

# Bourdieu, Capital, and the Postcolonial Marketplace

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## Introduction

**I**N THIS ESSAY<sup>1</sup> I attempt to assess the extent to which Bourdieu's notion of the different forms of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital and the mechanisms that regulate their acquisition, accumulation, exchange, and mutual conversion can help to elucidate diverse phenomena in the postcolonial marketplace. I begin by listing and briefly discussing a number of these phenomena which might be considered in the light of Bourdieu's conception of capital. I then briefly ask whether these are merely related phenomena or whether they are in fact variants of one underlying mechanism. In doing so, I try to assess the plausibility of a comprehensive account of commodification by means of Bourdieu's model in the light of a number of recent critical engagements with his ideas, particularly those by Graham Huggan, James F. English, and Sarah Brouillette. This leads me to a few points of criticism of Bourdieu's use of the notion of 'capital'. Finally, I suggest a few modifications and will sketch a case study: namely, the controversy about the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú and her testimonial *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. I will argue that, in order to conceptualize something like a postcolonial transnational field (in the sense in which Bourdieu employs the term) of literature and culture, we might want to rethink the relation between autonomy and heteronomy as discussed by Bourdieu; we

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might want to pay more attention to the narrativity, performativity, and medi-ality of actors' self-positioning in this field; and we might want to look more closely at the somewhat under-theorized intersection between local, national, and transnational fields of cultural production.

### 'Capital' and Selected Phenomena of Commodification in the Postcolonial Marketplace

It seems useful to begin with a few brief observations on the contemporary postcolonial marketplace which may plausibly be discussed in the light of Bourdieu's conception of capital. One such phenomenon, of course, is the marketing of exoticism, which Graham Huggan, Sarah Brouillette, and many others have recently discussed and which is also addressed in a number of essays in this volume. An obvious example is the exoticizing and essentializing display of 'the Other' on book covers: this frequently takes the form of 'ethnicized' author portraits on cover illustrations, even including the practice of representing them with significantly 'darker' skin colour.<sup>2</sup> Further widely discussed phenomena are marketing strategies in the tourism industry or the 'spicing-up' of fiction with a few indigenous expressions just unusual enough to add ethnic flair but not jarring enough to impede immediate understanding and easy consumption.<sup>3</sup> What we are looking at in all these cases is the commodification of ethnicity and difference to increase saleability.

The phenomenon of prizes and awards and their role in marketing and self-marketing, of course, also belong here. In this vein, Huggan has perceptively

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<sup>2</sup> A striking example is the cover illustration for the most widely used edition of Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, ed. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, tr. Ann Wright (*Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, 1983; London: Verso, 1984). The first edition appeared with Elisabeth Burgos-Debray as the author.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent example of such strategies in the North-American publishing market for ethnic fiction, see Jens Martin Gurr, "The Multicultural Marketing of Urban Fiction: Temporality, Language, Genre and Readership(s) in Luis J. Rodríguez' *The Republic of East L.A.* and *Music of the Mill*," in *E Pluribus Unum? National and Transnational Identities in the Americas/Identidades nacionales y transnacionales en las Américas*, ed. Sebastian Thies & Josef Raab (Tempe AZ: Bilingual, 2008 & Münster: LIT, 2009): 263–76.

analyzed the annual spectacle of the Booker Prize.<sup>4</sup> As a kind of meta-phenomenon in what James English, in an excellent recent book, has called “the Economy of Prestige,” we might briefly consider what used to be a possible strategy of breaking the cycle and of eluding complicity: namely, to refuse a prize. As English argues, this is no longer an option:

One can still refuse a prize, of course, but the refusal can no longer be counted upon to reinforce one’s artistic legitimacy by underscoring the specificity or the properly autonomous character of one’s cultural prestige [...]. On the contrary, owing to the increasingly acknowledged complicities between those who ostensibly affront or embarrass the prize and those who promote its interests, the scandal of refusal has become a recognised device for raising visibility and leveraging success.<sup>5</sup>

