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Article

The logic of distinction: nationalism and status seeking in Germany

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Abstract

This article proposes a framework that captures the logic of status seeking and reassesses the influence of one of its key drivers: nationalism. Inspired by Bourdieu's logic of distinction, the article conceptualises status as a form of social distinction and argues that nationalism influences status seeking based on variations in its external dimension. By examining the case of German nationalism, we illustrate how status-seeking practices such as overseas expansion, involvement with the League of Nations, and participation in European integration were determined by the interplay between a state's position, national habitus and rules of status politics.

Keywords: Bourdieu; Distinction; Germany; Nationalism; Status.

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Introduction

Status is a fundamental aspect of contemporary international politics. China's Belt and Road Initiative (Liu 2021), India's "swing power" efforts (Paul 2024), Brazil's emphasis on mediation (Buarque and Ribeiro 2023), Norway's commitment to curbing emissions from deforestation (Lahn and Rowe 2014) and Russia's interference in sovereign states (Freire and Heller 2018) serve to illustrate the prominence of status politics in both national and international agendas. International relations (IR) scholarship has been dedicated to understanding the *whys*, *whens* and *hows* of status politics (Wohlforth et al. 2018), from social-psychological (Larson and Shevchenko 2019) and constructivist (Pouliot 2014) to rationalist-instrumental (Renshon 2016) approaches. Nevertheless, a framework that integrates the conditions influencing status-seeking practices in different contexts remains to be developed (Götz 2021). This article introduces a new conceptual framework that addresses the persistence of status

concerns, delineates the logic of status pursuit, and reassesses nationalism's influence on status seeking by highlighting its often-overlooked external dimension, which inherently involves status distinctions in international politics. The research question that is addressed is as follows: how do the various forms of nationalism, distinguished by their external dimension, influence the logic of status-seeking practices?

This article has two principal objectives. The primary objective is to engage with the existing literature on status and propose a new conceptualisation of status as a form of social distinction in a hierarchically ordered international space. Drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of the logic of distinction, we demonstrate how status seeking is an intrinsic feature of international politics, regardless of a state's international standing. The second objective is to elucidate how this logic, when applied at the state level, encompasses nationalism and its impacts on distinction practices. The article uses the paradigmatic case of German nationalism to illustrate our framework. Germany's pursuit of status, often driven by nationalism, has significantly influenced European and global affairs (Winkler 2006; 2007). This pursuit manifests in a number of different practices, including colonialism and hegemonic violence, as well as multilateralism and supranational integration (Schöllgen 1990; Maull 2005). Throughout these endeavours, Germany occupied varying status positions in Europe, and nationalism took on different forms (Smith 2020). The logic of distinction encompasses all these elements, showing how distinction practices have arisen from the interplay between Germany's position as a dominant or subordinate power in the European hierarchy, national dispositions reflecting the time-specific form of nationalism, and the principles governing status politics in Europe.

The article is organised as follows. The first section examines the conceptualisation of status in IR and the connection between nationalism and status seeking. The second section explores the heuristic value of the logic of distinction in framing status-seeking practices. The following three sections present our empirical examples: Bismarckian Germany's overseas expansion, Weimar Germany's involvement with the League of Nations, and West Germany's participation in the early years of the European integration project. The concluding section puts forward suggestions for future lines of inquiry and considers the methodological issues that arise from the logic of distinction in international politics.

Status seeking in IR

IR's status research originally emerged as a challenge to the foundational premise of anarchy as the ordering principle of international politics. Instead, it focused on social stratification processes and the establishment of hierarchy as the ordering principle of international relations (Lake 2009). Over time, it evolved into an inquiry into the distinct conceptual nature of status in relation to cognate concepts like power (Guzzini 2017), prestige (Khong 2019), and honour

(Steele 2008). According to Larson et al. (2014, 8, emphasis in original), status is characterised by being "*collective*, *subjective* and *relative* (…) recognised through voluntary *deference* by others." This means that status designations, such as great power, rising power or civilian power, as relational ascriptions depend on socially constructed and recognised markers encompassing material and normative criteria (Duque 2018).

