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Dysfunctional, but stable – a Bourdieuian reading of the global nuclear order

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The Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is commonly regarded as the cornerstone of the global regime to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. It grants the five acknowledged nuclear weapon states the temporary right to possess nuclear weapons and prohibits such possession to all other member states. However, both the material provisions of the treaty and the actual practices surrounding the NPT have generated a highly unequal and arguably unjust global order. Yet why is this order still in place if it fails to pay tribute to eminent interests of many of its member states? This article argues that the sociological writings of Pierre Bourdieu help us to better understand why the nuclear order is actually quite stable despite its inherent flaws and injustices. I claim that the NPT regime with its division into nuclear haves and nuclear have-nots can be likened to the religious field in which priests rule over laymen through the command of 'religious goods' and through the establishment of certain – numbing and paralyzing – religious myths and practices. States over time internalize and habitualize these structures and schemes of interpretation, thus ultimately naturalizing, accepting, and reifying the hierarchical formation with all its dogmas and prescriptions. If we want to overcome the perceived injustices inherent in the current nuclear regime and achieve the envisioned goals of a world free of nuclear weapons, we need to uncover these structural, deeply engrained dispositions and practices and radically rethink the existing order beyond the confines of today's nuclear conventionalism.

Keywords: Nonproliferation Treaty; nuclear weapons; Bourdieu; sociology; myths; order

I have always been astonished by what might be called the paradox of doxa – the fact that the order of the world as we find it (…) is broadly respected; that there are not more transgressions and subversions, contraventions and "follies" (…); or still more surprisingly, that the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural. (Bourdieu 2001, 1)

The grand nuclear bargain

Ever since entering into force in 1970, the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was regarded a 'grand nuclear bargain' which, by reconciling the interests of nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states alike, helps to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons both horizontally and vertically. It stipulates that the non-nuclear weapon states have the right to fully use nuclear technology for civilian

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purposes, but are required to relinquish their ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons; the five nuclear states on the other hand are guaranteed a – temporary – right to possess nuclear weapons pursuant to efforts directed at general disarmament (Joyner 2011, 10; Shaker 1980). Hence, the treaty is supposed to alleviate states' uncertainty about their rivals' nuclear choices, thereby facilitating mutual nuclear restraint. This set of unequal, but indissoluble and reciprocal obligations established the foundations of a legal nuclear order, which remains in effect today (Brzoska 1992; Davis and Jasper 2014; Nye 1981; Tate 1990).

NPT supporters claim that thanks to the treaty 'the proliferation train has been slow to pick up steam, has made fewer stops than anticipated, and usually has arrived much later than expected. More likely than not, the NPT has helped to slow the engine of proliferation' (Potter 2010, 79; Müller 2010). Skeptics, on the other hand, maintain that

> in virtually every case [of non-proliferation] the decision made can be explained by reference to something other than the NPT – either to domestic considerations, the impact of acquiring nuclear weapons on bilateral relations, assessments of technological limitations, political costs, or security consequences. Demonstrating a causal relationship between a nonproliferation decision and the NPT would be a tall order. (Scheinman 1990, 61; see also Solingen 2007, 14–15)

The fact that four nuclear armed states remain outside (or in the case of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) withdrew from) the treaty and that others might develop a threshold capacity while being members of the treaty adds to the existing concerns about the treaty's achievements (Dunn 2009; Rublee 2010; Thayer 1995).

However, it is not only the NPT's record as a non-proliferation tool that is debated. The non-nuclear weapon states (often led by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)) also vehemently criticize the regime's failure to promote the transfer of civilian nuclear technology and to enforce more significant steps toward global nuclear disarmament (Potter and Mukhatzhanova 2011). In fact, recent analyses suggest that the promise of nuclear technology assistance remains largely unfulfilled. There is indeed little evidence that NPT membership has facilitated access to nuclear technology – or that it is even a precondition for such access (Fuhrmann 2009). In a similar vein, the non-nuclear weapon states call into question whether requirements such as the adoption of and compliance with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Additional Protocol are reconcilable with Article IV's 'inalienable right' provision and maintain that these stipulations in fact disproportionately prioritize nonproliferation over the disarmament and civil-use provisions of the treaty (Müller 2010, 195–196; see also Hanson 2005). It is against this background that James F. Keeley wrote already in 1990: 'Third World countries and nonnuclear weapon states may have justified grievances about the course of development of nuclear nonproliferation since the negotiation of the Nonproliferation Treaty' (Keeley 1990, 101).

