



HAL
open science

Structural crises vs. situations of (political) crisis

Gisèle Sapiro

► **To cite this version:**

Gisèle Sapiro. Structural crises vs. situations of (political) crisis: A Bourdieuan approach. *Rassegna italiana di Sociologia*, 2022, LXIII (2), pp.299-321. 10.1423/104930 . halshs-03929328

HAL Id: halshs-03929328

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03929328>

Submitted on 19 Oct 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Copyright

Structural crises vs. situations of (political) crisis:

A Bourdieuan approach¹

Gisèle Sapiro

Abstract:

Bourdieu's theory offers several concepts to analyze crises. In the first part of this article I study what Bourdieu calls « reproduction crises », which unfold on a long- or medium-term basis, but can provoke an endogenous political crisis, like that of May 68. In the second part, Bourdieu's theory of the state as monopolizing symbolic violence and the notions of “politicization” and “phase harmonization” he uses in his analysis of the May 68 “critical moment” are combined and applied to other types of political crisis, resulting from exogenous factors such as coup, war, military occupation, or colonialism, in order to understand how they affect individuals, groups and fields. The case of the French literary field during the German occupation serves as an example of the phase harmonization of a social field with the political field, through its politicization. Common to all these types of crises, beyond their differences, is the occurrence of ideological struggles around the monopoly of symbolic violence. In the conclusion, the concept of *axiological operators* is proposed to study those symbolic struggles that intensify in conjunctures of crisis.

Keywords: crisis, field theory, political field, politicization, symbolic violence

¹ I would like to thank Jérôme Bourdieu, Alihan Mestci and the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on this paper, and Marina Urquidi and Elliot Weininger for the stylistic editing. The paper was presented at the conference “Pierre Bourdieu and history” in Oxford on April 22nd, 2022.

The notion of crisis was imported from the medical domain to that of society in the seventeenth century, but there was no control over its usages. In the nineteenth century, it spread into economists' theories in relation to cyclical temporality (Rosier 2003), and then was extended, at the turn of the twentieth century, to the political, cultural and social spheres.

This transposition of what was originally a medical notion came with the introduction of functionalist and even organicist models, which were poorly adapted to thinking about society. Moreover, the concept of crisis in society serves to describe very different things: revolutions, social movements like May 68, but also wars and brutal regime changes under uncontrolled forces such as foreign occupations, coups, and so on, and of course different types of economic crises, from the exogenous causes of neoclassic theory to the Marxist conception of overproduction crises and to cyclical-growth crises. The notion is also applied to specific sectors such as publishing or culture. Some crises are local, while others are national, international, or global. What is common to crises is that they challenge a preexisting order and disturb, or even disrupt, regularities, thus preventing predictions of the future based on the past.

Bourdieu's approach to crises is usually discussed on the basis of his analysis of May 68 in *Homo academicus*, and used to study equivalent mobilizations (Dobry: 1987; Gilcher-Holtey: 2008, 2021). However, his theory and concepts can help us analyze other cases of social and political crisis, on which I will focus here (leaving aside economic and cultural crises). I shall first address Bourdieu's conception of the structural transformation of society, which leads to reproduction crises. I will then reflect on the social consequences of brutal political crises such as coups, wars, and foreign occupations, which contrast with endogenous *longue durée* (long-term) structural transformations. Although Bourdieu did not specifically work on such crises - with the notable exception

of Algeria -, I will try to show that his theory of symbolic violence, namely his definition of the state as holding the *monopoly of symbolic violence*, and the conceptual framework he developed in his study of May 68 – *politicization, phase harmonization* – combined with his field theory, provide heuristic tools and explanatory frameworks for their understanding.

In his lectures on the state, Bourdieu adds to Max Weber's definition of the state in terms of a monopoly of physical violence, the monopoly of symbolic violence, specifying that the latter could suffice to define it, as it legitimizes the former (Bourdieu 2012). Symbolic violence is defined as a form of "soft" violence, which relies on the complicity of the dominated, because they have interiorized the principles of their domination, through education and/or vectors of the dominant ideology. The State produces the taxonomies and hierarchies that are internalized by the individuals it governs, including those who rebel against it. Political crises may be characterized by a struggle around the monopoly of symbolic and physical violence.

In differentiated societies, fields have a relatively autonomous order, specific logics and temporality. According to Bourdieu, crises (especially political ones) entail a politicization of society, which has a synchronization effect across the different autonomous fields, leading, thanks to their structural homology, to the harmonization of their agendas ("phase harmonization" in the English translation), though retranslating in specific manners in each of them.

The politicization results from the uncertainty engendered by the crisis, but the politicization process produces, in turn, uncertainty. Uncertainty is due to the upheaval of the "structure of objective chances" which enables individuals to predict the future and develop adjusted strategies. Bourdieu characterizes these conjunctures as "critical

moments", since they interrupt the ordinary experience of time and seem to suspend the reproduction processes, thus opening up new possibilities (Bourdieu 1984: 236-237).

Political scientist Jacques Lagroye (2003: 360-366) has defined politicization as a "requalification" of different kinds of social activities as political by individuals who are not professional politicians. Whereas the autonomization of the political field tends to exclude non-professionals from politics (Bourdieu 2000), conjunctures of crisis favor the intensification of struggles over the boundaries of the political field and over the very definition of politics, all the while politicizing the other social fields. I will develop an analytical framework for the politicization effect on social fields through the case study of the French literary field during the German occupation, that can be regarded as ideal-typical of how politicization operates in relatively autonomous fields.