Once status was recognised as a social construct, studies were conducted to map the manifestations of status politics. Despite the emphasis on the dynamics of rising and declining powers, research has expanded our understanding of the processes of status signalling (Pu and Schweller 2014), dilemmas (Wohlforth 2014), accommodation (Paul and Shankar 2014), dissatisfaction (Greve and Levy 2018), immobility (Ward 2017), and inconsistencies (Krickovic and Weber 2018). Additionally, research revealed that states employ diverse and complementary strategies to attain status, indicating that not all states resort to the same status-seeking practice. For instance, research inspired by social identity theory (Turner 1975) suggests that states seek status through social competition and social creativity strategies. This involves outdoing rivals in status markers, including possessing a powerful naval fleet or veto power in an organisation, as well as hosting mega-events and transforming negatively perceived attributes into positive ones (see Larson and Shevchenko 2019; Subotic and Vucetic 2017). However, evidence indicates that states, particularly revisionist powers, frequently eschew institutions, practices, and markers that sustain a status quo, instead resorting to warfare as a means to attaining and maintaining status (Renshon 2017). Consequently, research has concentrated on the factors that affect the decision to seek status. These include the positions of under or overachievers (Volgy et al. 2014), power transition periods (Wohlforth 2009), the deferred-significant Other against which status is measured (Wolf 2022), the existence of humiliation events (Barnhart 2016), and the rules of status recognition.

Nonetheless, some puzzles still need to be addressed. Studies should adequately consider the unequal distribution of power between states, which makes powerful states more inclined to status seeking, and clarify what renders the overturn of status orders more likely than order-supporting status seeking. Understanding the factors and their variations that drive states to avoid hegemonic violence in favour of other status-seeking practices, such as joining international organisations or leading global initiatives, is crucial. The following section will discuss the concept of nationalism as an illustration of this tendency.

Nationalism and status seeking

IR research has demonstrated that nationalism influences and is influenced by international events through three lines of inquiry. One line of investigation has demonstrated that international outcomes impact nationalism, leading to shifts in people's identification with their nation and national borders (Sambanis et al. 2015). For example, Kornprobst (2008) highlighted how

the construction of the Berlin Wall prompted West Germans to reconsider territorial claims regarding East Germany in the 1960s. Another line examined nationalism's impact on foreign policy (Gruffydd-Jones 2017). Whereas some view nationalism as a uniform ideology promoting aggressive foreign policies (Mearsheimer 2019), others have found evidence of its varied effects. In response to the criticism of the civic/ethnic dichotomy (Tamir 2019; Tinsley 2019), Powers (2022) suggests, based on the EU's experience, that equality-based nationalism, rooted in fairness and reciprocity, is likely to mitigate militarism, whereas unity-based nationalism does not. Lastly, a third line stresses the co-constitutive relation between systemic dynamics and nationalism (Hall 1999). From this perspective, Schweller (2018) explained the differences between the United States' restraint-focused and Chinese outward-looking foreign policies based on the interplay between nationalism and power trajectories.

Notwithstanding the attention that IR has devoted to the influence of nationalism on foreign policy, the relation between nationalism and status seeking remains understudied. One notable exception is Ward's (2017) analysis of how nationalists in revisionist powers, like Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan, respond to the condition of status immobility by advocating for the overthrow of the status order. However, the analysis is incomplete in three respects. First, the analysis fails to consider the circumstances under which states pursue different revisionist policies. Goddard (2018) presents a compelling argument that the structure of the order revisionists seek to overturn is a critical determinant of their strategic approach. Secondly, it overlooks the diverse forms of nationalisms, particularly their under-theorised external dimension. While nationalism aligns territorial and cultural borders (Gellner 1983), it also involves the construction of a discourse asserting a nation's position in a status hierarchy. Here, we adopt Meyer Resende's (2014) analytical typology, which distinguishes between two distinct types of nationalism: introverted and extroverted. Extroverted nationalisms, characterised by a positive view of relations among nations, accommodate the pursuit of national goals with the sharing of sovereign powers. In contrast, introverted nationalisms are characterised by hostile attitudes towards other nations, based on a view that relations among nations are inherently conflictual. We build on this typology, which complements those theories of nationalism focused on the internal origins of national formation, and focus on status-seeking relations between nations in an international hierarchy. Finally, Ward (2017, 37–38) argues that nationalists in revisionist states consider status essential to national self-esteem. However, the varying external dimensions of nationalism can influence status seeking in different ways. Introverted and extroverted nationalisms both involve the pursuit of status, but the practices through which this is done are distinct. The following section presents an integrative framework addressing these concerns, arguing that Bourdieu's (1984) logic of distinction provides cues into the social conditions of status-seeking practices.