Dysfunctional, but stable

If the regime indeed fails to deliver on its main provisions and unduly disadvantages the majority of states, why do we see no stronger protests and revisionist aspirations? The existing theoretical accounts provide some explanation for the existence and survivability of regimes such as the NPT. From a structural realist perspective, a regime remains in place as long as it helps states to overcome the dilemmas of uncertainty and mistrust by

providing stable expectations regarding rivals' nuclear abstinence. Hence, the treaty was initiated because it 'was congenial to the interests of an overwhelming majority of states, including the superpowers, and offensive to only a few' (Davis 1993, 82). At the same time, membership is relatively 'cheap' and the treaty provisions are vague enough to allow states a broad range of nuclear activities without running into the risk of noncompliance, realists maintain. Adherents of hegemonic stability theory would add moreover that a hegemon plays a crucial role in imposing and maintaining the regime – either because it is the hegemon's own immediate interest or because the hegemon benefits indirectly from coordinating individual interests (Krasner 1982; Smith 1987). Interpreted through this lens, the treaty was implemented through the superpowers' pressure and it owes its continued existence today largely to the US and its ongoing interest in upholding the regime. And indeed, historical research on the origins of the NPT shows the degree to which a 'superpower condominium' created the regime even against the outspoken opposition of many middle powers (Popp 2014). The regime's persistence defies such an explanation, though. Rather, with the US becoming a more and more 'reluctant hegemon' in multilateral arms control, often even pursuing its arms control goals outside the NPT framework (Meier 2006), it appears that hegemonic stability theory cannot sufficiently explain the treaty's survival (Fehl 2008).

Neoliberal institutionalists stress, on the other hand, that even if the existing institutions generate sub-optimal results, governments only create new ones after rationally calculating the costs and benefits. And since institutions also influence, shape, and possibly alter states' interests, they might even 'survive' despite failing to achieve their original purposes (Ikenberry 1998; Simmons and Martin 2002). In contrast, from a constructivist point of view, it is the normative power embodied by the broader regime which not only ties states together in something akin to a value community of 'good' and 'civilized' states but also shapes states' preferences toward nuclear abstention and cooperation. The NPT regime is here seen as a technopolitical 'negotiated order' (Hall 1972) which is based on ongoing processes of re-negotiation, re-affirmation or re-configuration of actors' interests, identities, and roles. Institutions function as a venue 'in which reflexive new practices and policies develop' (Haas and Haas 2009, 104). According to such an interpretation, states remain members of the treaty despite its flaws, since they are not only normatively bound but also expect to be able eventually to wield influence in order to trigger institutional change and reform.

This seems to overestimate the regime's evolutionary adaptability and openness for change, though. For even a brief account of the treaty's historical development does not reveal significant structural changes or institutional amendments. In fact, the NPT's indefinite extension that was adopted in 1995 cemented and preserved the traditional nuclear order for the foreseeable future – with all its ostensible flaws and injustices. The continual sidelining of demands for procedural and distributive justice has bereft the treaty of its transformative momentum, as authors like Tannenwald and Müller have criticized (Tannenwald 2013; Müller 2010). Likewise, it appears difficult to argue that states' preferences have changed and adapted much – rather they make similar complaints than they used to. Accepting the treaty's extension, the non-nuclear weapon states relinquished their bargaining chip (termination of the treaty) without being granted significant concessions in return. The question is therefore how we can explain adherence to a treaty that fails to achieve many of its goals and that offers little hope for evolutionary reform.