As shown by Bourdieu with respect to May 68, reproduction crises may lead to a political crisis, be it a social (revolutionary) movement or a coup. On the other hand, social transformations due to sudden political crises provoked by exogenous causes (military intervention, political interference) such as war, occupation, and colonialism occur according to certain logics that are more or less predictable in light of the former social structure and power relations within the society (or specific social fields) affected by them. The boundary between exogenous and endogenous factors is of course unstable and related to interdependences (Zolberg 1985). Nevertheless, brutal crises involving physical violence still differ from *longue durée* crises because of the synchronization and politicization effect; colonialism is situated in-between, the reproduction crisis being fostered by the colonizer. Common to all these types of crisis, beyond their differences, is the occurrence of ideological struggles. In the conclusion, I propose the concept of *axiological operators* to study those symbolic struggles that intensify in situations of crisis.

Reproduction crises

Bourdieu's structural approach and his work on reproduction mechanisms led him to opt for the notion of « transformation » rather than « change » to designate the evolution of societies. His approach thus departs from event history on the one hand, and from evolutionist narratives on the other (from the Hegelian philosophy of history to Modernization theories in the social sciences). The notion of transformation implies that changes occur within an existing structure, through « processes » that unfold on a shorter or longer term, such as the division of labor described by Durkheim, Max Weber's rationalization process (in which the emergence of capitalism is embedded), or Norbert Elias's civilizing process. Bourdieu's structural approach, which takes into account both invariants and variations, continuities (of institutions and categories of classification) and ruptures, but also the metamorphoses of systems of differential gaps (unequal distribution of species of capital), underpins his historical conception of change.

What Spinoza defines as *conatus*, that is, the tendency to persevere in one's being, is neither inherent to social structures nor mechanical. Continuity does not only result from the structural inertia of institutions – « perfect self-reproduction » (Bourdieu and Passeron 1971, 76) – but also from strategies of reproduction that are implemented by social agents, especially those occupying dominant positions in these structures and seeking to perpetuate their domination, or strategies of active resistance when these institutions are threatened (Bourdieu 2000, 140, 144).

The rupture of pre-established harmony

In pre-capitalist societies, where reproduction mechanisms are not as institutionalized as in capitalist ones and where the species of capital are not clearly

differentiated, reproduction requires the constant investments of families in matrimonial, inheritance, and educational strategies in order to ensure transmission. Reproduction mechanisms and related strategies are at the core of fierce and permanent competition and struggles among groups or individuals (including within the domestic group).

When social structures are undergoing significant transformations, agents need to make adjustments, and sometimes even *conversions* (« *reconversions* » in French) that not all of them are able to undertake (such strategies depend on the flexibility of the habitus and its capacity to adjust). Crises can here be defined as the rupture of the « pre-established harmony » between the incorporated structures (habitus) and existing objective structures, which is the condition for reproduction. An example of this is the inertia of Kabyle and Béarn peasants' habitus vis-à-vis capitalism, especially in their traditional cyclical conception of time as opposed to the modern linear conception, or in their being bound to devalued resources such as the land (Bourdieu 1977; 2002). The hysteresis of their habitus provokes a crisis of reproduction, including in the literal biological sense, as described by Bourdieu in his study of male bachelorhood in the Béarn province of France (Bourdieu 2002).

The transformation of reproduction strategies

Capitalism is not the only factor in reproduction crises. The rise of the modern state was based on a concentration and redistribution of different species of capital, which led to the « transformation of reproduction strategies » (Bourdieu 1994, 9, my translation). The change from the dynastic state to the bureaucratic state, which Bourdieu analyzed in detail in his lectures on the state, involved a « process of de-feudalization », of « denaturalization », through the breaking of natural ties and family-based loyalties, which entailed struggles between two categories of agents, on one side the king and his

household, and on the other the king's civil servants (Bourdieu 2012). This transformation results from the advent of a « power acquired for a lifetime, based on 'gift' and merit and guaranteed by law (with educational titles) », which challenges the « power that is inherited and transmissible by blood, hence based on nature (with nobility titles) » (Bourdieu 1994, 10, my translation). This transformation led the dominant agents to develop *conversion* strategies in order to adjust to the new mode of reproduction. An example is the *conversion* of the landed aristocracy into a state bureaucracy in nineteenth-century Germany.

The modern state is not, however, simply a superstructure of production relations, as it is in Marxist theory. Its transformations are caused by struggles between groups and fractions. Jurists supported the advent of the state by legitimizing its double monopolization (as described by Elias), of taxes and of instruments of coercion (in Charles Tilly's words). Similarly, the action of philanthropists in the conjuncture of industrialization largely supported the transition from private to public responsibility, a process that is – in a circular rather than dialectic causality – related to the development of insurance, including universal public health insurance and other welfare-state institutions (Bourdieu 2012, 577).

Closely related to the rise of the transformation described above is the changeover from the direct mode of reproduction (controlled by families who designate their heirs) to the « scholastically mediated mode of reproduction », in which the educational credential delivered by the *grandes écoles* (the elite schools in France) became the equivalent of a nobility title, as it granted the right to access one of the state bodies (« *corps* ») while masking the mechanisms of reproduction involved in merit (Bourdieu 1989, 406). This transformation, which forces families to develop educational strategies, provoked social tensions and contradictions in the reproduction process, as it sacrifices

some of the heirs – the « failed ones » (« *ratés* »), who then have to reorient their career paths toward « refuge professions » or toward spaces that have not yet been bureaucratized – to the benefit of newcomers to whom school offers an opportunity for social ascension (*ibidem*, 409-10). At the same time, certain transformations such as the democratization of access to secondary and higher education usually lead to a structural transposition of inequalities within the system (for instance general vs. vocational or technical colleges), which are perpetuated in new forms, a fortiori in conjunctures of an overproduction of diplomas with regard to available positions. This type of contradiction, which engenders a gap between subjective expectations and objective chances, is likely to provoke a reproduction crisis that may lead, if not to revolutions, then at least to « critical events » such as May 1968.