As an example, one might cite Amitav Ghosh’s 2001 withdrawal of his novel *The Glass Palace* from the Commonwealth Prize, which Sarah Brouillette has recently discussed. Commenting on Ghosh’s highly publicized withdrawal, she observes: “Here, an act of political refusal becomes a gateway to authorial self-definition and to career development and promotion.”<sup>6</sup> However, while that may well be so, it is a little facile to criticize Ghosh’s decision as a commercial move: protest *must* be made public to function as protest.<sup>7</sup> I will return to this mechanism below. Finally, academic trends and fashions (not least in postcolonial studies) can also be seen in this light. For instance, we need only consider the cultural capital that has accrued to postcolonial studies and to individual figures in the global academic field, a phenomenon of which postcolonial literary and cultural studies have long been keenly aware.

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<sup>4</sup> See Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001): 105–23.

<sup>5</sup> James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2005): 222.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers and the Global Literary Marketplace* (London: Palgrave, 2007): 72.

<sup>7</sup> For a case study of an artist in the field of tension between protest and mainstream see Gurr, “Shakey’s 40 Years of Zigzag: Neil Young between Commerce and the Counter-Culture,” in *Sound Fabrics: Studies on the Intermedial and Institutional Dimensions of Popular Music*, ed. Patrick Burger, Arvi Sepp & Martin Butler (Trier: WVT, 2009): 83–102.

### Autonomy and Heteronomy, Subversion and Commodification

It emerges from the discussions in the work of Huggan, English, Brouillette, and others that all these developments conceivably to be subsumed under the heading of the ‘commodification of (post)colonialism’ are not separate phenomena but, rather, related manifestations of one underlying constant. In a late-capitalist global economy, the strategic positioning of individuals and groups in academia, the commercializing appropriation of originally subversive music or literature by the mainstream, or the marketing of exoticism and ethnic flair in the tourism industry or in the fiction market appear inevitable as variants of totalizing commodification.

Bourdieu famously argues in *The Rules of Art* that the literary and artistic field is at every moment “the site of a struggle between two principles”: the principle of heteronomy, serving “those who dominate the field economically and politically”; and the opposite principle of autonomy.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, he maintains, the rise of the literary market precisely coincided with an ideology of disregard for the market. However, the claim made in *The Rules of Art* that originally “the literary and artistic field is constituted as such in and by opposition to a ‘bourgeois’ world”<sup>9</sup> is clearly no longer adequate. This neat conceptual separation between artistic seclusion and the demands of the market has rightly been questioned for some time now. Surely, the global literary marketplace – apart from countries where strong political censorship still prevails – is now to a large extent free of direct political influence, but, to an unprecedented degree, is part of the late-capitalist commodity culture and thus subject to the economic principle of heteronomy.<sup>10</sup> In this vein, Spivak, Dirlik, Huggan, English, Brouillette, and others have perceptively discussed the issue of postcolonialism vs postcoloniality and their entanglement. Thus, Graham Huggan distinguishes between postcolonialism as the “anti-colonial intellectualism that reads and valorizes the signs of social struggle in the fault-lines of literary and cultural texts” and postcoloniality as a “regime of value

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<sup>8</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, tr. Susan Emanuel (*Les règles de l'art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, 1992; Cambridge: Polity, 1996): 216; see also 58.

<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. also Brouillette’s discussion of the postscript to Bourdieu’s *The Rules of Art*, which she reads as problematising his earlier thoughts about these opposing principles in *Postcolonial Writers*, 62–64. English, too, aims to “contest some central aspects of Bourdieu’s grand narrative of art’s commercialization” (*Economy of Prestige*, 8).