When accounting for NPT adherence, scholars and policy-makers tend to refer either to states' normative considerations or to the 'materials' of the nuclear regime: Accordingly, they either argue that states remain in compliance since a 'logic of

appropriateness' – what is expected from 'civilized' states – makes them do so (Brzoska 1992); or they refer to the tangible and rationally calculable costs and benefits that are enshrined in the agreements and legal provisions that establish the NPT and related institutions such as the IAEA or the Nuclear Suppliers Group, arguing that the benefits of treaty adherence outweigh the costs (Nye 1981; Tate 1990; see also Horovitz 2015). Little attention has been given to more covert ideational dimensions underlying the nuclear regime and to how these ideational 'strings' tie – or socialize – states into the existing order (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990). In attempting to shed light on these underlying forces of stability and confinement, I will introduce a narrative that explains the longevity of the existing nuclear order by drawing on Bourdieu's sociological writings on 'structures' and 'fields' as well as on conceptualizations of ritual and myth. Without wanting to push the analogy too far, I maintain that this approach offers us a lens to better understand the persistence of the nuclear order.

Thus, rather than being a merely functional security instrument, a depoliticized bureaucracy or simply a rather neutral discursive forum for the contestation and fixation of meaning, the NPT, I argue, resembles a 'religious field' – i.e. a deeply anchored, static structure that relies on ritualistic practices for its preservation (cf. Pouliot 2010). It is this particular set of internalized beliefs and interpretations – the 'doxa' or cosmology in Bourdieu's terms – which coheres, consolidates, and restricts our thinking and consequently also the policies that we consider feasible. The internalized orientations and norms as well as the corresponding habitualized practices reproduce and solidify the existing nuclear order and help to conceal its hegemonic and unjust character – even in the absence of a disciplining hegemon.[1]

Understanding the stability of existing structures

Bourdieu's sociological writings have long remained disregarded by International Relations (IR) scholars, since they do not explicitly cater to questions of the 'international'. At the same time, he is often – and falsely, I would add – 'read as too materialist, too linked with the questions of interests, too unaware "of the role of ideas, emotions or spontaneous actions"', as Bigo writes (Bigo 2011, 227). It was only more recently, and as part of the discipline's turn toward practices and to sociology in general, that the value of his contributions for dealing with IR-specific puzzles was acknowledged (Adler-Nissen 2012; Bigo 2011; Leander 2011; Berling 2011; Senn and Elhardt 2014). In his work, Bourdieu emphasizes that action is neither sufficiently explained by reference to deterministic structural forces nor as a result of rationally calculating individuals who freely follow their utilitarian interests. He consequently sets out to develop a via media between a subjectivist methodology, on one hand, and an objectivist structuralism, on the other, by blending structuralist and constructivist assumptions into a 'social praxeology' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 7–11; Joas and Knöbl 2004, 523–530). Thus, rather than privileging utilitarian or materialist explanations (as critics sometimes maintain (cf. Joas and Knöbl 2004, 531)), Bourdieu seeks to uncover dynamics of co-constitution between structure and action by scrutinizing how actors' behavior contributes to processes of structuration and how these structures in turn shape action.

Importantly, though, Bourdieu does not attempt to develop a general account of practice, but maintains that actors' strategies largely depend on specific settings or social formations ('fields'), in which actors find themselves: The social world, in other words, consists of a multitude of dissimilar and relatively autonomous fields (i.e. 'spaces' of

politics, the economy, religion, arts and culture, and so forth), each comprising different, structured networks of actors and interactions and each following distinct rules and regularities.

> In analytical terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97)

All fields are structured according to the distribution of 'capital' among the members and all share a similar dynamic: in each of them, the different actors strive and compete for power in order to be able to enforce not only their interests but also their preferred 'rules'. The 'history of the field is the history of the struggle for a monopoly of the imposition of legitimate categories of perception and appreciation,' Bourdieu writes accordingly (Bourdieu 1996, 157).

In explaining how the structures of a specific field find their way into actors' strategies (without fully determining them), Bourdieu introduces the concept of 'habitus' as a hinge: Accordingly, actors are socialized into their environments and thereby acquire and incorporate ('habitualize') the structural conditions or 'rules of appropriateness' that matter in these social contexts. They internalize 'schemes of thought and perception' (preconfigured 'world-views' in the language of IR) that reflect their specific position in the social world and shape consecutive action (Bourdieu 1994).