Struggles within and among fields

In *Homo academicus*, Bourdieu defines this crisis as a conjuncture resulting from an encounter among independent causal series, an encounter that produces the « event ». Among these independent series are the specific logics of different fields, in which the struggles for the conservation or the transformation of power relations are shaped by specific and relatively autonomous forms. The transformation of these power relations are, at a medium-term scale, embedded in *longue durée* processes such as the differentiation and autonomization of fields, with the advent of bodies of specialists who claim a monopoly of the activity (religion, law, art, literature, philosophy, medicine, science, and so on) (Sapiro 2019).

While the most institutionalized among these fields (religion, law, medicine) perpetuate themselves through mechanisms of reproduction – including family reproduction in medicine and law (Charle 1994) – and cooptation, the least regulated

(literature and art) have evolved through symbolic revolutions since romanticism, featuring a perpetual crisis of reproduction. Again, none of these processes are linear, and while Bourdieu analyzed the conditions through which the literary and artistic fields in France became autonomous (Bourdieu 1992; 2013), he also described how the publishing field lost its autonomy from the economic field in the process of its rationalization and concentration into large conglomerates (Bourdieu 1999). I myself studied the loss of autonomy of the French literary field under the German occupation (Sapiro 1999; see below). Despite their different degrees of institutionalization, the structural homology between fields (the opposition between dominant and dominated and between autonomy and heteronomy), but also the power relation between them (the political field being generally dominant), favors their harmonization in *critical moments*.

Crises also challenge the disciplinary and geographic boundaries of fields. For instance, the geographic borders of a field can extend, at least in part, from national borders to transnational or regional ones (or conversely), as shown by Casanova for the literary field and by Heilbron for the field of social sciences (Casanova 1999; Heilbron 2013; see also, for an analysis of these mechanisms, Sapiro 2018a).

Political crises under coercion: Wars, occupations, colonialism

In his work on Algeria, Bourdieu mentions that capitalism was imposed on traditional Algerian society through colonial coercion rather than through endogenous developments, which aggravated the population's alienation. These changes culminated in a forced resettlement by the army of peasants into regroupment camps, entailing a crisis of traditional agriculture (Bourdieu and Sayad 1964). At that time, Bourdieu had not yet forged the conceptual tools which may help us to suggest a theoretical framework to think

about political crises produced under coercion by the interference of exogenous forces (war, occupation, colonialism) or by coups.

I will try to demonstrate that such deep political crises are characterized by a struggle over the monopoly of symbolic violence, which implies the production of legitimate identities, and I will combine this framework with the concepts of *phase harmonization* and politicization, which Bourdieu adopted to describe the political crisis of May 68, and which can be extended to other types of political crises: it is the struggles over the monopoly of symbolic violence and their retranslations in different fields (political, religious, legal, administrative, intellectual, academic) that entail their politicization and synchronization.

I will leave aside here, for lack of space, revolutionary conjunctures, which would require a longer discussion of the sociological literature (from structural functionalism to symbolic interactionism and theories of conflict) and of the literature in political science, which has been studied extensively by Dobry (1987), who relies partly on Bourdieu to criticize the theories of resource mobilization and develop his theory of multisectorial crises. But we can say that revolutionary situations result more from deep reproduction crises leading to a political crisis (a *critical moment*) during which a large mobilization is successful (although it can be favored by exogenous factors such as war and occupation, like in the case of the Paris Commune; in her book on revolutions, Theda Skocpol [1979] highlights such external factors).

Struggles over the monopoly of symbolic violence

Political crises entail a process of synchronization and politicization by subordinating all fields, including the economic one, to the political field and to its cleavages. Synchronization is not, however, a mechanical and automatic process, nor is

it an organic one like contagion; it is mediated by individuals and institutions, and it occurs over time, thus offering a framework for comparative sociological investigations. It also requires some « translation » of the issues at stake in the different spheres or cultural contexts. This « translation » is undertaken by activists and political organizations through a process of politicization that entails clear-cut divisions into camps.

In obliging everyone to organize his political position with reference to the position held in a specific field and in that one alone, the crisis tends to substitute a *division* into clearly distinguished *camps* (according to the logic of a civil war) for progressive distribution between two poles, and for all the multiple, partly contradictory memberships which the separation of spaces and times allows to reconcile (Bourdieu 1984, 235; 1988, 181, emphasizes his).

Another characteristic of political crises is the uncertainty stemming from the fact that the usual social mechanisms are no longer functioning in a predictable way. Drawing from astrophysics, Dobry speaks of fluid conjunctures (Dobry 1987).

Such a conjuncture opens up the public space to prophetic discourses, as Bourdieu argues using Max Weber's theory of the prophet (Bourdieu 1971). Prophetic discourses reinterpret the past in order to predict the future in a mode that is more emotional than scientific (Weber 1995, 320-25). These discourses are not born from the crisis; they exist at all times but they come to the fore in such conjunctures because of the uncertainty and unpredictability of the near future following traditional analytical patterns, which contributes to relativizing the traditional intellectual authorities. As Bourdieu explains:

[...] the constitutive power of (religious and political) language, and of the schemes of perception and thought which it procures, is never clearer than in situations of crisis: these *paradoxical* and *extra-ordinary* situations call for an extra-ordinary kind of discourse, capable of raising the practical principles of an ethos to the level of explicit principles which generate (quasi-) systematic responses, and of expressing all the unheard-of and ineffable characteristics of the situation created by the crisis. (Bourdieu 1991: 128-129)