[pertaining] to a system of symbolic, as well as material, exchange in which even the language of resistance may be manipulated and consumed. [...] [It is] a value-regulating mechanism within the global late-capitalist system of commodity exchange.” However, he makes it very clear from the beginning – and this appears to be one of the major concerns of his book – that “a cursory glance at the state of postcolonial studies at Western universities, or at the worldwide marketing of prominent postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie, is enough to suggest that these two apparently conflicting regimes of value are mutually entangled.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, as he further argues, “postcolonialism *is bound up with* postcoloniality – [...] in the overwhelmingly commercial context of late twentieth-century commodity culture, postcolonialism and its rhetoric of resistance have themselves become consumer products.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Brouillette has argued that “the very nature of the contemporary publishing industry makes claims to an authenticity defined by separation from the market a near impossibility.”<sup>13</sup> Rather more bluntly, Jim Jarmusch has pithily commented on the related phenomenon of the inextricable entanglement of mainstream and counter-culture:

[Capitalism and the counter-culture] coexist somehow. And the counter-culture is always repackaged and made into a product, y’know? [...] If you have a counter-culture and you put a name on it, you call them beatniks and you can sell something – books or bebop. Or you label them as hippies and you can sell tie-dyed T-shirts.<sup>14</sup>

To me, however, the point does not seem to be merely that they are mutually entangled or that a separation of the two is “a *near* impossibility.”<sup>15</sup> The problem, it seems, lies precisely in the very fact that a separation of the two is not a *near*-impossibility but a logical impossibility. Postcoloniality does exploit

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<sup>11</sup> Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 6 (emphasis in original).

<sup>13</sup> Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Dead Man* (London: British Film Institute, 2000): 51.

<sup>15</sup> Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 63 (my emphasis). Huggan similarly appears to me to underestimate the problem when he merely speaks of “the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between a ‘euphemistic’ realm of artistic promotion and public relations and the unashamedly profit-driven world of modern corporate commerce” (*The Postcolonial Exotic*, 213).

the saleable, hip, subversive anti-position of postcolonialism; there surely is a widely apparent mechanism of defusing appropriation of subversive material by the mainstream. Huggan points acutely to this dilemma when he states that “while postcolonial authors gain currency from their perceived capacity for anti-imperialist resistance, ‘resistance’ itself emerges as a commodified vehicle of symbolic power.”<sup>16</sup> Adding a further twist, Brouillette has more recently drawn attention to the marketability even of an author’s *awareness of* this complicity, a phenomenon she appropriately calls “the marketability of postcolonial self-consciousness.”<sup>17</sup> A related issue is the frequent game in current postcolonial studies of pointing out complicities with hegemonic discourses and practices in the work of other scholars. In this vein, Brouillette has argued that Huggan’s work on exoticism, too, is complicit with the system, that it is “a *symptom* of postcoloniality even while it is an assessment of it,”<sup>18</sup> and has pointed out that this faulting mechanism certainly also applies to her own work. Her chapter heading of “The Industry of Postcoloniality” points nicely to this inescapable business of postcolonial self-denunciation – in other words, to what might be termed the ‘postcolonial guilt industry’.

However, she does not quite point out just how logically inescapable and fundamental the mechanism is. This is not just a game central to the business we are engaged in – we are, after all, in a ‘denouncing business’. Complicity, and this seems to me to be a central point, is inescapable in the sense of Adorno’s dictum “There can be no right life in a false one” (“*Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen*”).

What we are looking at, however, is a double mechanism. On the one hand, the commercial mainstream will incorporate and thus defuse voices of dissent – this is the mechanism most perceptively theorized, I believe, by Sacvan Bercovitch in his reading of the functioning of the ‘American Ideology’ as being based on the absorption of dissent into hegemonic discourse.<sup>19</sup> This pattern is apparent in much of what Bourdieu writes, but it is not so neatly described and conceptualized as it is by Bercovitch, for instance. If we want to abstract the figure of thought underlying this mechanism, it might be termed ‘monistic inclusion’, the conflation of two seemingly opposite poles

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<sup>16</sup> Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Postcolonial Writers*, 22 (emphasis in original).

<sup>19</sup> See especially Sacvan Bercovitch, “The Problem of Ideology in American Literary History,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1986): 631–53.

into one of the extremes by means of incorporation. But the reverse process also applies, of course: voices of dissent actively make use of the system themselves in order to become audible as voices of dissent – Ghosh’s withdrawal from the Commonwealth Prize is a good example here.<sup>20</sup> Postcolonial subversiveness, in order to make itself heard, *has* to rely on the marketing mechanisms of global commodity culture. Here it seems to me that, all too frequently, we see these mechanisms in isolation and either accuse a writer of complicity with the mainstream *or* lament the tendency of the mainstream to commercialize dissent without realizing that these are dialectically paired expressions of the same totalizing tendency of global commodity culture. Bourdieu’s dichotomy of ‘autonomy’ vs ‘heteronomy,’ so much is clear, does not help. One might argue that these opposite principles are *aufgehoben*, sublated, in a Hegelian sense in the mechanism of the commercializing and defusing of subversion and dissent.