> [The habitus] is first and foremost a 'system of durable dispositions' that have been internalised by the actor over time. This process is both unconscious, through lived experience, and conscious or semi-conscious, through formal learning. (. . .) The effect of the habitus is to provide the actor with an ingrained set of orientations that influence not only in the intellect but also in the physical relationship of the social actor to the external world. Acquired through a process of inculcation, the dispositions of the habitus become 'second nature' and generate understandings and expectations which in turn set the parameters for strategies of social action. (Jackson 2008, 164)

Rather than questioning given structures and permanently revising potential strategies according to utilitarian calculations, actors tend to accept and ultimately reproduce imposed orders into which they have been socialized and which have become habitualized over time.

The nuclear order as a quasi-religious field

When analyzing the nuclear regime, it is not only Bourdieu's general conceptualization of structure and agency that is illuminating but also his examination of the 'religious field' in particular. From a Bourdieuian perspective, this is a social space where habitualized 'religious labor' carried out by religious protagonists not only establishes and justifies a particular cosmological order or hierarchy but also leads to (and 'rationalizes') the (unequal) distribution of 'sacred goods'. The religious field is, according to Bourdieu, an originally arbitrary and highly hierarchical formation. However, it is legitimated through a largely decreed set of moralized beliefs, myths, and performed rituals (Bourdieu 1991; Dianteill 2003; Verter 2003; Wienold and

Schäfer 2012). The 'religious specialists' at the top monopolize the religious capital and the 'goods of salvation', systematize constitutive dogmas and knowledge (the 'doxa', in Bourdieu's terms), and rule over the laymen by enforcing adherence to certain rituals and practices.

Similar to the religious sub-systems or fields (and unlike most other treaty arrangements in international law), the global nuclear regime, too, is characterized by a highly hierarchical, discriminatory structure. By exclusively enjoying the (temporary) right to possess nuclear weapons, the five acknowledged nuclear weapon states monopolize the 'administration of the "goods of salvation"' (Bourdieu 1991, 9). This monopolization by the five nuclear priests is only one part of the process, though: the constitution of the field 'goes hand in hand with the objective dispossession of those who are excluded from it and who thereby find themselves constituted as the laity' (Bourdieu 1991, 9). In other words, in both the religious and the nuclear field, we find a hierarchical classification which has its roots in the 'divinely justified' possession versus dispossession of the relevant 'capital'. Yet, as Bourdieu emphasizes, it is not only the distribution of symbolic capital – i.e. of nuclear weapons in the nuclear case – but also the acceptance of inferiority or subordination by the majority. The majority of NPT member states – like laypeople in a church – willingly accept the rule of the five nuclear weapon states and regard this hierarchy as given. The preservation of this order

> depends on the ability of the institution that possesses it [the monopoly] to make known to those who are excluded from it the legitimacy of their exclusion, that is, to make them misrecognize the arbitrariness of the monopolization of a power and a competence in principle accessible to anyone. (Bourdieu 1991, 25)

From a theoretical point of view, one can thus assume that an existing hierarchical order will continue to exist as long as the dominant actors manage to reproduce the existing 'schemes of thought and action'. To do so, they need to provide not only a mythical narrative that refers to some divine duty but also impose 'objectified' rules and enforce adherence to rituals that allow re-enacting the order time and again. In the following, I will illustrate that these three dimensions – the (mythical or numinous) narrative, a set of imposed 'objectified' definitions as well as ritual performances – can indeed be found in the nuclear realm, too.[2]

The mythico-religious nuclear narrative

Ever since the beginning of the nuclear age, nuclear weapons have been associated with religious myths that weave together notions of good and evil, apocalypse, sin, and salvation.

> Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation, but that of a statement of fact. (…) It abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all the dialectics (…) Things appear to mean something by themselves. (Barthes 1998, 301)