The mixture of uncertainty and politicization favors receptivity to extreme discourses rather than to nuanced analyses, and the lifting of censorship in the public space. Even if the regime stays in place, uncertainty forces the government to develop narratives – what Bourdieu calls « *sociodicée* » - in order to justify the disruption and burst of violence in everyday life. Nationalism has provided the most common modern *sociodicée* for wars. Andreas Wimmer has demonstrated, based on 484 cases, that the nation state is the form of government that has engendered the highest number of wars (Wimmer 2013). Although he does not use Bourdieu's framework, his reflection on the role of ethnicity can be reframed in terms of a competition for the imposition of a hierarchy of legitimate identities. He shows that ethnicity will be more politicized and that an ethnic minority will impose its rule more easily in three cases: 1) in states that are not highly centralized and are endowed with a limited capacity to distribute public goods, collect taxes, and control the political process, like in Saddam Hussein's Iraq; 2) in states where power is divided among different ethnic elites, like in Lebanon; 3) in nation states that were formerly governed by an empire and have a less institutionalized relation with the political center (for instance the Ossetian or Abkhazian separatist movements once they became members of Georgia). In all these cases, the fight for the monopoly of physical violence is sustained by ethnic identification and by a struggle over legitimate identities (like in religious wars, which sometimes partly overlap with ethnic wars, as in Lebanon).

Imperial and colonial wars transform the occupied or colonized societies to varying degrees, from preservation of their mores to forced (religious, linguistic, cultural and/or economic) conversion and even physical extermination (as in the case of the Hereros). Some of these different options are illustrated in George Steinmetz's study of the German colonial field of power, using Bourdieu's concept. He argues that the mode

of domination depends on the competition among different groups within the ruling elite, and their diverging anthropological definitions of the colonized population: cultural exchange and mutual recognition among intellectuals prevailed in Qingdao; in Samoa, the colonial economic entrepreneurs aimed to convert the natives to the capitalist economy; whereas in Namibia, it was the commander of the colonial forces, General Lothar von Trotha, who ordered the extermination of the racialized Hereros (Steinmetz 2008; on the Hereros, see also Mamdani 2001). Although Steinmetz does not use this concept, these anthropological definitions pertain to the construction of legitimate identities that underpins symbolic violence, and as we can see, they determine the use or not of physical violence against the colonized population.

In his large study of mass extermination in the Modern Era, Abram De Swaan (2015) identifies two necessary but not sufficient preconditions for asymmetrical mass violence against unarmed populations and for citizens' tolerance of genocidal (or rather democidal) regimes: on the one hand, there are the mechanisms of dis-identification and dis-humanization of the ostracized population, with, as a counterpart, strong identification with the dominant group; on the other hand, there is the spatial separation – compartmentalization – of the targeted population (which applies to all the cases he studies, apart from Rwanda). Like Steinmetz, De Swaan does not use Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, but it is clear that the dis-humanization process (already analyzed by Kuper 1981) is part of the construction of legitimate identities by the state, which legitimizes physical violence against the « outgroup », in Merton's sense (Merton 1948).

Collaboration and resistance

From the standpoint of the population, all these forms of colonialism, imperialism, military occupation, and authoritarian regimes introduce the alternative between

collaboration and resistance.² Collaboration implies adhesion to the ideological narrative of the colonizer, occupier, or authoritarian regime, or a pragmatic arrangement with it (structural collaboration), whereas resistance requires an alternative narrative justifying the combat, usually in nationalist or religious terms, but often also in terms of universal and human-rights values such as self-determination and freedom, against the arbitrariness of pure coercion imposed by the conqueror (who may also have a universalistic *sociodiciée* like the French occupation in Germany after the Revolution, which had aroused sympathy among German intellectuals as representing a constitutional regime). The fight is retranslated in all the social fields, starting with the legal field, which is, together with the media and education, crucial to the struggle for the monopoly of symbolic violence. Recent research has shown, using Bourdieu's theory of the power of law, that the Taliban resistance won in Afghanistan not only through combat but also by reinstating the traditional legal system based on Sharia and relying on a bureaucracy of judges trained in religious schools in Pakistan (but not autonomous from the Taliban rulers), the Afghan legal system having been corrupted by the elites and destroyed by the Western occupying forces (Baczko 2021).

These crisis configurations often imply a change of personnel in the elites – the dismissal of civil servants and of professors, the banning of political activists and intellectuals who oppose the new leaders – and their replacement by the fractions of the elite expressing allegiance to the new power. Indeed, the new power implements a system of rewards for those who commit to the new ideology, in parallel to the repression of opponents and the implementation of a system of control and censorship of discourses in

² In such situations of crisis, the options for “exit” (Hirschman 1970) are restricted to exile, or retiring into silence and isolation, for those who can afford it (like Roger Martin du Gard during the French Occupation) or are constrained to hide. As we know, the notion of “inner emigration” used by novelist Frank Thiess in response to Thomas Mann's argument about German collective guilt for Nazi war crimes and the Holocaust is ambiguous (between resistance and structural collaboration) and controversial.

the public space, which reduces the possible dissemination of alternative narratives to the dominant ideology and thus contributes to normalizing the symbolic violence (Karabel 1996). A paradigmatic example of promotion as a reward for ideological service is the case of German sociologist Richard Thurnwald who, after having failed to get a position in the United States, became the theoretician of the Nazi empire – contributing to its “*sociodicée*” -, but this evolution is explained by his strategy in the academic field, which leads him from autonomy to heteronomy (Steinmetz 2010).

Autonomy and heteronomy: the example of the literary field during World War II

In my former research on the literary field during World War II, I worked on the impact on the literary field of the political crisis related to the defeat and German occupation of France (Sapiro 2013, 2014). This translated into a crisis of national identity and an obligation to choose between collaboration and resistance, although I showed that there were other options in between. Combined with loss of autonomy (through ideological control, censorship, repression, and rewards), the synchronization and harmonization of the literary field with the political field, which forced writers to define themselves vis-à-vis the crisis situation and thus politicized all the literary issues at stake, produced effects that are specific to crisis situations.

