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Christian Olsson

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Christian Olsson

In this article, the aim is to bridge the gap in the international relations (IR) literature on contemporary interventionism between a strand of research mainly focusing on the concepts of intervention, sovereignty and their meanings, and a strand more interested in the particular practices bound up with the phenomenon described as 'intervention'. This is done by exploring how the literature on the so-called 'practice-turn' might allow light to be shed on both dimensions. Such an approach might prove fruitful provided attention is paid both to the material and discursive practices of interventionism; both to the transgressive practices constitutive of interventionism and their routinization. Finally, this piece also introduces each of this special section's contributions by showing how they illustrate and expand on the different problématiques here outlined.

Keywords practices; Bourdieu; intervention; exception; transgression; sovereignty

Introduction: Concepts and Practices, Concepts as Practice

When international relations (IR) theorists say that a state is 'intervening' (or 'doing' anything), they are using a convenient yet simplifying shortcut to social reality. As a legal entity the state cannot be seen to be 'doing' anything in the concrete and embodied sense of the term. If we want to clear our empirical observations of pre-conceived metaphysical concepts, we should rather say that a specific set of (state) agents are doing something, or rather many different things, thus collectively performing what we, under specific circumstances, might call 'intervention'. It would, however, be equally misleading to give onto-logical primacy to the abovementioned agents. They are not the demiurgical creators of their 'doings'. When state professionals act, they are enacting and acting out a set of behavioural patterns that largely precede and transcend them: their 'doings' are 'historic and collective acts' (Balzacq et al. 2010, 2). How can their actions and behaviour then be accounted for without somehow personifying the

collective that they form? How can one simultaneously account for the embodied character of singular 'doings' and the abstract concepts such as 'the state' or 'intervention' that might be bound up with these practices (or that might allow the IR theorists to organize their knowledge of them) but that are too frequently hypostasized as unitary agents or actions? One of the promises of so-called practice approaches is precisely to overcome this ontological conundrum by putting the focus on the way in which practices are performed by individual agents, (re-)produce collective and historic patterns as well as on the interplay between these two dimensions. In this sense, practices have, if not an ontological status, then at least a 'social life' of their own that is irreducible to the agents that set them in motion or the structural preconditions that make them possible.

In this special section, we draw on recent interest in practices in IR theory (Bigo 1994, 2001; Neumann 2002; Balzacq et al. 2010; Adler and Pouliot 2011; Bueger and Gadinger 2014) to shed light on contemporary forms of 'interventionism'. Indeed, while many (purely) conceptual approaches fail to explain how sovereignty (and non-intervention) seen as the main regulatory norm of international relations can coexist with increasingly routinized forms of interventionist behaviour (Fassin and Panolfi 2010), this introduction highlights that from the point of view of an approach foregrounding social practices this paradox can in fact quite easily be solved.

The more general objective of this special section is to showcase the possible contributions of a practice approach to the analysis of interventionism. Such an objective can itself be subdivided into two interrelated aims. Firstly we want to suggest that intervention is best approached through the heterogeneous set of practices that usually are seen to actualize it, in other words the 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understandings' (Schatzki 2001, 2) and manifested by a 'routinized type of behavior' (Reckwitz 2002, 249). This first aspect implies looking at broadly defined 'interventionist practices—for example capacity-building missions, technical assistance or crisis management operations—rather than focusing solely on the juridical concept of 'intervention' *stricto sensu*. Secondly, we want to show how some of the theoretical endeavours that have tried to foreground practices might be useful in this regard. This will allow highlighting the significant differences between the widely diverse theories (see Kratochwil 2011) that populate the so-called 'practice turn' (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, and von Savigny 2001). Let us indeed remember that the latter has drawn from such diverse authors as Wittgenstein, Foucault, Bourdieu and Giddens, to name but a few, and developed in philosophy, history, anthropology and sociology before making its way into political sciences and IR. In the contributions here presented, this diversity is mainly highlighted by the combination of sociologically oriented contributions—mainly drawing on Bourdieu and Foucault—foregrounding both discursive and non-discursive practices (see Jeandesboz 2015 and to a certain extent Delcourt 2015) and a poststructuralist inspired contribution focusing on 'discursive practices' (see Pomarède and Schjødt 2015). Although both approaches, discursive and sociological, allow analyzing how practices emerge and transform the context from which

they were born, this introduction will mainly draw on the sociological approach. Indeed we do not consider there to be any epistemological or methodological ground to exclude non-discursive practices to the benefit of discursive practices or vice versa: both have to be accounted for.