A subtle, deeply moralized, Manichean narrative, which has evolved over many decades, limits the discursive contestation and impedes change and alteration. The best known and perhaps earliest example for this religious–mythological infusion of the nuclear discourse

is Robert Oppenheimer's frightened and yet elevated quotation of the Hindu verse 'I am become Death, the Shatterer of Worlds' (quoted in Ungar 1992, 42). The successful realization of a nuclear test and the release of unmatched power granted the scientists an apparently unprecedented feeling of awe in the light of scientific mastery and progress. Referring to the technology's unique power in determining human destiny and the fate of the earth, scientists, and politicians alike drew on cosmic myths to grasp the implications of this new invention. 'Splitting the atom', Ungar writes, 'dramatically heightened the sense of human dominion; it practically elevated us into the empyrean. The control over nature's ultimate power was also taken as a sign of grace, an indication of America's moral superiority and redemptive capacity' (Ungar 1992, 5). The incomparable power of nuclear explosions was thus integrated into the cosmic myth of the forces of the 'numinous', i.e. the divine power of creation and mortality. Interestingly, the Russell–Einstein manifesto published in 1954 – while condemning nuclear weapons – reproduces this religio-mythical narrative of divine human power, as it proclaims that humanity has to decide between bliss and extinction:

> There lies before us, if we choose, continual progress in happiness, knowledge, and wisdom. Shall we, instead, choose death, because we cannot forget our quarrels? We appeal as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death. (Russell and Einstein 1955)

Notably, though, this representation of creation and death is closely linked to a second motif, namely that of salvation versus doom. Nuclear technology always used to be seen 'as a source of transcendental power that was expected to be decisive in the political, military, diplomatic, and economic realms. At the same time, it was the source of demonic fear that conjured up images of vaporized cities' (Ungar 1992, 3; see also Beyler 2003). Hence, the weapon was regarded as both a source of military salvation in the fight against the ultimate evil and a source of incredible pain, loss, and obliteration. On one hand, the new technology – in both its military and civilian form – is framed as a guarantor of national security and as an indispensable means to defeat terror and evil. On the other hand, the nuclear superpower standoff was perceived as an existential and hardly controllable danger that required growing arsenals, complex postures, and ever more sophisticated deterrence strategies in order to avoid apocalyptic escalation. Nuclear weapons are thus seen as both the West's salvation and the elicitor of apocalypse. The Manichean framing, which interpreted the Cold War as part of the eternal struggle between good and evil, clearly underscored and substantiated the metaphorical representation of 'consecrated' nuclear weapons. Interestingly, however, this frame is not merely a Cold War relic, but still shimmers through in the current nuclear and national security discourses. George W. Bush's reference to the 'Axis of Evil' and to America's moral obligation to 'rid the world of evil' are well-known contemporary embodiments of the dualistic divide between good and evil (Bacevich and Prodromou 2004; Singer 2005; for the UK discourse, see also Ritchie 2010).

Finally, the nuclear narrative is impregnated with allusions to 'chosenness', 'priest-hood', and guardianship. This frame comes into play on two different levels: on the domestic-bureaucratic stage as well as on the international one. According to the domestic interpretation, questions surrounding nuclear weapons technology in the broadest sense should be excluded from the normal political current of a democracy and entrusted to a small circle of experts who have the authority to develop and shape the state's nuclear

policy in an apparently technocratic, objective manner (Dahl 1985). These nuclear decision-makers act as the 'guardians' of nuclear politics; by devising nuclear strategies and postures, they have the competence to decide on the fate of the country. Cohn provides a compelling interpretation of the 'new priesthood':

> Perhaps most astonishing of all this is the fact that the creators of strategic doctrine actually refer to members of their community as "the nuclear priesthood." It is hard to decide what is most extraordinary about this: the easy arrogance of their claim to the virtues and supernatural power of the priesthood; the tacit admission (never spoken directly) that rather than being unflinching, hard-nosed, objective, empirically minded scientific describers of reality, they are really the creators of dogma; or the extraordinary implicit statement about who or what has become god. (Cohn 1987, 702; see also Taylor 2007, 674–675; Gusterson 1996)

The frame is not limited to the domestic realm but also structures our interpretation of the global nuclear order. Here, too, the possession of nuclear weapons by the entitled few is legitimated by reference to notions such as 'guardianship' and 'responsibility'. Such a reading is supposed to suggest that a few selected actors can be trusted to act responsibly and to take care of the nuclear issue *on our behalf*. Often, this legitimization is made on religious grounds. Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, wrote in 1943:

> Various nations and classes, various social groups and races are at various times placed in such a position that a special measure of the divine mission in history falls upon them. In that sense God has chosen us in this fateful period of world history. (Cherry 1998, 297)

The discriminatory order is justified not only on the grounds of what Gusterson calls 'nuclear orientalism' – i.e. assumptions regarding non-western countries' irrationality, passion, or incivility (Gusterson 1999) but also with reference to a divine or religious entitlement – a 'theodicy of privilege'. Such a justification is, for example, entailed in the commonly invoked narrative that the existing nuclear powers have an obligation to retain their weapons in order to be able to guard international peace and security – and that they will abandon their capabilities, once the international security environment permits doing so (MOD and FCO 2006, 6).