First, it opened the field to marginal agents, activists, and men of the party apparatus, all weakly endowed with specific capital but holding some political capital, who were given a chance by politicization to come to the fore; we find them at the most politicized poles of the literary field, in particular among the collaborationists, but also in the intellectual resistance (in particular, certain communists).

Secondly, typical of crisis situations, « the lifting of taboos » that are ordinarily imposed upon public debates « offers an opportunity to reveal social pretensions, or even

impulses, often scantily veiled by an appearance of political generalization » (Bourdieu 1984: 299/1988:175). The occupation opened the door not only to an overtly heteronomous discourse that reduced literary judgment to political, social, moral, and racial criteria, but also to a pamphleteering style, insults, *ad hominem* attacks, and what I call *stigmatizing discourses*, which participate in the framing of the outgroup as such (« Jews », for instance), and thus to the dis-humanizing process (Sapiro 2020).

Although openly political, these attacks, which were part of the struggles for the monopoly of symbolic violence, were retranslating the political issues at stake according to the specific logic of the field, thus attesting to a certain persistence of its relatively autonomous logics. Moreover, collaborators were relying on external forces to settle literary scores and to try and subvert the power relations within the field, a strategy that reflects the heteronomous logic. An ideal-typical example of this heteronomous logic is the attempt by two fascist writers, Robert Brasillach and Lucien Rebatet, to have the Catholic writer François Mauriac's novel *La Pharisienne* banned, even though it was authorized by the German occupying forces, and then their measures to boycott the book and the press campaign they organized against the author. Although facilitated by the weak institutionalization of the literary field and by its former politicization - from the Dreyfus Affair to the 1930s (Charle 1979; Sapiro 2018) - such a retranslation process can be observed - although in a more euphemized manner - in institutionalized fields, like the legal field, as attested by the fact that some lawyers and magistrates joined the Resistance (Israël 2005).

This transgression of the rules of autonomy aimed at overturning internal power relations helps to explain the third effect that is typical of the *phase harmonization* of the literary and political fields, that is, the restructuring of the former around principles

homologous to those that organize the latter, which can be observed in other fields (intellectual, academic, legal, artistic, musical³) at the same period, or in the literary fields under the Communist regimes (Dragomir 2007). Far from proving its solidarity in the face of the foreign occupation, the literary field was divided among different political camps, and internal struggles took a very radical form. These struggles crossed almost all the literary institutions; more muffled in the Académie Française, where an *esprit de corps* reigned, they provoked rowdy splits in the Académie Goncourt. Literary institutions were indeed more or less obliged to provide guarantees to the Vichy regime and to the occupying forces according to their age, legal status, prestige, and the symbolic stakes they represented; thus, while a very old institution like the Académie Française, an official body [*corps constitué*] of the French state, needed, in order to continue « being », nothing more than its own institutional inertia - or *conatus*, to use Spinoza's concept, which inspired Bourdieu's conception of inertia -, the Académie Goncourt, a « nonprofit organization serving the public interest » set up in 1904, which owes its symbolic power to the media resonance of its annual award, had to adjust to the dominant ideology in order to continue to « exist » (it granted the 1941 award to Henri Pourrat, whose literature embodied the Vichy return-to-the-land ideology).

The crisis affected individuals and institutions in ways that varied according to their social position; the most fragile – Jews, foreigners, communists – those who were *stigmatized* according to the hierarchy of legitimate identities, or framed as terrorists in the case of the latter, were the most threatened and were reduced to silence or clandestinity, and many were doomed to death, like the writer Irène Némirovsky, a Jewish Russian immigrant, whose life ended in 1942 in Auschwitz. The *stigmatizing discourses* of the collaborators and the supporters of the Vichy regime helped to justify their

³ Even though they do not use field theory, similar divisions are observed by historians in the artistic and musical milieus (Bertrand Dorléac, 1993; Le Bail 2016).

exclusion and the physical violence which was inflicted on some, including, in some cases torture and death. For instance, the leader of the monarchist league Action française, Charles Maurras, who was promoted as one of Marshall Pétain's counsellors, regularly called in his newspaper for the immediate shooting, with no trial, of the Gaullist and communist résistants combatting the occupying forces - stigmatized as "traitors" and "terrorists" - and also for the slaughter of hostages from their families (Sapiro 2020).

Despite the loss of autonomy and the *phase harmonization* with the political field, however, the very logics according to which the literary field was restructured relates to the structural history of the literary field. As was the case with university faculties in May 1968 (Bourdieu 1984/1988), the writers' political choices are explained in large part by the positions they occupied in the literary field and its struggles prior to France's defeat. Hence, a crisis also has a revelatory effect: it unveils the field's structure, at least before this structure is affected by the crisis. The subordination of the economic field to the political field highlights the propensity of writers situated at the pole of large-scale production to sacrifice the rule of the autonomy of art to heteronomous logics – economic, political, media – and to align with fractions holding what Bourdieu calls "temporal power" in order to defend or restore the social order (in the same way the dominant pole of the French literary field championed "state reason" - *raison d'Etat* - during the Dreyfus Affair; Charle 1979⁴). In contrast, it is when its autonomy is threatened that the pole of small-scale production reveals its subversive potential.

This opposition becomes more specific at several levels (especially within institutions) and is embodied in struggles in which different conceptions of literature and

⁴ As Christophe Charle (1979) demonstrated, the political crisis provoked by the Dreyfus Affair politicized and divided the literary field along lines that can be superimposed on the field's structure, and mainly the opposition between the dominant pole, embodied by the Académie française, and the dominated pole, represented by the symbolist avant-garde. The naturalists, who occupied intermediate position, were divided. It is interesting to note that the literary field was at the time challenged by the crisis of the book industry, which probably triggered the inner division of the field.

of the writer's social role confront one another. These struggles, which reveal the complex imbrication of ethical, aesthetic, and political dispositions, as well as the dynamics of collective assigning of positions (annexation, stigmatization, labeling, calls to order), refer back to the field's structural history, as illustrated by the « quarrel of the bad masters », in which famous writers and public intellectuals were accused of being responsible for the military defeat of France.