### A Few Problems with Bourdieu’s Notion of Capital

If all these phenomena can be seen as variants of the same underlying pattern of commodification, it would appear that Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘forms of capital’ is ideally suited to conceptualizing this pattern. However, there appear to me to be problems with this approach, for it is precisely the fact that they *are* emanations of one underlying mechanism that has serious implications for the validity and applicability of Bourdieu’s model.

In his extremely insightful book on *The Economy of Prestige*, English finds Bourdieu’s model “reductive” and argues that Bourdieu “leaves out or greatly underappreciates certain dimensions of art and literature.”<sup>21</sup> Huggan also criti-

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<sup>20</sup> In a related vein, Sarah Brouillette has recently discussed Rushdie’s *Fury* as a “critique of [the] capitalist culture in which it is entirely complicit,” as a saleable commodity which simultaneously critiques the system from which it profits; see Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 10.

<sup>21</sup> English, *Economy of Prestige*, 8. English himself attempts to rescue the economic terminology without falling prey to reductionism: He does admit that the “appropriateness and explanatory power” of the economic terminology he uses “have been much disputed.” What he calls “the economics of cultural prestige” “is woven together with, and cannot be understood apart from, the money economy, [but] is not itself based on money. It involves such terms as ‘capital,’ ‘investment,’ ‘endowment,’ ‘return’ [...]. But it does not assume the primacy of the money economy; it is a matter

cizes “Bourdieu’s somewhat Olympian view” of the world and rightly points to the limitations of his conceptualization of the relationship between artistic production and the market.<sup>22</sup> In what follows, I will attempt to identify some of these problems more clearly.

As far as Bourdieu’s notion of “forms of capital” and his application of the model are concerned, it seems to me that there are two seemingly opposite but again dialectically paired problems. On the one hand, there is the economic reductionism of the model; on the other, there is a somewhat hubristic claim of universal applicability and all-encompassing explanatory value. Let me briefly engage with both these points.

Bourdieu repeatedly claims that, despite frequent accusations of simplistic economism against him, his work “from the very beginning [...] was conceived in opposition to economism.”<sup>23</sup> However, in *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu himself speaks of the “deliberate and provisional reductionism” of his method, on the grounds that it allows him to “import the materialist mode of questioning into the cultural sphere from which it was expelled, historically, when the modern view of art was invented.”<sup>24</sup> In “Forms of Capital,” Bourdieu most clearly posits the primacy of economic capital:

So it has to be posited simultaneously that economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their

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not of reducing culture to economics, artistic motivations to money-lust, but of enlarging the notion of economics to include systems of non-monetary, cultural, and symbolic transaction”; English, *Economy of Prestige*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 213.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “A Reply to Some Objections,” in *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, tr. Matthew Adamson (*Choses dites*, 1987, Cambridge: Polity, 1990): 106. For the critique of economism, see also Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity, 1995): 40 and passim.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Bourdieu & Loïc Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology (Réponses: Pour une anthropologie réflexive)*, 1992; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992): 116.



possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root, in other words – but only in the last analysis – at the root of their effects.<sup>25</sup>

Roland Fuhrmann’s 2006 art installation *Valuta* obliquely lends itself to pinpointing a potential problem here: six industrial conveyor belts, each three metres long, are arranged in a circuit, carrying 100 kilogrammes of global coins around in circles. “This staged flow of money reduces the system of the financial markets to pure mechanics and shows its absurdity.”<sup>26</sup> This appears to be a great idea, wonderfully self-explanatory and apparently so true. But then what? Conceptually, this is singularly uninteresting.