What we are here interested in is how approaches focusing on practices reframe the question of intervention(ism). While one of the self-proclaimed contributions of the 'practice turn' is to outline an empirical research agenda freed from the 'metaphysical fictions' and 'indefinite teleologies' (Veyne 1997) conveyed by so many theorizations (Walker 2006b), it is simultaneously important not to lose sight of the conceptual issues inevitably raised by such a move. For example, when Adler and Pouliot theorize 'international practices' as 'socially organized activities that pertain to world politics' (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 7), one might be seduced by their attempt to circumvent the deadlock of ontological debate on the nature of 'the international'. At the same time, the casualness with which they foreclose this debate is problematic. To define the 'international' as that which 'pertains to world politics' is not satisfying: what is 'world politics' and how do you recognize a practice that pertains to it? It would have been more useful to clarify to what extent the concept of the 'international' can be seen as constitutive of such practices and to what extent it foremost is to be considered as an analytical device. In the former case, the usage of the concept is seen to be bound up with the unfolding of these practices. In the latter one, the concept allows the social scientist to create an object of knowledge out of diverse practices assembled on the basis of the commonalities they display and that are deemed important from the point of view of a scientific *problématique*. In this case the concept is foremost bound up with a particular scientific practice of organizing knowledge. One can of course also combine these approaches, for example by appropriating a term already in use by the practitioners one is observing while re-conceptualizing it in the light of its constitutive limits. In this vein, one could distinguish 'practices of the international' which, like many diplomatic or military activities, are (self-)perceived as producing the international, and 'international practices' which, like the cultural practices of westernized elites in the 'developing world' (or the production of scientific knowledge by IR scholars), can be seen by the external observer as co-producing a particular 'international' order.

The contribution of practice theories to IR is hence not to substitute a naïvely empiricist concern for social practices to conceptual debates. Let us indeed remember that the conceptual debate on the concept of practice itself is lively (Kratochwil 2011; Andersen and Neumann 2012). It is rather to recast concepts —here understood as the general 'units' in terms of which we constitute (and think of) objects and that hence organize our knowledge of the world—in a new light. One can in this regard remind oneself of Foucault's description of his own approach in a class at the *Collège de France* in January 1979:

> instead of deducing concrete phenomena from universals [taking the expression of reifying or taken-for-granted concepts], or instead of starting with universals as

> an obligatory grid of intelligibility for certain concrete practices, I would like to start with these concrete practices and, as it were, pass these universals through the grid of these practices. (Foucault 2008, 3)

When studying 'international practices', it would in this regard be crucial to pass the concept of the international through the grid of the practices it is seen to be bound up with and, by so doing, to reframe, problematize and possibly re-conceptualize the 'international'.

The same is obviously true as far as 'intervention' is concerned. When trying to apply practice theories to the latter, it is not enough to look at the 'socially organized activities that pertain to intervention'. One also has to gauge what is left of (and done to) the very concept of 'intervention' once one starts looking at the myriad of not necessarily coherent practices that are seen to constitute it. Furthermore, what can 'pertaining to' come to mean in this context? Is the very practice of denying something not also a way of pertaining to it? For example, are discursive denials or critiques of intervention not also constitutive of the latter, as Cynthia Weber (1995) has highlighted and as the contribution of Julien Pomar-ède and Théa Schjødt (2015) also shows?

It is undeniably tempting to escape the difficulties of traditional conceptual approaches by starting off with the social practices that are usually framed though the given concept (for a critique of this idea, see Andersen and Neumann 2012). In line with Foucault's abovementioned quote, our point is however that the practicality of practice approaches only reveals itself when relating the analysis of practices back to the concepts employed to make sense of what they are supposed to be (or to do).

The Concept of Intervention: A Dead End?

Why is the concept of intervention such a problematic one? While giving a few tentative answers to this question, we here intend to show why an approach focusing on social practices is particularly apposite.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century up until the 1980s in Europe, 'international intervention' (i.e. intervention in the 'Western hemisphere' up until the era of decolonization) as a category of statecraft was foremost and in principle considered as a violation of international law and its founding concept of sovereignty. At best, it could only be an 'exception' confirming the norms underpinning 'Western' international politics, a potentially transgressive borderline practice that had to be duly justified and/or denied by the actors accused of transgressing the norms of sovereignty and non-intervention (Finnemore 2003). Initially these justifications or denials were flowing from, and enacting, a dynastic conception of sovereignty. Progressively, as the European Congress system was coming to an end and positive international law overtook natural law, they came to understand sovereignty as national self-determination (Weber 1995; Little 2011).