While a crisis has a revelatory effect, it also has transforming effects and a specific dynamic. One of the effects of the crisis during the occupation was the tightening of the struggle that structured the field around the opposition between autonomy and heteronomy. Whereas in ordinary times *avant-gardes* tend to combat those who occupy a dominant position at the autonomous pole of the field, which I call the *aesthetes*, the crisis favored an inter-generational alliance at this pole. Heteronomous conditions of production, transgression of norms of literary debate by collaborationist intellectuals and their recourse to extra-literary forces to regulate the internal power relations contributed to uniting together writers of the opposition in a fight to reconquer literary autonomy, which merged with the ideological fight against the Nazi occupier and against the Vichy regime.

The symbolic reunification of a literary field that had been split apart into the two zones (« free » and occupied) and exile operated primarily by means of a device for evading censorship through a coded language, which was baptized « literary contraband », for example speaking of the present by using the events of the national past as an allegory. This device, which was decrypted by the initiated of the adversary camp, became too risky in 1942, however, when measures of control over printing hardened. Underground literary activity started at this time.

This underground activity developed thanks to another type of improbable

alliance made possible by the crisis conjuncture, between writers situated at the autonomous pole of the literary field but deprived of their habitual outlets and the clandestine Communist Party, which offered them the material means to become engaged with proper literary devices. This alliance is related to another phenomenon typical of situations of crisis, namely the central role played by political apparatuses in mobilizing an opposition (Bourdieu, 1984:247-8/1988, 191-92). Based on literary affinities between communists and non-communists, this alliance was mediated by individuals who belonged to both groups, such as the poets Aragon and Paul Éluard (who joined the French Communist Party in 1942). Thanks to their prestige, they attracted young « pretenders » or « newcomers », to use the vocabulary of field theory. The clandestine recruitment in the so-called free southern zone relied on the literary networks that Aragon had set up after the defeat around small literary magazines, where he had developed the « poetic contraband » device.

From this alliance was born a new organization, the Comité National des Écrivains (CNE, or National Committee of Writers). The appearance of this grouping is a specific effect of the crisis. It is the fruit of, on the one hand, the incapacity of traditional institutions like the Académie Française and the Académie Goncourt to defend the autonomy of the literary field in the face of cooptation enterprises and the hijacking of their symbolic capital; and on the other, of the margin of maneuver open for individual initiatives within political organizations – here the Communist Party – in *critical moments*. Its simultaneously literary and political character makes the CNE a typical organization of such *critical moments*. It also shows that in a conjuncture of crisis and loss of autonomy, the struggle to reconquer autonomy brings about new forms of dependence with respect to extra-literary (political) forces – in this case, the clandestine Communist Party – and hence a new threat of heteronomy that the postwar period would

ultimately confirm.

Conclusion: The role of axiological operators in crises

Two forms of crises were distinguished in this article: reproduction crises due to structural transformations that occur over the *longue durée* or on a medium-term temporality; and political crises due to a coup or to exogenous factors such as war, military occupation, or colonialism, with the ensuing brutal disruption of the social order. Bourdieu's theory provides an explanatory framework and heuristic conceptual tools for both cases.

In the first, the crisis stems from the discrepancy between habitus and social structure, and the hysteresis effect which makes it more or less difficult for different social groups to adjust to the new conditions. It may lead, among the latter, to different types of strategies that may be loosely arranged under three ideal types: 1) a fatalistic acceptance of the new order and of their own *déclassement* (downgrading); 2) strategies of adjustment and *reclassement* which may imply conversion (*reconversion*); 3) collective rejection through political mobilization, which may provoke a political crisis, like in May 68 (strikes, uprisings, rebellions, and even revolutions).

In the second, the sudden change in the governing structure induces a *politicization* and *harmonization* of the social fields, promoting the fractions expressing allegiance to the new ruling forces and ostracizing the opponents and the *stigmatized* groups (for instance the Jews in occupied France). This heteronomous upheaval of power relations within the fields, which is retranslated in specific terms as we saw in the case of the French literary field during the German occupation, usually produces resistance within the autonomous fractions, which can take a more or less openly politicized form, entailing more or less fierce repression; many of the 2,000 Turkish academics who signed

a petition for peace, for instance, were tried for terrorist propaganda and some of them were dismissed from their jobs. The usage of « legal » procedures and tools that are adapted to the political objectives, which reveals both the symbolic power of law and its arbitrariness (Bourdieu 1986), is typical of the need for these new governing forces to establish their domination not only through their monopoly of physical violence, but also that of symbolic violence, aimed at « legitimizing » the former.

The struggle around the monopoly of symbolic violence is manifested in the overproduction of narratives and prophecies, which is typical of crisis conjunctures – not only political ones, but also economic ones, or cultural ones⁵ – as a consequence of the uncertainty regarding the future and in order to establish – or contest – the new powers' legitimacy altogether. In these struggles, which occur in the field of ideological production, the legitimate representation and interpretation of the crisis is at stake; it entails proposing an explanatory framework and thus denouncing the causes of the crisis, while designating the individuals or groups deemed responsible for the crisis, like in the « quarrel of the bad masters » in occupied France.