Returning to Bourdieu’s model, the problem seems to be that the notion of ‘capital’ is a heuristic metaphor. In applying the model, there is a tendency – not least with Bourdieu himself – to lose sight of the fact that reduction to economic factors is a heuristic assumption. Thus forgetting that he is working with a metaphor, he literalizes the notion of capital and over-extends the applicability of the model. It is precisely due to the fact that the economism of the model is no longer recognized as an abstraction that he can then claim universal explanatory value: “the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world.”<sup>27</sup> The universalizing tendency here might remind one of Borges’s “On Exactitude in Science” (1946) with its famous image of the map of an empire on a one-to-one scale:

In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without

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<sup>25</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986): 252–53.

<sup>26</sup> See *Roland Fuhrmann: Valuta*, ed. Steffen Fischer (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2006): 14–15 (exhibition catalogue); cf. also “Roland Fuhrmann,” <http://www.rolandfuhrmann.de> (accessed 17 April 2008). The site shows several photographs and a film clip.

<sup>27</sup> Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital,” 242.

some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters.<sup>28</sup>

Although the relations between a model and the reality it attempts to capture and between a map and the territory it represents are conceptually different, the underlying philosophical problem, of course, is that of the ‘map–territory relation’, and the related category error is that of mistaking the representation for the object itself.<sup>29</sup> If the notion of ‘forms of capital’ thus ceases to be regarded as a heuristic model that can be used to *explain* current phenomena on a rather abstract level but instead comes to be seen as a model ‘*reflecting*’ the contemporary world, it loses much of its diagnostic value.

### Suggested Modifications and a Case Study

I have already suggested above that Bourdieu’s notion of a dichotomy between ‘autonomy’ and ‘heteronomy’ in conceptualizing the interaction between the literary and artistic field, on the one hand, and the field of politics and the economy, on the other, might be profitably replaced with the mechanism of commodifying and defusing subversion and dissent in the process of adoption into the mainstream.

In order to escape the economism of Bourdieu’s model while preserving its strengths, it seems that a shift of attention from the notion of ‘capital’ to that of the ‘field’ as a site of competitive interaction might be helpful. Let me try to take the concept of the field as the central notion and to supplement this by means of a number of further concepts. Though the notion of ‘field’ is, of course, just as metaphorical as the concept of ‘capital’, it is far less strongly tied to certain ideological preconceptions. One might thus speak of the ‘global cultural field’ as a – not necessarily spatial – social arena in which agents or groups of agents strategically position themselves and compete for desirable resources, recognition, prestige, awareness or interpretative authority. Thus, if

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<sup>28</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitude in Science,” in *Collected Fictions*, tr. Andrew Hurley (1946; *Ficciones*, 1989; New York: Penguin, 1998): 320.

<sup>29</sup> Taking his cue from Borges’s text, which he cites as an epigraph, Umberto Eco has written a hilarious essay on some of the conceptual problems with such a map; see Umberto Eco, “On the Impossibility of Drawing a Map of the Empire on a Scale of 1 to 1,” in *How to Travel with a Salmon and Other Essays*, tr. William Weaver (*Secondo diario minimo*, 1992; New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994): 95–106.

we take Bourdieu's argument that "the struggle which takes place within the field is about the monopoly of the legitimate power (specific authority) which is characteristic of the field in question,"<sup>30</sup> it can be argued that conceptualizing this struggle as one about 'capital' – of whatever form – will frequently not be very productive, and we should, rather, focus on the idea of specific performative strategies and tactics of self-positioning in the field. Space does not permit a full discussion here, but it is worth suggesting that this 'struggle' might also be conceptualized in terms of de Certeau's notion of hegemonic "strategies" and subversive "tactics."<sup>31</sup>

In theorizing such global postcolonial phenomena, we might also want to pay more attention to the intersection and interaction between local and transnational fields and competitive manoeuvres in these fields, because I think one can argue that inter- and transcultural phenomena remained somewhat under-theorized by Bourdieu, whose model seems geared towards an analysis of intra-cultural phenomena in 'developed' European nation-states or in developing economies.