Intervention was however from the start a problematic and elusive concept. Paradoxically, justifications of intervention in the name of the need to establish or reinstate a particular form of sovereignty simultaneously functioned as denials of intervention: when accused of intervening in a state, and hence of violating its sovereignty, the intervening parties would reframe sovereignty as being consistent with their actions by defining it in relation to dynastic principles, national self-determination, the responsibility to protect, and so on. By doing so, the 'interveners' could simultaneously justify their interventions and negate them as interventions. The meanings of sovereignty and intervention were hence co-constitutive, yet variable, since justifications of interventionism instituted new meanings of sovereignty and non-intervention (Weber 1995; Malmvig 2006; Delcourt 2006). To the extent that intervention was an object of diplomatic and legal controversy that at the same time could be seen as violating and upholding sovereignty, it truly was framed as an exception in the Schmittian sense of the term (Fassin and Pandolfi 2010), i.e. as simultaneously contradicting and instituting a particular legal order in an 'international society' limited to the 'Western world' (Bull 1977).

While 'international society' is now generally considered as encompassing the whole world (Bull 1977; Buzan 2004), an increasing number of elements seem to indicate that the borders between the norm and the exception are becoming blurred. Thus, in a context in which notions of intervention and humanitarian action tend to become intertwined in practice (Finnemore 2003), 'Western' state representatives are increasingly forced to justify and/or deny their apparent non-intervention in Bahrain, Ukraine, Syria or elsewhere. These justifications/denials seem to be formulated as if intervention had become the norm to be complied with and non-intervention the exception to be justified or denied (Malmvig 2006). Does this imply that the realm of international relations has undergone a radical transformation, perhaps even marking an evolution towards an imperial order in which respect for national sovereignties is the exception rather than the rule?

Such a conclusion would be premature at best since such a development would mark the end of the 'inter-national' that to a certain extent is premised upon the complementary opposition between national sovereignty and intervention (Walker 2006a; Olsson 2013). In fact, what seems to have happened is that the meaning of 'intervention' has become increasingly polysemic and vague. It refers to different types of endeavours (coercive, non-coercive, 'interventions on invitation'); involving a wide array of policy sectors (cultural, economic, military, legal etc.); seeing the engagement of a diverse set of 'interveners' (states, international organizations, NGOs etc.) as well as 'targets' (states, 'crises', civil wars, populations etc.). In sum, the concept is used to describe an extremely heterogeneous set of practices ranging from all-out war, in which case it serves as a euphemism, to the provision of humanitarian aid. What does this proliferation of 'interventionist' enunciations reveal about contemporary international relations? How can the concept of 'intervention' be recast in the light of current developments? If 'interventionist' practices do not any longer unfold outside of the

purview of normalized international behaviour, does this necessarily imply that it has become a norm? Could it not be said to be 'folded' in the norm, both inside and outside, as the two faces of a Moebius strip (Bigo 2001; Agamben 2005)?

These are some of the interrogations that have led us to propose this special section problematizing the 'interventionist practices'[1] proliferating in the increasingly broad grey area between 'sovereignty' and 'intervention'. Indeed, as argued by Barbara Delcourt (2015), 'interventionism' cannot any longer be approached as a mainly legal concept referring to blatant violations of state sovereignty (in which case, clear-cut interventions would be very rare) or exclusively through political theory (a world in which intervention is the rule is not 'international' but 'imperial' (Walker 2006b)). There are then reasons to believe that the apparent continuity of interventionary discourses since the beginning of the nineteenth century in fact dissimulates the extreme diversity of the practices that have actualized and transformed its meanings throughout this period. For example, as practices of military interventionism and of humanitarianism have come to interpenetrate in the 1990s (Finnemore 2003), sovereignty (and hence intervention) has since the early 2000s been reframed through the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), thus creating significant discontinuities with previous modes of action and justification.

A practice approach is here particularly appealing since, as highlighted by Paul Veyne, it precisely does not assume broad political categories to refer to an essence that would remain constant throughout time. It rather advocates focusing on the contingent, emergent and shifting practices that it is seen to designate at different moments in time as well as on their transformations. Moreover, rather than analysing these practices as flowing from a given set of interests, ideas or identities, such an approach implies focusing on these material practices in and for themselves in order to see how they interact, evolve, differentiate and merge, thus producing effects and creating virtualities that are largely emergent in relation to the rationalities that are seen to guide these practices (Veyne 1997).