Reproduction crises also involve a change in power relations, which comes with narratives and prophecies exerting symbolic violence by justifying the marginalization of the degraded groups, although the longer temporal framework and the absence of physical violence make these struggles over the dominant vision of the world less concentrated, less harmonized across social fields and less politicized. These long-term transformations may lead to a more fatalistic view of the social transformation from the standpoint of the « losers », and to more individual or local forms of resistance through inertia and adjustment strategies. In some conjunctures, however, like in May 68, the reproduction

⁵ I proposed a tentative analysis of what a cultural crisis is in a conference entitled *Crises and cultures: the study of culture facing the challenges of a changing world*, held at Sofia University on October 19 and 20, 2021.

crisis can coalesce into a politicized uprising thanks to the role of political organizations, and reverse the hierarchy of legitimate identities by valorizing the subaltern groups (workers, women, colonized or indigenous people⁶).

In order to study more precisely the ideological struggles around the legitimate interpretation of a crisis and more generally the competition for imposing or challenging the dominant worldview, I have proposed the concept of *axiological operators* (Sapiro 2021). I call *axiological operators* notions or expressions such as « progress », « modernity », « freedom », and « human rights », or conversely, « tradition », « roots », « social order », and « civilization », which provide systems of cultural oppositions, and at the same time their meaning and their position in a hierarchy of values through spatial designators – in this case high and low – with a moral connotation of worthy (*digne*) and unworthy or undignified (*indigne*). These notions are not and do not function as *axiological operators* in themselves; they are given a specific meaning in an ideological framework and in a social configuration, and they become core notions of these ideologies and their related narratives, for which they serve as a synecdoche. They also euphemize and legitimize the forms of violence perpetrated in their names: they are thus key in the "*sociodicée*". The notion of « civilization » served, for instance, to justify French colonialism. The social efficacy of such operators stems from their ability to unify, symbolically, systems of classification or heterogeneous types of hierarchies in the order of values and institutions. Such general principles are instrumental in the construction of « causes » as universal, lest those causes otherwise be discredited as defending particular interests (as illustrated by the corporatism reproach).

Consequently, *axiological operators* play a major role in symbolic struggles, especially in periods of social transformation, but they are also in « normal » times a

⁶ See for instance, on the indigenous politics of the Movement for Socialism in Bolivia, Postero 2017 and Poupeau 2021.

constant object of struggle for their definition and appropriation within the field of ideological production. Situations of crisis, or *critical moments*, make these symbolic struggles more intense, more explicitly ideological and more concentrated, fostering the spread and retranslation of these *axiological operators* across fields and thus contributing to the *harmonization* and *politicization* of the latter. Opponents to the change of power relations also use *axiological operators* by working to counter the narrative imposed by the winners; for instance, in occupied France, while the Vichy regime and its ideologues qualified the *résistants* as « traitors » and « terrorists », thus justifying their killing, the resistance presented them as national heroes who sacrificed their lives to combat the occupying forces, and the underground literature played a major role in this symbolic struggle (Sapiro 2018b). The ideological struggle over the framing (in Goffman's sense) of the crisis used a common *axiological operator*, « national interest » while connecting it to other, different *axiological operators*: « social order » and « authority » on the side of the Vichy regime; « freedom » and « independence » on the side of the *résistants*. After the war, it was the collaborators and the supporters of the Vichy regime's collaboration policy who would be designated as « traitors » and tried for the crime of « *intelligence avec l'ennemi* ». These are just some examples. In each socio-cultural and political configuration, the relevant *axiological operators* - there are usually only a few words or notions who function as such - have to be identified and the ideological work they perform described, especially in the interpretation of crises.

This article focused on reproduction and political crises, but they share with economic and cultural crises the ideological struggles over the imposition of the dominant worldview and the intensive use of *axiological operators* in these struggles in order to legitimize or contest the new social order and its symbolic hierarchies. Thus, the concept of *axiological operators* can prove useful in a Bourdieuan research program on struggles

for the monopoly of symbolic violence, that reach their peak in crisis conjunctures, and their role in the *harmonization* and *politicization* of social fields.

References

- Baczko, A. (2021), « La Guerre par le droit, Les tribunaux Taliban en Afghanistan », Paris, CNRS Éditions.
- Bertrand Dorléac, L. (1993), « L'Art de la défaite, 1940-1944 », Paris, Seuil.
- Bourdieu, P. (1971) *Une interprétation de la théorie de la religion selon Max Weber*, « Archives européennes de sociologie », 12, 1, pp. 3-21.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) « Algérie 60. Structures économiques et structures temporelles », Paris, Minuit.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984), « Homo academicus », Paris, Minuit.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) *La force du droit*, in « Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales », 64, pp. 3-19.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988) « Homo academicus », Stanford CA, Stanford University Press (or. ed. 1984).
- Bourdieu, P. (1989) « La Noblesse d'État. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps », Paris, Minuit.
- Bourdieu P. (1991) « Language and Symbolic Power ». Edited by J. B. Thompson, English Transl. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1992) « Les Règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire », Paris, Seuil.
- Bourdieu, P. (1994) *Stratégies de reproduction et modes de domination*, in « Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales », 105, pp. 3-12.

G. Sapiro, « Structural crises vs. situations of (political) crisis: A Bourdieuan approach », *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, vol. LXIII, n° 2, 2022, p. 299-321. DOI: 10.1423/104930.

Bourdieu, P. (1999) *Une révolution conservatrice dans l'édition*, in « Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales », 126-127, pp. 3-28.

Bourdieu, P. (2000). « Propos sur le champ politique », Lyon, Presses universitaires de Lyon.

Bourdieu, P. (2000) « Les Structures sociales de l'économie », Paris, Seuil.

Bourdieu, P. (2002) « Le Bal des célibataires. Crise de la société paysanne en Béarn », Paris, Seuil, « Points ».

Bourdieu, P. (2012) « Sur l'État. Cours au Collège de France, 1989-1992 », Paris, Raisons d'agir/Seuil.

Bourdieu, P. (2013) « Manet. Une révolution symbolique. Cours au Collège de France, 1998-2000 », suivis d'un manuscrit inachevé de Pierre et Marie-Claire Bourdieu, Paris, Raisons d'agir/Seuil.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.-C. (1971), « La Reproduction », Paris, Minuit.