The logic of distinction in international politics

The Practice-Turn marked Bourdieusian sociology's entry into IR theorising (Schatzki 2001; Mérand and Pouliot 2008; Bigo 2011). Incorporating Bourdieusian notions such as "cultural capital" (Williams 2012), "symbolic capital" (Musgrave and Nexon 2018), and "hysteresis" (Neumann and Pouliot 2011), status research draws from the idea that "people seek status because they were born into a state of profound sociality" (Pouliot 2014, 197). However, no studies have explored Bourdieu's logic of distinction despite its valuable insights into status-seeking practices. One such insight is the understanding that status markers are "designated by their rarity" (Bourdieu 2014, 176), explaining why displaying rare proprieties and practices is a primary concern of dominant states (and those wishing to become one). As Bourdieu (1984, 251–52) posits, dominant players "engage in an endless pursuit of new proprieties through which to assert their rarity." Notwithstanding the existence of a form of self-imposed domination, dominant players are driven to prevent the vulgarisation of distinctive proprieties and practices. This is achieved through the regulation of the exhibition of symbolic capital (status markers), which only holds value through controlled display (Bourdieu 2014, 219). Symbolic capital "unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others" (Bourdieu 1984, 56).

Another insight is recognising the presence of horizontal differentiation processes within the dominant class. The logic of distinction frames the dominant fraction of the ruling class's appeal to a "status-derived capital" (Bourdieu 1984, 70), which it mobilises to differentiate itself from burgeoning fractions. Based on an idea of seniority emerging from the precocious acquisition status markers, this capital serves as a form of advance (both a headstart and a credit) that enables those who previously displayed the rarest conditions to master time (e.g., previous periods as a dominant power) and utilise it to preserve their distinction (Bourdieu 1984, 71). Weimar policymakers' efforts to impede Germany's status demotion by setting its historical great power status apart from other status-seeking powers, such as Brazil or Poland, are examples of mobilisation of such capital. While rising powers may meet the material or normative criteria, they must learn and adapt to the superimposed rules of the status game established by dominant powers, which master the "feel for the game" that allows them to exert domination without appearing to do so (Williams 2007, 36).

Recasting status along the lines of the logic of distinction offers at least two advantages. Firstly, it features a field-theoretic explanation of interstate relations, which views the unequal distribution of power as a result of the unequal "control of various historically constructed and determined forms of capital" (Epstein 2012, 30; see also Mattern and Zarakol 2016).[1] As such, it provides scaffolding for exploring status seeking, for instance, within Nexon and Neumann's (2018) field-theoretic adaptation of hegemonic-order theory. Secondly, it reintroduces the often-overlooked concept of national habitus (Bjola and Kornprobst 2007), which has the potential

[1] See Cohen (2018) for an overview of Bourdieu's field theory in IR.

to connect nationalism to status seeking and clarify why some states are more inclined to seek status than others. As Bourdieu (1987, 115) would argue, "the most effective strategies of distinction are those that stem from practical, pre-reflective, quasi-instinctual choices of habitus."

Conceptualising national habitus

Emerging from a dynamic process of internalising personal and collective history (Bourdieu 1984, 170), the habitus consists of a "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (Pouliot and Mérand 2012, 29; see also Bourdieu 1990). Bourdieu's (2014) later research advanced the notion of national habitus (see Elias 1996), which, when imported to IR, is both complementary and distinct from national identities and roles. A national habitus differs from the latter in that it consists of an often-unconscious system of dispositions emanating from internalised past experiences and resistant to sudden changes. In contrast, identities and roles entail intersubjective processes of self-understanding and identification that render them more prone to change (either self-induced or externally imposed) than habitus (Bucher and Jasper 2017; Brummer and Thies 2015).

We define national habitus as a system of dispositions encompassing national experience, which serves as a blueprint of status perceptions and practices. As such, it is linked to nationalism, a practice within the modern state that makes a "heterogeneous set of 'nation'-oriented idioms, (...) 'endemic' in modern cultural and political life" (Brubaker 1996, 10; see also Bonikowski 2016). Nationalism creates, shapes and imposes "nations" – "idées-forces" generated through symbolic struggles (e.g., determining who is included/excluded from a nation), primarily involving the ruling classes vying for control over the "monopoly of the legitimate principle of vision and division of the social world" (Bourdieu 2000, 64). Notwithstanding, as Bourdieu (2014, 359) posits, "building the nation, building the state, building the nation starting from the state, means promoting the 'integration of the dominated'." This can be achieved through civil liturgy, expressed through "rites of institution" (Bourdieu 1993), such as national celebrations. In Bismarckian Germany, for instance, celebrations of military events served as occasions for elites and masses to materialise the transition to a German nation-state. These events hold meaning for the constitution of the national habitus, as they ensured widespread doxic comprehension and adhesion (Bourdieu 2014, 107, 184) to the nation – an essential condition for compelling people "to exert all their strength, to fight and if necessary to die in situations where they see the interests or the survival of their society threatened" (Elias 1996, 157).