'Interventionist Practices': Vain Escape or Productive Paradox?

Considering the difficulty of defining intervention in simultaneously substantial and trans-historical terms, a turn towards the historical practices usually framed through it could seem a convenient way out. The activity of making sense of and historicizing practices is however no less conceptual than the ones arising from 'purely' conceptual work. Indeed, firstly, it does not alleviate the 'burden' of justifying on what basis a set of practices are delimited (on the basis of the networks formed by their practitioners, their material features or manifestations, the effects they produce),[2] how one designates them, how one problematizes their analysis, etc. To the extent that each of these operations is mediated by language and that the latter organizes knowledge rather than merely reflecting a pre-existing 'reality', it necessarily involves a degree of conceptualization. Secondly, while most traditional approaches advocate settling

conceptual debates prior to empirical research, practice understandings imply that a substantial, and perhaps even the most important part of the conceptual work is done while sifting taken-for-granted concepts through the grid of practices, and hence in the very process of analysing the latter (Balzacq et al. 2010; Bigo 2011; Harrison 2010). To switch one's focus from the 'concept of intervention' to 'interventionist practices', as we argue for, does make a substantial difference, as highlighted by Julien Jeandesboz (2015). It does not however make the question of what makes these practices 'interventionist' any less pressing or any less conceptual.

As with the notion of 'international practices' previously mentioned, it is then important to relink the 'materially mediated arrays of human activity' to the concept that allows regrouping and distinguishing them from other such arrays. The question for the practice analyst is ultimately how singular, contingent and 'rare' practices (Veyne 1997) can be conceptually regrouped either as being ultimately the *same* practice or clusters of *different* practices without losing sight of these doings' immanent logic that is always partially resistant to one's endeavours.

For example, is 'declaring war' a practice or a cluster of different practices? At least two different questions have here to be distinguished. Firstly, is one particular historical declaration of war itself the performance of one practice or a cluster of sequentially organized but different practices, including for example the writing of the official speech, its endorsement by competent authorities, its organization by protocol specialists and finally its ritualized pronunciation by a political leader? This raises the question of what a practice is and hence of the 'unit of analysis' of practice understandings. The answer might vary depending on whether one considers that a practice has to be integrally embodied in one social agent or if it can include the coordination of multiple bodies.

A second question is whether different 'declarations of war' at different epochs or geographical locations are the enactment of one and the same generic practice or if the very notion of declaration of war does not in fact conflate practices that are fundamentally different in spite of being referred to as such 'declarations'. For example, spoken proclamations of war and written declarations of war, formal declarations and informal proclamations of war, declarations by heads of state and by leaders of clandestine political movements are not necessarily the same practices. Here the question is whether the concept of 'declaration of war' refers to a strictly formal practice or can also be informal, whether the concept of 'war' is better used only for activities performed by public agents or can also be extended to non-state practitioners of political violence. The multiplicity of 'practices' that make the stuff of history and their enactments do not by themselves allow these questions to be answered without the mediation of concepts that determine what can be known and on what terms.

We here have two levels of conceptualization: the first one concerns the concept of practice, the second the concept through which different 'doings' are assembled and distinguished from others. However one approaches the problem, there are no easy answers. By definition, practices are patterned,

organized, routinized 'doings' that display regularities, yet at the same time are irreducibly uneven, heterogeneous and unstable in time and space. As claimed by Andreas Reckwitz, 'a practice represents a pattern which can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions reproducing the practice' (Reckwitz 2002, 250). The difficulty is then how one delimits a specific practice or a group of practices based on common patterns, without reviving the essentializing universals that practice theories set out to challenge. One way out of this difficulty, which is here explored by Julien Pomarède and Théa Schjødt (2015), is to distinguish 'general' and 'specific' practices following a suggestion initially formulated by Lene Hansen (2011). This distinction however only partly solves the problem since specific practices tend to redefine the general practice they were an enactment of. Moreover, one specific practice can perform multiple general practices at the same time.

Practice theories add a third level of conceptualization. For example, through a concept such as 'field of practice', Bourdieu has tried to grasp the interplay between the singularity and patterned character of practices. Indeed, the field is a network of objective positions structured by struggles between social agents over specific species of power (Bourdieu 1998). As such it structurally shapes and limits the collective practices that its agents might display. At the same time, the dispositions that the agents bring with them into the field allow for agency on their part and hence also for transformations of the field (Bourdieu 1984; Lahire 2012; Loughlan, Olsson, and Schouten 2014).