Bourdieu, P. and Sayad A. (1964) « Le Déracinement. La crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie », Paris, Minuit.

Casanova P. (1999), « La République mondiale des lettres », Paris, Seuil.

Charle, C. (1979), « La crise littéraire à l'époque du naturalisme : roman, théâtre et politique. Essai d'histoire sociale des groupes et des genres littéraires », Paris, Presses de l'École normale supérieure.

Charle, C. (1994) « La République des universitaires (1870-1940) », Paris, Seuil.

De Swaan, A. (2015). « The Killing Compartments: The Mentality of Mass Murder ». New Haven, Yale University Press.

Dobry, M. (1987) « Sociologie des crises politiques. La dynamique des mobilisations multisectorielles », Paris, Presse de Sciences Po (2009 reprint).

G. Sapiro, « Structural crises vs. situations of (political) crisis: A Bourdieuan approach », *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, vol. LXIII, n° 2, 2022, p. 299-321. DOI: 10.1423/104930.

Dragomir L. (2007) « L'Union des écrivains. Une institution littéraire transnationale à l'Est : l'exemple roumain », Paris, Belin.

Gilcher-Holtey (2008). « Die 68er Bewegung. Deutschland - Westeuropa – USA », München Beck.

Gilcher-Holtey (2021). *Le moment critique*, in « Revue française d'éthique appliquée », 11, 1, pp. 61-77.

Gorski, P.S. (2013) « Bourdieu and Historical Analysis », Durham NC, Duke University Press.

Hirschmann, A. (1970) « Exit, Voice and Loyalty », Cambridge, Harvard.

Heilbron J. (2013) *The social sciences as an emerging global field*, in « Current Sociology », 62, 5, pp. 685-703.

Israël L. (2005) « Robes noires, années sombres. Avocats et magistrats en Résistance pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale », Paris, Fayard.

Karabel J. (1996) *Towards a theory of intellectuals and politics*, in « Theory and Society », 25, pp. 205-23.

Kuper, L. (1981) « Genocide: Its Political Use in the 20th Century », New Haven, Yale University Press.

Le Bail K. (2016) « La Musique au pas. Être musicien sous l'Occupation », Paris, CNRS Editions.

Mamdani, M. (2001) *A Brief History of Genocide*, « Transition », 87, pp. 26-47

Medvetz T., Sallaz J. eds. (2018) « The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu », Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Merton, R. K. (1948) *The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*, in « The Antioch Review », 8, 2, pp. 193-210.

G. Sapiro, « Structural crises vs. situations of (political) crisis: A Bourdieuan approach », *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, vol. LXIII, n° 2, 2022, p. 299-321. DOI: 10.1423/104930.

Postero, N. (2017) « The Indigenous State: Race, Politics, and Performance in Plurinational Bolivia », Oakland, University of California Press.

Poupeau, F. (2022) « Altiplano. Fragments d'une révolution (Bolivie, 1999-2019) », Paris, Raisons d'agir.

Rosier, Bernard (2003) « Les Théories des crises économiques », Paris, La Découverte.

Sapiro, G. (2013) *Structural History and Crisis Analysis: The Literary Field in France during the Second World War*, in P. Gorski, ed. (2013), cit., pp. 266-85.

Sapiro, G. (2014) « The French Writers' War » (1940-1953), Durham, Duke University Press (or. ed. 1999).

Sapiro, G. (2018a) *Field Theory from a Transnational Perspective*, in T. Medvetz, J. Sallaz, eds. (2018), cit., pp. 161-82. (English transl. of : Sapiro, G. (2013) *Le champ est-il national ? La théorie de la différenciation sociale au prisme de l'histoire globale*, in « Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales », 200, pp. 70-85).

Sapiro G. (2018b) « Les Écrivains et la politique en France. De l'affaire Dreyfus à la Guerre d'Algérie », Paris, Seuil.

Sapiro, G. (2019) *Rethinking the Concept of Autonomy for the Sociology of Symbolic Goods*, « Biens Symboliques / Symbolic Goods » [Online], 4, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/bssg.334>.

Sapiro, G. (2020) « Des mots qui tuent. La responsabilité de l'intellectuel en temps de crise (1944-1945) », Paris, Seuil, Points ».

Sapiro, G. (2021) *Against Self-interest: The codification of « disinterestedness » as an axiological operator in religion, aesthetics, and the ethics of intellectual professions*, in C. Zabel, ed. (2021), cit., pp. 241-60.

G. Sapiro, « Structural crises vs. situations of (political) crisis: A Bourdieuan approach », *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, vol. LXIII, n° 2, 2022, p. 299-321. DOI: 10.1423/104930.

Skocpol, T. (1979) « States and Social Revolutions a Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China », Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Steinmetz, G. (2008) *The Colonial State as a Social Field: Ethnographic Capital and Native Policy in the German Overseas Empire before 1914*, in « American Sociological Review », 73, 4, pp. 589-612.

Steinmetz, G. (2010) *La sociologie et l'empire : Richard Thurnwald et la question de l'autonomie scientifique*, in « Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales », 185, pp. 12-29. doi.org/10.3917/arss.185.0012

Weber, M. (1995) « Économie et société. Tome 1, Les catégories de la sociologie », Paris, Pocket, « Agora » (or. ed. 1922).

Wimmer, A. (2013) « Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World », Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Zabel, C., ed. (2021) « Historicizing Self-Interest in the Modern Atlantic World. A Plea for Ego? » London, Routledge.

Zolberg, A. (1985) « L'influence des facteurs 'externes' sur l'ordre politique », *Traité de science politique. Tome 1. La science politique, science sociale. L'ordre politique*. Paris, PUF, 567-598.