What I am looking at is a model that allows us to study the interaction of agents in the 'global cultural field', the processes of mediation between cultural practices, institutional contexts, cultural production and reception, and social processes and movements. In order to arrive at this model, I believe we need to supplement Bourdieu's conception by taking into account theoretical insights into the narrativity, performativity, and mediality of such cultural positioning.

In order to discuss these ideas more concretely, let me suggest a case study and weave in a few remarks on how the suggested modifications might be applied. Let us take a look at the case of Rigoberta Menchú, the 1992 Nobel Prize winner who became a global icon with her 1983 testimonial *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. It is the story of the murder of virtually her entire family in the genocidal Guatemalan civil war between 1960 and 1996. She told her story to the 'Western' anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, who edited it and turned it into a book. As a very powerful account, which first drew attention to the genocidal proportions of the civil war and created awareness of the brutality of a US-sponsored right-wing government, this text quickly became

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<sup>30</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Some Properties of Fields," in *Questions of Sociology (Questions de sociologie, 1980; Thousand Oaks CA & London: Sage, 1993): 73.*

<sup>31</sup> See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, tr. Steven Rendall (*Arts de faire, 1980; Berkeley: U of California P, 1984*).

required reading in many North American courses on multiculturalism, globalization, gender studies, anthropology, postcolonial studies, and a good number of other disciplines. Given this prominence, the text became a bone of contention in the US ‘culture wars’ of the 1980s and 1990s.

In a highly controversial 1999 book, which was accompanied by a major media campaign, the anthropologist David Stoll undertook to demolish the myth and questioned the veracity of Menchú’s account.<sup>32</sup> He claims to have found that Menchú was by no means as uneducated as she claimed, that the land conflicts she writes about were not so much conflicts between the indigenous Mayan population and the ruling *ladinos* as conflicts between branches of Menchú’s own family. Finally, Stoll claims to have shown that some of the episodes of horrendous cruelty – such as the burning alive of her brother – cannot have occurred in the way she describes them. What he does not question is that the kind of cruelty and brutality Menchú describes did happen and was indeed common in Guatemala.

In February 1999, Menchú admitted that “she used others’ accounts as well as her own: ‘I was a survivor, alone in the world, who had to convince the world to look at the atrocities committed in my homeland.’ She denounced criticism of the book as ‘a campaign that has political ends, that is lying and that is taking things out of Guatemala’s historical reality’.”<sup>33</sup>

Both Menchú’s 1983 *testimonio* and the controversy around it afford interesting perspectives on the concept of the global cultural and political fields. Although it is possible to use the notion of ‘capital’ here, this would not get us very far. This is where the suggested modifications become relevant. What about narrativity?<sup>34</sup> The controversy turns not least on the generic question of the truth-claim made by the narrative mode of *testimonio*. In an interview given in the course of the controversy, Menchú insisted that “*I, Rigoberta*

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<sup>32</sup> David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder CO: Westview, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> “Peace Prize Winner Admits Discrepancies,” *New York Times* (12 February 1999), <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A07E5D7163AF931A25751CoA96F958260> (accessed 12 March 2008).

<sup>34</sup> For the connection between narrative and identity, see, for instance, *Narrative and Identity: Theoretical Approaches and Critical Analyses*, ed. Birgit Neumann, Ansgar Nünning & Bo Pettersson (Trier: WVT, 2008); the classic account, of course, is Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols, tr. Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer (*Temps et récit*, 1981–83; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984–88), esp. vol 3: 246.

*Menchú* was a testimonial, not an autobiography. [...] The history of the community is my own history.”<sup>35</sup> *Menchú*’s narrative mode can clearly be regarded as a characteristic example of what Susan Lanser in *Fictions of Authority* calls “communal voice.” More specifically, the form employed here corresponds to the subtype she calls the “singular form in which one narrator speaks for a collective.” Interestingly, Lanser adds that “the communal mode seems to be primarily a phenomenon of marginal or suppressed communities.”<sup>36</sup>

It appears that *Menchú*’s testimonial, as far as the construction and projection of an audience were concerned, relied on specific conventions familiar to one community that were not recognized accordingly by another community, the North American reading public. It is precisely this need for an awareness of culturally specific narrative conventions that lies at the heart of much of the controversy.<sup>37</sup> Thus, in an interview Stoll reveals a lack of just this awareness when he states that “Rigoberta said her story was the story of all poor Guatemalans, but the story of a single individual cannot be the story of everybody else, except in a literary sense.”<sup>38</sup> It is precisely the *point* of a *testimonio*, however, to tell the story of a community in the narrative form of a personal memoir.