Ideally these three levels of conceptualization—(1) of practices; (2) of a particular type or category of practices; (3) of the conceptual tools that can be mobilized in the analysis of practices—are to be elaborated upon in close interaction with empirical investigation. It is simultaneously important to recognize that the concepts that one mobilizes are inevitably linked to what one tries to do, to the purpose of one's research and hence to the concept's practical purpose. When ranging a class of practices under the same concept based on their immanent material manifestation, one is always singling out one particular manifestation that multiple practices have in common in spite of being very different from the point of view of other manifestations. Like the glass fragments of a kaleidoscope, practices are not only permanently disassembled and reassembled but also convey a different image to the observer depending on the positioning of its mirrors, or in this case of the conceptual framework. While practice understandings rightly remind the researcher of the importance of accounting for the immanent logic of material practices that always partially subvert the unity and distinctiveness of concepts, it would be non-reflexive to pretend that this logic can be articulated and made sense of without the active mediation of, and hence interpretation through, concepts.

Approaching intervention through its 'doings' is not a convenient way out of conceptual controversy for another important reason. The analysis of practices entails a focus on processes of routinization that constitute the latter as (more or less) 'competent performances' (Adler and Pouliot 2011). This raises a seemingly difficult question in relation to intervention as traditionally understood,

as a violation of the norm of sovereignty supposed to constitute one of the central 'rules of the game' of interstate relations: can a transgression be constituted by competent performances and hence be performed 'in the right way'? Are the only 'competent interventions' not by definition constituted by clandestine or covert actions and, in this case, can they still be conceived of as 'performances'? In other words, is there not in the case of transgressions a practical incompatibility between competence and performance and more generally between routinized practices and exceptional actions? In fact there is no problem in analysing social practices as subverting or contradicting general norms such as the one of non-intervention. On the contrary, as highlighted by Julien Jeandesboz (2015) through the concept of 'sub-version', that is what practices often do: they are always partly in excess of, or even contrary to, the formal rules or norms that are supposed to govern them (Walker 2006a, 59). As claimed by Schatzki, 'what makes sense to someone to do is not the same as what someone thinks is appropriate, right or correct' (Schatzki 2002, 75). Moreover, to master the 'rules of the game' that apply to a practice is also to know when, how and under what conditions one can allow oneself not to follow these rules or to use them in order to change the game itself (Bourdieu 1984): ultimately to be a 'competent performer' is not necessarily to conform to the 'rules of the game' in all circumstances but also to know how to break and change them competently. This requires some elaboration in relation to intervention.

Practices seen as instantiating 'intervention' have in reality been part of the more or less routinized courses of action that constituted the horizon of Western interstate relations since at least the Congress of Vienna (Little 2011; Finnemore 2003). Indeed, within any stabilized definition of what constitutes an intervention at a specific moment and place, its constitutive practices could be considered as competent performances provided they were justified in ways that allowed for some of the 'practitioners of the international' to lay aside dominant interpretations of the law of nations/international law as one of the main modes of legitimation in international relations. This was illustrated by one of the frequent conclusions drawn from the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia: illegal but supposedly legitimate because performed in circumstances that made many vocal supporters of international law suddenly consider that 'legalistic' arguments were far too narrow and technical in this particular case.

We here have a conundrum that needs to be elucidated. One could indeed conclude from the preceding that international law is irrelevant to governmental practice and vice versa. This would however be erroneous: the juridical practice of interpreting 'a corpus of texts sanctifying a correct or legitimized vision of the social world' (Bourdieu 1987, 817) constitutes a resource and a constraint for governments and, inversely, governmental practices are generative of new meanings that might create or transform dominant interpretations of legal norms. It is hence not a coincidence that just a few years after the abovementioned bombing campaign, sovereignty was increasingly interpreted as conditional upon the R2P principle, and this even by some (initially relatively marginal) legal experts as shown by Barbara Delcourt (2015).