This religiously impregnated mythical narrative fulfills two functions: first, the narrative helps to grasp the incomprehensible and to rein in the 'nuclear demon'. It allows us to cope with the 'unpleasant' dimensions of nuclear weapons and nuclear war (Lifton 1980; Chernus 1982). Second, by relating to and building upon other myths and religious narratives that are deeply engrained and available in a range of different cultures, it stabilizes and naturalizes the given order (Eisenbart 2012, 43–44).

Between orthodoxy and heresy: the systematization of conventional beliefs

Two further dimensions add to a reproduction of the quasi-religious character of the nuclear field: the systematization of fundamental beliefs and principles as well as the enactment of a set of recurring habits and ritualized performances. According to Bourdieu, the specialists or guardians of the given order organize and codify a corpus of knowledge claims and beliefs which consolidates and vindicates their hierarchical position. In the nuclear field, dogmas, for example, define and categorize such ambivalent terms like 'nuclear', 'peaceful', or 'weapon state'. Gabrielle Hecht's discussion of nuclear ontologies illustrates what is at stake in such processes of defining and categorizing:

> What things make a state "nuclear," what makes things "nuclear," and how do we know? Are the criteria scientific? Technical? Political? Systemic? ... [N]uclearity is a regularly contested technopolitical category. It shifts in time and space. (Hecht 2007, 101; see also Hymans 2010)

Dominated by the specialists, the processes of interpreting, defining, and categorizing nuclear activities, actors, norms, and the like not only delineate normal from deviant behavior and define right and wrong in the nuclear sphere (Keeley 1990). These definitional practices also contribute to and naturalize a larger cosmology of the different actors and their respective roles within and outside the regime: legitimate nuclear weapon states, non-nuclear weapon states, illegitimate nuclear weapon states outside the treaty, revisionist non-nuclear weapon states, the community of treaty obeying states and of 'uncivilized' outsiders, and so forth. Hence, assessments of rights and norms or of states' nuclear activities and obligations become apparently 'objective' and authoritative. They thereby contribute to

> the (hidden) imposition of the principles of structuration of the perception and thinking of the world; and of the social world in particular, insofar as it imposes a system of practices and representations whose structure (...) presents itself as the natural-supernatural structure of the cosmos. (Bourdieu 1991, 5; see also 1994, 163–165; Tambiah 2006, 227)

This does not imply that such practices of interpreting, defining and ordering evolve unanimously or that they rule out opposition or dissent – quite to the contrary, as Bourdieu shows. Struggles over power – be it the power to rule, to define or to decree – embody the crucial dynamics within each formation. In fact, fields are fundamentally shaped by the fight for power. And while the dominant actors – the guardians of the 'orthodoxy' – seek to consolidate and preserve their hierarchical position, the subalterns – or 'heretics' – attempt to overturn the given order of the field. Yet they do so, Bourdieu argues, 'without disturbing the principles on which the field is based. Thus their revolutions are only ever partial ones, which displace the censorships and transgress the conventions, but do so in the name of the same underlying principles' (Bourdieu 1980, 269). One could claim that this is the kind of behavior that states like Israel, India, Pakistan or North Korea show. While they refuse to join the NPT under the given circumstances, they nonetheless buy into the nuclear order – for example, by sending observers to NPT conferences, by alluding to the NPT in official statements, by (partially) accepting IAEA obligations, and so forth. From this perspective, it is rather unsurprising, for example, that the Indian government announced it would join the treaty if the declared nuclear weapon states gave a 'firm commitment and timeframe for eliminating their nuclear arsenals' (Tannenwald 2013). Even a 'deviant' state like DPRK has frequently presented the prospect of returning to the NPT (US Department of State 2005).

