

Association for the Study of Higher Education, International Forum
32nd Annual Conference of ASHE, 7-10 November, Louisville, Kentucky

Global flows and global field: a theoretical framing of worldwide relations of power in higher education [presentation version]

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Introduction: Worldwide higher education is a relational environment that is simultaneously global, national and local. It includes global agencies, governments and national systems, institutions, disciplines, professions, for-profits including e-learning sites and others. Most activity in higher education is nation-bound but a distinctive global dimension is growing in importance. This global dimension connects with each national system while being external to them all.

Though the global dimension has many roots, above all it derives from the worldwide roll-out of instantaneous messaging and data transfer, and cheapening air travel. The cross-border dealings of research universities, and inter-governmental relations on higher education, are more than a mass of bilateral connections. We can identify networked global systems with commonalities, nodes of concentration, rhythms, speeds and modes of movement. In research there is a single mainstream system of English language publication of research knowledge, tending to marginalise other work rather than absorbing it. There are converging approaches to recognition and

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quality assurance, such as the Washington Accords in Engineering, and in degree structures in Europe via the Bologna agreement.

The practices that distinguish higher education from other social formations are the credentialing of knowledge-intensive labour, and basic research. The global dimension is a bounded domain of cross-border activities in these areas. Though 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 its outer and inner relationships. This suggests Bourdieu, who terms such domains as 'fields of power'. Bourdieu's field is 'a space', 'an ensemble of positions in a relationship of mutual exclusion'. It is a social universe with its own laws of functioning. It enjoys a variable degree of autonomy, the ability to reject external determinants and obey only its own specific logic. Bourdieu theorises agents as 'positioned' and 'position-taking' within the field.

Any theorisation of global higher education as a field of power must account for two elements. One is cross-border *flows* of people (students, administrators, faculty); messages, information and knowledge; ideas and policies; technologies, finance capital and economic resources, which constitute visible effects. Global flows in higher education are very dynamic and uneven. In the decade from 1995 to 2004 the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship rose from 1.3 to 2.7 million. Cross-border research collaborations and institutional partnerships are expanding rapidly.

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 a field but not a level playing field.

The paper draws on Bourdieu's notion of field to analyse worldwide relations of power in higher education, supplementing this with Gramsci's argument about hegemony in discussing the global role of US higher education. The concluding section argues that Bourdieu's theorisation is nation bound, and tends to be trapped on the structure side of the structure/agency dual. To understand global ontology and especially global agency, with its relatively open potentials, we need to move beyond Bourdieu. Arjun Appadurai, with his global cultural flows, is one theorist that does that.

The global field: Bourdieu's field of higher education is structured by opposition between an elite sub-field of restricted production and a sub-field of large-scale mass tending to commercial production. Each sub-field has a distinctive principle of hierarchisation. In the elite sub-field, where outputs are scarce, the principle of hierarchisation is cultural status, autonomous and specific to the field. In mass or 'popular' institutions the principle involves economic capital and market demand and is heteronymous, though mass institutions renew themselves from time to time by adapting ideas from the elite sector. Between the sub-fields are found a range of intermediate institutions, combining the opposing principles of legitimacy to varying degrees.

Bourdieu's polarity helps to explain relations of power within national systems, where heteronomy is shaped by governments, market forces or both together. 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 Bourdieuan polarity inside single institutions. However, the point here is that the Bourdieuan polarity is apparent also in the global field. In the global sub-field 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 in the UK. Places in these institutions are prized by both students and academic faculty. Selectivity is enhanced by modest student intakes. Concentrating knowledge power to themselves by housing most of the leading researchers, their autonomy is enhanced by the globalisation of knowledge and their pre-eminence in the web, global university rankings and popular culture. Their global power rests on the subordination of other institutions and nations. In the opposite sub-field are institutions solely focused on revenues and market share; 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 UK and Australia providing international education on a commercial basis. A range of institutions are in intermediate positions. Bourdieu's notion of a differentiating field of power that includes/excludes, and is driven by prestige and social power at one end of the continuum, and demand-oriented market forces at the other end, is closer to the dynamics of higher education than the neo-liberal imaginary of a universal market.

Gramsci and hegemony: Bourdieu fails to distinguish hierarchy from overwhelming power in a field such as higher education. Gramsci's notion of *egemonia* (hegemony) is helpful here. Gramsci couples and contrasts two regimes of power. The first is domination or coercion by the 'State-as-force'. 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'. Rule by consent is underpinned by rule by force. Hegemony is secured mainly in civil society, including education. 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.