What is at the heart of the matter is how different practical domains inter-act. One has in this regard to distinguish on the one hand international law as a field (or subfield) of legal experts producing legitimate interpretations of inter-national rules and, on the other hand, the social universes of diplomats, pro-fessionals of politics and security experts with tacit 'rules of the game' that need not at all times be consistent with dominant (but by no means consensual) interpretations of international legal principles. What is 'normal' in one field can be 'exceptional' in another. This is not to say that the pull of law does not make itself felt on other practices, but it is not always as unequivocal as one might think. Indeed, the symbolic power vested in the field of international law is inseparable from the structural oppositions that fuel its internal struggles. In Bourdieu's view the juridical field[3] is highly heterogeneous. It is infused with struggles between legal practitioners and scholars strongly resist-ing influences and pressures from other practical realms (as orthodox 'guar-dians' of what is seen as an autonomous legal order[4]) and other more 'pragmatic' or multi-positioned legal experts putting their heterodox legal interpretations at the service of *loci* of power external to the field (Bourdieu 1987; Delcourt 2015): politicians, civil or military officials, firms but also NGOs and advocacy groups. The 'force of law', the formal acceptance of legal rules by other practitioners, is, according to Bourdieu, precisely linked to the 'division of juridical labor' (Bourdieu 1987, 817) resulting from these struggles: while the 'guardians of the temple' ensure that the legal norms appear as autonomous, neutral, rational and apolitical (and hence maintain their symbolic force), the 'pragmatics' ensure that they are sufficiently accom-modating for dominant agents outside of the juridical field to have a vested interest in the reproduction of the 'force of law'. While being opposed within the field, 'guardians of the temple' and 'pragmatics' cooperate (know-ingly or unknowingly) to reproduce its power outside of the field through their complementary opposition. Ultimately the quasi-magnetic (but limited) pull of the juridical field on other domains is inseparable both from its apparent autonomy and its dissimulated heteronomy, both of which are tied to the field's internal structure and struggles.

In interstate relations, the legal domain is certainly less unified and the 'force of law' accordingly less constraining than in domestic settings (Vauchez 2008). However, if Bourdieu's reasoning were here correct, it would imply that the abovementioned process of co-constitution of sovereignty and intervention (Weber 1995), would be neither automatic, nor exclusively mediated by discursive practices. It would amongst others be contingent upon the interactions between the practical realm of international law and other fields of practice as well as upon the struggles arising from within the field of international law to subvert or main-tain its dominant interpretations of international rules. There would in other words be significant discrepancies between the material practices of 'world poli-tics' (that might find justifications in the interpretation of what are still heterodox and/or marginal legal experts) and what they are supposed to be according to dominant interpretations of international law.

Reformulating the Question: On the Routinization of Transgressive Behaviour

To analyse interventionism through its practices is to highlight that, contrary to traditional assumptions (Rosenau 1968, 1969), it cannot and in fact never could solely be understood through the category of the exceptional. One must account for the routinization of its practices, and hence for the way in which their founding transgressions might tend to become normalized (although this is by no means necessary). Practices do set 'precedents', even when they are not recognized as such: they shape contexts that create durable dispositions among agents (Lahire 2012). Intervention, within any given meaning of the term, is then less about a dialectics of the norm and the exception than about the intricate relations between social fields.

Consequently, rather than focusing on the traditional legal concept of intervention, here we will deal with 'interventionist practices'. We frame the latter as the discursive and non-discursive arrays of activity that either are born out of (or have been linked to) what at a given moment in time has been defined as intervention by dominant legal interpretations but that has sedimented into quotidian international *praxes*. We will hence also use the expression to describe practices that are caught up in the controversies surrounding 'intervention', without necessarily falling under this category in most legal accounts. Indeed, such practices might unknowingly create the conditions of possibility for more clearly defined interventions (Doty 1993). For example, Julien Pomarède and Théa Schjødt (2015) show convincingly how the discursive practices deployed by NATO representatives in the context of its airlift operation over Darfur to a certain extent paved the way for more clearly defined 'interventions', such as the one in Libya in 2010. Our working definition of 'interventionist practices' is self-admittedly quite broad and diffuse. However, since our object lies in the increasingly large grey zone between sovereignty and intervention, this characterization is integral to our problematization of the subject.

The difference in perspective that practice understandings introduce is potentially substantial. In the 'norm/exception' way of thinking about intervention, the banalization of the exception can be assimilated to a systemic shift. The conclusions flowing from a sociologically inspired practice-theoretical approach[5] would most likely be divergent. Governments and their bureaucratic apparatuses are here seen to be constituted by a plurality of distinct but interrelated fields (Bourdieu 2014) with their own material interests, dispositions and rules of the game coming together in the 'practical reason' of the fields' agents (Bourdieu 1998). As a result, there can be durable inconsistencies between the legal norms as interpreted by the dominant practitioners of international law and the practices deployed by intelligence services, the military or diplomats.