What we see is therefore, on one hand, that powerful actors use their authority to maintain or (re-)establish rules and categories and to define what is legitimate and what is deviant. Dominated actors, on the other hand, challenge these imposed interpretations, seeking to expose the unjust character of the existing order. This struggle, however, takes place within the structural confines (i.e. within the 'doxa') of the existing regime – without ultimately abandoning its underlying ordering principles. Since both the guardians of the order and the challengers are socialized into the prevalent 'rules of the game' and into its most fundamental ordering principles, both groups are constrained by the boundaries of what is thinkable and intelligible within the actual formation. Thus, the contestation between orthodox and heretic thinking only conceals a much profounder cleavage – namely, the 'fundamental opposition between the universe of things that can be stated, and hence thought, and the universe of that

which is taken for granted' (Bourdieu 1994, 165; König and Berli 2013, 325; Berlinerblau 2001).

On quasi-religious performances and rituals

Finally, ritualized performances and practices enable the active 'perpetuation and repro-duction of the social order (understood as the established structure of relations between groups and classes) by contributing to its consecration, that is to sanctioning and sanctify-ing it' (Bourdieu 1991, 19). The recurrent meetings and discussions – above all of course the preparatory sessions (the so-called PrepCom meetings) and the five-annual Review Conferences that bring nearly 200 delegations from all member states as well as additional non-state observers to New York to discuss the state of the regime, to voice demands and criticism, to blame the heretics, to appeal to higher goods (usually international peace), and to re-affirm the sanctity of the treaty – easily remind one of a religious rite or confession of faith. Participation in the NPT summit diplomacy thereby resembles the performance of a pilgrimage or the 'High Mass', which reifies and reproduces the institution as such, rearticulates the underlying shared knowledge and constructs and reaffirms the boundaries between inside and outside as well as between the different classes of treaty members (Giesen 2006, 352–353; Alexander 2004; Neumann 2002). The recurring and formalized NPT ceremony is used by the participating actors (both within and outside the treaty realm) to perform different roles and functions and to act out discontent – albeit without completely transgressing established boundaries. Quite similar to other ritualized institutions and settings (Gusterson 1996), NPT conferences and related instruments thus instill a sense of community by providing a stage for the performance of a set of standardized and formalized procedures and by enabling a cathartic venting of disgruntlement. Here, the simple, but sometimes perhaps overlooked argument is that the ritualized functioning of the NPT regime further contributes to a tacit, incremental strengthening of the order – even if the sessions are often used as a forum for vivid criticism and disapproval. The Review conferences are the focal point of the nuclear regime – and they remind the treaty members to show their 'allegiance'.

> Ritual performances are not just events, but iterations of events. They repeat events that have happened before. Only by this reference to the past can the ritual become visible as standardized performance. This standardization and formalization are at the core of the ritual process. (. . .) By participating in a ritual the actors cope not only with the possible difference between their individual perspectives but also with the fundamental problem of change, uncertainty, and boundaries. Rituals perform an order. (Giesen 2006, 338–339)

Together with the set of nuclear myths and the establishment and enforcement of subject categories and norms (of legitimate/illegitimate, right/wrong, acceptable/inacceptable behavior), the recurrent collective enactment of these rituals thus contributes to a reifica-tion of the conventional NPT regime.

Against this background, it does not come as a surprise that even progressive or critical initiatives that apparently challenge the nuclear status quo in fact remain largely attached to the rather conventional, underlying principles of the given system – to what is thinkable and intelligible within the confines of the prevalent discourse. They therefore fail to profoundly alter the existing order. Neither Egypt's threat to abstain from future NPT Review Conferences (Reuters 2013), nor the Four Horsemen's gradual disarmament initiative (Shultz et al. 2008; Senn and Elhardt 2014), nor the Humanitarian Initiative by

Switzerland, Sweden, and others (EDA 2012) – to name just a few examples – called into question the 'rules of the game' of the NPT-based order. Rather, with their reiteration of predictable calls for more decisive steps toward disarmament or nuclear weapon free zones, they merely add another ('problem-solving' rather than critical) round in the decades-long and well-rehearsed NPT debate between reformist and status-quo voices. Or, as Campbell Craig and Jan Ruzicka write: 'To deal effectively with nuclear danger, more radical answers are needed, but it is these kinds of answers that have been marginalized by the dominant discourse of the complex' (Craig and Ruzicka 2013, 344; see also Lichterman 2010). Thus, instead of fundamentally challenging the current system, these movements – by reiterating conventional positions that are already part of the common 'doxa'/discourse and by using the usual institutional forums – might ultimately even contribute to a reification of the existing order.

