 'Because position-takings arise quasi-mechanically – that is, almost independently of the agents' consciousnesses and wills – from the relationship between positions, they take relatively invariant forms' (Bourdieu 1993, 59). Conscious 'lucidity is always partial and is, once again, a matter of position and trajectory within the field' (1993, 72). This reifies not just human reflexivity but the reciprocity between structure and agency on which Bourdieu's system turns. He becomes trapped on the structure side of a dual he has created, before the dual can be re-reconciled. If the scope for action is decisively confined by limitations to our inner mental horizons installed by a prior materiality, self-determination has been locked.

A further difficulty is that Bourdieu universalises competition. There is no respite from the relentless war of all against all that continually eats into our conditions of possibility. Yet inter-subjective relations in global higher education are often cooperative. Bourdieu's pre-structuring of agency and conscious imagining also leaves insufficient scope for the multiple investments in both fields and identity characteristic of the open global setting (Sen 1999), in which positionality is continually made and remade by strategic action.

Global ontology

Arjun Appadurai (1996) discusses this broader range of possibilities, envisioning the global as a zone of new imaginings and the construction and self-construction of identity. Emphasising mobility, plurality 'and in general, agency', he describes 'a new global cultural economy … a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order' (1996, 32) with 'interactions of a new order and intensity' (Appadurai 1996, 27) in which human agents generate global cultural flows, and flows generate and transform agents. Diasporic populations use media, communications and return travel to create hybrid identities within more malleable configurations of locality, breaking the monopoly of nation-states over modernisation (Appadurai 1996, 10). Appadurai famously

specifies 'five dimensions of global cultural flows': ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes (1996, 33ff.) that are 'building blocks' of these 'imagined worlds'. Each scape has its own logic, and intersects with and conditions the other scapes in unpredictable ways. 'The suffix -scape allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes' (Appadurai 1996, 33). Global flows are structured but their structures are uneven, overlapping, disjunctive, asynchronous, temporary and contingent. This contrasts with not only Bourdieu's attenuated notion of agency but also his more robust notion of fields, which requires boundedness, predictability and a certain insularity.

The global dimension of higher education is in continuous formation, the map of positions is continually being reworked and novel positions are emerging. Why this greater ontological openness in the global setting? One factor is the growth, extension, reciprocity, dynamism, instability and contingency of cross-border flows. As the fluid ever-moving metaphor of 'flows' suggests, flows generate change on a continuous basis even as they themselves are changing. These effects are conditioned by permeable national borders, the transience of global networks and the flaky borders of the global field; and lacunae in the governmental regulation of cross-border relations and room for spontaneous association this creates. Above all there are the expanded potentials for agency freedom created by the global transformations in space and time: more multiple locations; faster passage between them; instantaneous, expanded, intensified and multi-associating communications; multiple and variously articulated spheres of action. All of this loosens relations of power.

Yet Appadurai's suggestive reading of flows, scapes and disjuncture also has limits for understanding global higher education (Marginson and Sawir 2005). He argues 'the nation-state … is on its last legs', and that 'globalisation does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenisation or Americanisation' (Appadurai 1996, 17). Claims that the nation-state is vanishing and hegemony is a paper tiger are less convincing since the assertion of American military-security globalisation after 9/11; and implausible in the higher education sector where capacity is shaped by patterns of national investment. The larger point is that it is unhelpful to consider the global as a single space, open and volatile, which contains the whole of human action. It is one identifiable space where human action is played out, suffused with unpredictability in the manner of Appadurai's scapes. It sits alongside the national and local spaces and connects with them at many points. Working across all three of these relatively open spaces we find more bounded and predictable (although no longer closed) domains such as law, governmental regulation and finance. These domains of practice have their own global aspect or dimension, and they intersect with Appadurai's global scapes, but they are not reducible to the global (still less the national) 'as a whole'. Grounded in traditions and institutions, domains such as law and government tend to be more regular and stable and tightly bordered than scapes. Nevertheless in a more global era they are bigger and less stable than they once were, and infused with greater dynamism and unpredictability by the scapes. One such domain of practice is higher education and the associated research. Within such domains, Bourdieu's notions of field of power and position-taking retain the larger part of their potency.

Even so, if the global space is immersed in the multiple and unpredictable with ever-growing scope for imagining, this places a question mark alongside American hegemony. Hegemony is a bold effort to impose form on flux, to stop time and centre control in particular sites. How could any such project ever be anything but provisional? How could it not fail 'in the long run'? That does not mean that US university hegemomy is ephemeral or incapable of present domination, only that the project must be continually made and remade as Gramsci saw until its capacity for renewal is finally undermined, fragmented or exhausted. Appadurai (1996) implies that hegemony can be subverted from below, in hybrid academic forms created in the gaps left by American exceptionalism and isolationism. There is more potential for hybridity in some

practices than others. People movement, where the US fosters openness, readily generates complex identities. Organisational models are nested in historical conditions and open to local self-determination and variation. In teaching there is plurality of languages of use, including the heterogeneous 'Englishes', hybrid responses to tenacious cultural traditions. However, and despite the fluidity of intellectual discourse, there is less scope for hybridity in research and knowledge. As noted, it is here, above all, that elite status and global power in higher education are secured. A tight binary logic of inclusion/exclusion assigns worldwide academic labour to one of two categories: part of the global research circuit that uses the dominant language and publishes in the recognised outlets; or 'not global', outside the hegemonic circuit, the bearer of knowledge obsolete or meaningless and doomed to be invisible. Will this hold? Appadurai's argument nests the closure of research within the larger openness of mobility and scapes. The global research system is layered over the top of a vast potential for imaginings. More concretely, there is pluralisation in the rise of China and other Asian science powers (China doubled investment in R&D as a share of GDP during 1995–2005) and the potential of Spanish and Arabic as global languages.

The expanded and more open global ontology is experienced differentially. Some have more freedoms of action than others. Bourdieu's point is that autonomy, capacity and scope for strategy are concentrated in the high academic subfield. Here an individual institutional break with hegemony is telling, but few will risk losing their place in the sun. The point about concentration is right but not the end of the story. All structures are open to change including hegemonic structures. Especially in the global field, any structural dynamic must be considered partial, relativised by the other parts of the field, provisional and in continuous transformation. There is no closure. One element always at play in the field and a primary source of this ontological openness is the imagination and will of agents.

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Notes

1. The work is also informed by 12 case studies of the cross-border practices of research-intensive national universities in the Asia-Pacific, the Americas and Western Europe (for example, Marginson and Sawir 2005).
2. The SJTU Institute of Higher Education (2007) measures include publication and citation in leading journals, and the location of highly cited researchers, and of winners of Nobel Prizes and field medals in mathematics.
3. In *On Freedom* Zyggy Bauman (1988) makes a similar argument.

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