More importantly perhaps, there can also be persistent contradictions between the discursive and non-discursive practices of the agents of a same field, for example professionals of politics (Veyne 1997). Contextual constraints can lead politicians to make tactical moves that contradict their publicly held views

without this necessarily being self-perceived as a recantation. Indeed, it might be consistent with their 'practical reason', following which public statements are foremost ways of 'doing politics' rather than privileged ways of revealing one's personal convictions or capacity for formally logical reasoning (Bourdieu 2000). Such apparent contradictions are then more likely to be the outcome of the practical 'rules of the game' of the field than of the individual psychology of political leaders ('their cynicism') or the 'organized hypocrisy' of international politics (Krasner 1995). Non-interventionist narratives can very well coexist more or less durably with interventionist practices, both discursive and non-discursive (Malmvig 2006). In the light of sociological practice theories, the very idea of a dialectics of the norm and the exception becomes less of an *aporia* than the expression of a world made up of a multitude of often conflicting practical universes in which contextual constraints might create lasting disjunctions between what is said and done. In this sense, (contextually defined) transgressive behaviour can indeed become (contextually) normalized. The contributions in this special section all show how such disjunctions are bound up with questions of change in international relations.

In IR theory, this notion of 'interventionist practices' was already present in Cynthia Weber's seminal work on sovereignty/intervention (Weber 1995). In her poststructuralist practice approach (also see Doty 1993), she treated 'interventionist practices' as acts that have to be denied (as 'interventions') by the 'interveners' precisely because they are likely to be accused of being 'interventions'. Although she hence dealt with interventionist practices as being partly non-discursive, her analysis nearly exclusively focused on the discursive practices redefining sovereignty and intervention in order to justify these first-mentioned practices. While clearly ground-breaking, her analysis left substantial work to be done on the articulation between what is said and what is done.

Interventionist Practices: Presentation of the Contributions

This special section is meant as an invitation to take the intricacies of practices seriously while simultaneously questioning and reframing the taken-for-granted concepts we tend to use when analysing them. Perhaps more importantly, we are arguing that these are two inseparable requirements arising from any attempt to put practice approaches 'to work'. Social practices cannot be accessed in any analytically meaningful sense independently from the partially arbitrary (and we insist on the 'partially') concepts through which we carve out distinct 'practices' or 'groups of practices' from pre-existing continua.[6] Conversely, concepts that are not transformed in the light of the asperities of the human activities they are meant to grasp are likely to become more obscuring than enlightening.

This special section comprises three articles dealing with some of the main questions raised in this introduction. In his fascinating account of the implementation of EU capacity-building programmes at the Ukrainian–Moldovan border, Julien Jeandesboz (2015) displays very concretely what it means to pass

essentializing concepts through the grid of heterogeneous practices and what such an approach does for the analysis of interventionist practices. Barbara Delcourt (2015) convincingly highlights the role played by new concepts crafted by heterodox experts of international law in the routinization of interventionist practices. Julien Pomarède and Théa Schjødt (2015) show in their extremely detailed account of the controversies that have surrounded NATO's air-lift operation in Darfur how discursive practices made these interventionist practices possible but also how the virtualities contained within these practices paved the way for more ambitious interventions on the African continent.

From the point of view of 'practice theories', all of the contributions explore distinct avenues. Jeandesboz draws in his article on a Foucauldian and sociological understanding of practices of governmentality while accessing the latter through ethnographic fieldwork and careful analyses of the policy programmes they are bound up with. Pomarède and Schjødt mobilize a poststructuralist framework to highlight the inherent instability of the 'specific practices' through which NATO's operation was justified and given meaning to and that were premised upon a set of 'general practices' that had emerged during previous NATO operations. Delcourt's contribution combines elements of legal theory and international political sociology with Cynthia Weber's seminal work on interventionist practices to show how recent changes in contemporary forms of interventionism have transformed the relation between sovereignty and intervention.