Conclusion

Policy-makers and analysts alike often portray the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as the fragile and endangered cornerstone of the global nuclear order. They argue that the regime will crumble if its member states continually fail to implement the underlying nuclear bargain and to make progress, above all, on the road to nuclear disarmament. While many of the NPT's core promises remain indeed unfulfilled, it is doubtful, however, that regime collapse or even profound changes to the global nuclear order are imminent.

Both rationalists and constructivists offer some explanations for the persistence of regimes in international security; however, they fail to fully grasp the entrenched 'ideational' mechanisms by which the regime is conserved and reproduced. Drawing on a Bourdieuian reading of the nonproliferation regime as a religious field, this article has argued that the treaty-based order is deeply engrained in our schemes of thought and perception and is thus more stable than is often assumed. Through a recurrently invoked set of dogmatic provisions and rules as well as through repeated practices and rituals, the allegedly arbitrary, unjust nuclear order is not only habitualized and naturalized but also reproduced and reified, even in the absence of an enforcing hegemon. It is hence similar to a religious order with its ritually performed distinction between experts and laypeople and with the invoked canon of religious justifications, myths, and principles. I have suggested that the existing nuclear order is based on a deeply engrained quasi-religious narrative which justifies a hierarchical world order and legitimizes the possession of nuclear weapons by a few states as a means in the struggle between good and evil. In other words, it is a religiously impregnated Manichean world view, mythologies of entitlement and responsibility as well as strongly ritualized regime procedures which lead to an ongoing preservation and reaffirmation of the Nonproliferation Treaty and its related institutional mechanisms. The recurrent conference rituals moreover foster the given order – on one hand by allowing for dissent and opposition and on the other hand by reaffirming the boundaries both between nuclear and non-nuclear states within the regime and between treaty adherents and outsiders.

Using Bourdieu's writings as an analytical tool helps us to better understand how actors internalize and habitualize given structures and why they become unlikely to challenge the order they are embedded in, even though many of the treaty's original promises – from disarmament to technology transfer – are likely to remain unfulfilled in the foreseeable future. Bourdieu thus enables us to discern 'the ways that existing social hierarchies and power relations are legitimated and reproduced by cultural representations

and practices' (Jackson 2009, 102) which become the 'doxa' or common sense of our thinking – they become taken for granted and unquestionable. His approach encourages us to thoroughly uncover, trace, and deconstruct such 'numbing' and paralyzing representations and interpretations, to emancipate ourselves from deeply engrained mental boundaries and to seek radically new ways of thinking about nuclear politics. Rather than (unwittingly) upholding and reproducing religiously impregnated myths about nuclear priesthoods, salvation or Armageddon, and rather than unconsciously re-enacting predictable rituals, this would facilitate a profoundly critical examination and contestation of the subtle mechanisms that contribute to a preservation of the existing nuclear order.

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Notes

1. There are some overlaps with Foucault's work on power and *Governmentality* (see, for example, Foucault 2011). I contend, however, that Bourdieu's conceptualization of fields, structures and habitus provides an analytically more consistent and precise toolbox that is well-suited for the analysis of the dynamics taking place within the nuclear order.
2. Noticeably, the nuclear narrative exhibits quite paradox traits: on one hand, it is exceedingly 'acronymed', technostrategic, abstract and devoid of concrete, imaginable meaning; and on the other hand, it is full of emotional, mythological and religious associations and references. While the technostrategic framing of nuclear weapons and its consequences has been of interest to scholars for many years (Cohn 1987; Belletto 2009; Berling 2011; O'Gorman and Hamilton 2011; Taylor 2007), the quasi-religious, ritualistic dimension and its broader implications for the nuclear order have received surprisingly little attention (for exceptions, see Benford and Kurtz 1987; Eisenbart 2012).

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