What the Rigoberta *Menchú* controversy also lends itself to is the conceptualizing of the intersection between national and transnational fields of struggle.<sup>39</sup> The controversy can be thought of as a struggle in the trans-American

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<sup>35</sup> Rigoberta *Menchú*, “Those who Attack me Humiliate the Victims: Interview by Juan Jesús Aznárez,” tr. Jill Robbins, in *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, ed. Arturo Arias (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001): 110.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 1992): 21.

<sup>37</sup> For the genre of *testimonio* and the implications of the generic conventions for the debate, see Arturo Arias, “Authoring Ethnicized Subjects: Rigoberta *Menchú* and the Performative Production of the Subaltern Self,” *PMLA* 116.1 (2001): 75–88, and several contributions in *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, ed. Arturo Arias (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> David Stoll, “I Don’t Seek to Destroy *Menchú*: Interview by Dina Fernández García,” in *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, ed. Arturo Arias (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001), 68.

<sup>39</sup> For an insightful theoretical account of this intersection, see Sebastian Thies & Olaf Kaltmeier, “From the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wing in Brazil to a Tornado in Texas?: Approaching the Field of Identity Politics and Its Fractal Topography,” in *E Pluribus*

field of cultural politics, and the positioning both of Menchú herself and of other players in the debate can also be studied as strategic moves in a competition for attention and interpretative authority, with the struggle occurring at the intersection between national and global cultural fields. Thus, the positioning of Menchú's testimonial itself was clearly aimed at 'Western' audiences, and much of the ensuing publicity – culminating in the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 – was, of course, a global phenomenon. But the controversy around the book in the US academy is largely a national phenomenon.<sup>40</sup> We have to be aware here of the 'culture wars' going on in the US academy, a struggle about the academic canon, a struggle for interpretative authority, and a struggle about political agendas in the scholarly community, which coincided with a major generational shift in the US academy. In this struggle *I, Rigoberta Menchú* had been a central text for a number of years.

As I argued earlier, the question of whether the account is to be believed in all details is largely pointless for purely generic reasons; what is interesting here is the strategic positioning of the book and its harnessing in political and cultural conflicts as conceptualized from the point of view of Bourdieu's notion of the global cultural field and its subfields.

To conclude, in order to make Bourdieu's model more fruitful for the analysis of global postcolonial phenomena, it seems that a shift of attention from the notion of 'capital' to that of the 'field' as a site of competitive interaction seems helpful. Second, we might want to pay more attention than does Bourdieu to the narrativity, performativity, and mediality of such strategic moves in this global field. Third, the interaction between local and transnational fields and competitive manoeuvres in these fields is, I think, somewhat under-theorized in Bourdieu, and, in a twenty-first-century globalized world, needs to be considered more carefully. Finally, Bourdieu's notion of a dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy in conceptualizing the interaction between the literary and artistic field, on the one hand, and the field of politics and the economy, on the other, might profitably be replaced by an emphasis on the mechanism of defusing subversion by incorporating it – i.e.

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*Unum? National and Transnational Identities in the Americas/Identidades nacionales y transnacionales en las Américas*, ed. Sebastian Thies & Josef Raab (Tempe AZ: Bilingual, 2008 & Münster: LIT, 2009): 25–46.

<sup>40</sup> See also Mary Louise Pratt, "I, Rigoberta Menchú and the 'Culture Wars'," in *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, ed. Arturo Arias (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001): 29–48.

the mechanism of commodifying dissent as conceptualized by Bercovitch – and the inverse process of a tactical form of making use of the system. The positioning of actors in the field generally might further be studied by drawing on de Certeau’s notion of hegemonic “strategies” and subversive “tactics.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, esp. 29–41.

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