In relation to the conceptualization of interventionism, the articles are equally contrasting. Pomarède and Schjødt build their account of the interventionism by showing how the Alliance's spokesmen had to negotiate their way through the accusations and controversies that the perspective of NATO involvement in Darfur triggered and according to which the operation was either too limited or on the contrary potentially too intrusive. By showing how the operation in/over Darfur links with the Kosovo intervention and with the one in Libya, this account is fully consistent with the conceptualization of interventionist practices laid out in this introduction. Jeandesboz shows that EU practices at the Ukrainian–Moldovan border, while not being interventions in the orthodox sense, apply techniques of government that are bent on setting conduct right and reforming social, technical and political systems. Such resort to technical knowledge in order to reform, improve or restore normally autonomous systems is generally described as 'interventions', for example when performed by surgeons, technicians or policemen. These EU practices can hence be re-conceptualized as interventionist according to the author. Delcourt shows in her article that both of these (re-)conceptualizations of interventionism, one bound up with changing meanings of sovereignty/intervention and the other linked to practices claiming to (re-)form conduct and heal societies, are relevant for the study of contemporary interventionist practices.

In spite of the diversity of the interventionist practices here analysed, the contributions show that a sociological objectification of some of their common features is possible. Firstly, their focus is on organizing (coercively, through inducement or otherwise) the autonomy and liberty of the 'other' with all the

tensions, paradoxes and double-binds that this entails. In other words, prac-titioners of interventionism exert power and generate resistance while denying their own power (Chandler 2006); they claim to reach out to the 'Other' but frame the latter as a risk to be controlled (Jeandesboz 2007). Secondly, these practices are essentially about being projected across geographical borders while maintaining formally, but crucially, the distinction between 'here and there', 'in-country' and 'out-country', 'locals' and 'internationals'. From this point of view, interventionist practices are very different from 'imperialism' as historically based on a dialectics of incorporation/differentiation (Cooper 2002). Thirdly, they are locally framed as transitory, limited in time, occasional, even when prolonged and institutionalized in time and space. Fourthly, they unfold in the context of essentially non-reciprocal power relations as opposed to relations based on exchange or mutual assistance. After all, humanitarian assistance shares at least one feature with coercive regime change: it is virtually never simultaneously reciprocal between two governments.

These elements do not allow for circumscribing a clear-cut category of prac-tices. Rather they are meant to show that although the relation between the norm and the exception seems to be turned on its head, this is an illusion for two reasons. Firstly, practices are never totally determined by norms. Similarly, norms are not immediately undermined by practices that circumvent them, only by practices that do not take precautions when doing so. After all, the first three of the abovementioned features are precisely about taking such precautions in order not to be accused of violating sovereignty. Secondly, many 'doings' in international relations share these four features. The current proliferation of references to 'international interventions' might then be linked less to a radical shift in international politics than to a complexification of what counts as 'inter-national'. When the international is no longer seen as the domain of 'solemn declarations' and 'extraordinary events', but rather of a myriad of heterogeneous and bureaucratic practices (Bigo 2012), the meanings of sovereignty and interven-tion are equally diffracted and diffused across multiple sites. It is our ambition for this special section to develop these elements further by analysing the interven-tionist practices of the everyday (Jennings and Boas 2015), by getting more prac-tice into theory, by focusing more on the heterogeneity of power relations than on the parsimonious elegance of ready-made concepts.

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Notes on Contributor

Christian Olsson is associate professor in International Relations at *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (ULB), affiliated to its *Recherche et Enseignement en Politique Internationale* (REPI) research unit. He is associate editor of the French journal of international political sociology *Cultures & Conflits*. Drawing in particular on (critical) security studies and sociological approaches, his research focuses on the colonial genealogies of contemporary military doctrine, the historical sociology of security practices and the role of private military companies in recent overseas military interventions, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq where he has carried out field research. Recent publications include: '"Legitimate Violence" in the Prose of Counterinsurgency: An Impossible Necessity?' (*Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, May 2013).

Notes

1   Malmvig rather uses the expression 'interventionary practices' (see Malmvig 2006).

2   Practitioners draw, through their practices, borders between their social universes but these borders by no means need to be the only 'legitimate' ones between categories of practice.

3   Although Bourdieu focuses on domestic law, one can hypothesize this also to be the case in international law, although this would have to be empirically tested. The article by Barbara Delcourt in this special section goes some way in doing this (Delcourt 2015).

4   At least in the sense that the principles of recognition following which international legal rules can be distinguished from other rules are seen to be autonomous from (but necessarily incompatible with) political, moral or ideological judgements.

5   Without going into too much detail, one can note that not all practice-theoretical approaches can be said to be sociological in any meaningful sense. This is notably the case for some poststructuralist analyses.

6   And even so, they can only be accessed partially though some of their manifestations and expressions, rather than in their totality.

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