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, p. 350).

US has massive instrumental strength in higher education compared to all other nations. It has the third largest population, the largest GDP and a GDP per head of almost \$42,000 USD, and spends the highest proportion of GDP on tertiary education, 2.7 per cent, about \$360 billion in 2005. The next largest spender is Japan at \$51 billion. *The United States invests seven times as much on tertiary education as the next nation.* This overwhelming concentration of resources explains little in itself but is a condition for many things. How is US hegemony manifest? Hegemony is not top-down like a military command. It is accumulated in worldwide networks dominated by American institutions that define the idea of a university in this era. The paper notes four aspects of US hegemony: flows and concentrations of knowledge, the global role of English, American universities as people attractors and as exemplars of ideal practice.

Consider the asymmetries in research knowledge. US institutions employ 3930 of the Thomson-ISI 'HiCi' researchers that shape the Shanghai rankings, compared to 456 in the UK, Germany 256, Japan 253, and 18 in China. Harvard with 183 HiCi researchers has more than France. American universities are the global communications hub. Institutions in all world regions are partly linked with other regions but routinely linked to US universities. Then there is the global role of English. Gramsci remarks that in hegemony 'great

importance is assumed by the general question of language, that is, the question of collectively attaining a single cultural “climate”. Bourdieu puts it more sharply. Creating a canon is an act of ‘symbolic violence’. It occludes the norms it displaces and the underlying power relations sustaining it. Certain practices are legitimated as ‘naturally’ superior, especially to those who do not participate.

US university hegemony is akin to American domination of communications and the contents of film, television and hand held media; and financial and technological might. It is almost akin to the US global domination of military capacity. Is there a way out? How solidly fixed are worldwide power relations in higher education? This goes to questions of global agency and ontology.

Global agency and ontology: In *Distinction* Bourdieu talks about an opposition between ‘the tastes of luxury (or freedom) and the tastes of necessity’. The potential for self-determination is confined to freedom from material necessity. But while self-determination *is* conditioned by resources and historical relations of power and it is essential to understand them 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 knows this. He emphasises the will and individual initiative. Likewise Amartya Sen distinguishes self-determining agency freedom itself from conditions such as resources and freedom from constraint. When these conditions are held constant the range of choices may still be expanded, in the first instance by the *creative imagination* of governments, universities, disciplines, groups and individuals. But Bourdieu’s pre-structuring of agency and conscious imagining leaves insufficient scope for the multiple investments in both fields and identity characteristic of the open global setting in which positionality in higher education is continually made and remade by strategic action; for example in the strategies of Singapore or Phoenix.

Appadurai (1996) discusses the broader range of possibilities. His global is a zone of new imaginings and the construction and self-construction of identity. Emphasising mobility and plurality he describes ‘a new global cultural economy... a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order’ with ‘interactions of a new order and intensity’ in which agents generate global cultural flows, and flows generate and transform agents. Diasporic populations use media, communications and return travel to create hybrid identities in malleable localities. Appadurai specifies ‘five dimensions of global cultural flows’:

ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes, 'building blocks' of these 'imagined worlds'. Global flows are uneven, overlapping, disjunctive, asynchronous, temporary and contingent. This contrasts with not only Bourdieu's attenuated notion of agency but his more plausible notion of fields, which requires boundedness, predictability and a certain insularity.

Appadurai's scapes are useful for understanding global higher education providing that we do not essentialise them. It would be unhelpful to consider the global as a single space, open and volatile, that contains the whole of human action. It is one identifiable space where human action is played out, one 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 the more bounded and predictable (though not closed) domains such as law, governmental regulation and finance, and the institutional and regulatory world of higher education. These domains of practice have their global dimensions that intersect with Appadurai's global scapes, rendering them with some of the dynamism and unpredictability of the scapes. But within such domains, Bourdieu's notions of field of power and position-taking retain the larger part of their potency.

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.

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 hegemony 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 also implies that hegemony can be subverted from below, in hybrid academic forms created in the gaps left by American exceptionalism and isolationism. Here, at present, there is more potential for cultural hybridity through people movement, organisational models and teaching, than in research and knowledge. 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.

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 sub-field. Here an individual institutional break with hegemony is telling, but few want to give up 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.