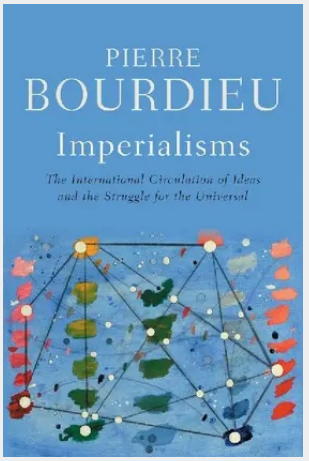
Bourdieu

Imperialisms

The International Circulation of Ideas and the Struggle for the Universal



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While Bourdieu's work on cultural production, the reproduction of inequality and the rise of the modern state is well known, his writings on the phenomena of internationalization and imperialism have received much less attention. Bourdieu's analyses of the international circulation of ideas and the imperialisms of the universal – where two political powers, such as the United States and France, clash on matters of cultural legitimacy – generated multiple research programmes on topics ranging from translation and scientific exchange to global economic policy. The constitution of globalized domains where national problems like unemployment, ethnicity and poverty are subjected to international import-export processes serves to naturalize the dominant vision of dominant countries and impose it on national political contexts. Freedom, democracy and human rights have been constituted as universal values and some countries claim to embody these values more than others. However, historical analysis shows that things are not so simple and that the actual content given to these values does not necessarily have the universality they claim. For example, the claim to universality of past colonial or imperial policies arouses suspicion in the eyes of some, to the point of calling into question the very idea of universality. But it is possible to move beyond the alternative between, on the one hand, a naïve belief in universality and, on the other, a disenchanted relativism that sees the universal as nothing more than a disingenuous way to legitimize particular interests. Bourdieu argues that the theory of fields enables us to move beyond this alternative by showing that the struggle for the universal can produce its own forms of universality that transcend particular interests. This volume of Bourdieu's writings on internationalization, imperialism and the struggle for the universal will be of interest to students and scholars in sociology, anthropology, politics and the social sciences and humanities generally.

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