Integrating the logic of distinction in international politics reveals that status seeking, as a form of social distinction, is shaped by a state's international standing, national habitus, and historically contingent rules governing status politics (e.g., what constitutes a status marker). The German case, a paradigmatic example (Greenfeld 1992; Jansen 2011), illustrates this interplay through distinct status-seeking practices across three periods: the post-unification Empire, Weimar Germany, and

postwar West Germany. The selected periods were chosen to allow for the examination of variations in the three elements of the logic of distinction while maintaining continuity in status-seeking practices. This approach resonates with Flyvbjerg's (2001) argument that case studies, especially paradigmatic ones, are effective for generating context-dependent knowledge. To illustrate, the transition from pursuing territorial conquest to seeking a permanent seat on the League Council in the 1920s demonstrates the contingent nature of the parameters of the logic of distinction. Focusing on a single case provides analytical stability, allowing us to track how Germany navigated its status concerns amidst shifting internal and external conditions. The following sections present a detailed examination of the evolution of German nationalism's external dimension, offering insights into the logic of distinction in international politics.

Historicising German status-seeking practices

Drawing on Bourdieusian historical sociology (see Steinmetz 2011), our analysis emphasises the historicisation of the logic of distinction. We assess the introverted-extroverted traits of the national habitus by mapping the evolution of the dominant national discourse on relations with other nations, articulated by leading intellectuals and policymakers at each period. This historical analysis relies on documentary and secondary literature, as well as on the proceedings of the Bundestag minutes (1949 to 1957). By situating the search for status in each historical context, we highlight the evolution of the national habitus in response to changing political, social, and cultural conditions.

For Germany's international standing, we analyse its (objective and perceived) position within the European context, recognising the fluidity of its status as shaped by internal and external players, such as the reference Other. We also trace the evolving rules of status politics, identifying shifts in collectively recognised status markers, such as the transition from colonial acquisitions to participation in multilateral frameworks like the League of Nations and the European Communities. By historicising national habitus, international standing, and status politics, our approach ensures a nuanced analysis that situates Germany's logic(s) of distinction within each specific historical context, offering an integrative understanding of its historical trajectory and the evolving conditions underlying German status seeking.

Expanding overseas

Nationalism's influence on Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm II's status-driven foreign policy has been extensively studied (e.g., Ward 2017; Murray 2019). Evidence suggests that, despite Germany's dominant position in Europe, policymakers still felt that their status as an equal to Great Britain was not fully recognised, prompting, for instance, overseas expansion. Recasting this practice

through the lens of the logic of distinction shows that the decision to become a colonial power gained the upper hand over other options, such as hegemonic violence, due to the interplay between national habitus, position, and the rules of status politics in the late nineteenth century.

During this period, Germany's national habitus reflected nationalism's external dimension. The influence of Pietism and Romanticism led to the emergence of an introverted aspect, characterised by a perception of enmity and antagonism towards other states, particularly dominant powers. Two interrelated processes contributed to the emergence of nationalism in this introverted form. Firstly, the intellectual debates in the early nineteenth century about Germany's rightful position in Europe and how to attain it. For example, while Herder contended that Germans were entitled to a dominant position because "the major part of Europe ha[d] been, not only conquered, cultivated, and arranged after their own manner, but protected and defended" (quoted in Kohn 1944, 106), Father Jahn proposed that "Germany need[ed] a war of her own [...] against Frankdom to unfold herself in the fullness of her nationhood" (quoted in L. Snyder 1952, 28). Secondly, how Prussia realised the German unification project, positioning itself as the most capable German-speaking state to fulfil the national ambitions of intellectuals and policymakers. It entailed the clash with Austria (1866), which temporarily settled the symbolic struggle between the notions of Little Germany and Greater Germany, and was finalised with the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1) (Wawro 2003).

Intellectuals, particularly historians, transformed this introverted account of national experience into a cultural frame for public policies, setting the parameters of how national history was taught in schools and universities to socialise Germans, especially those coming to serve the state (Ringer 1969). These policies, along with state-sanctioned rites of institution, such as national celebrations, ultimately ensured doxic comprehension and adhesion to the nation's idiom. In Treptow, following his dismissal, Bismarck declared: "May it be our holy duty to nourish a strong and proud national sentiment (…) the German, as soon as he crosses his border, loses in prestige if he cannot say that fifty million Germans stand united behind him, ready to defend German interests and German honor" (quoted in Pflanze 1955, 559). The introverted reading of the national experience, which had previously permeated cultural and political life, became the central piece of the national habitus and established warfare as a privileged status-seeking practice. Policymakers perceived any threat to status as an intrinsic outcome of international relations' conflictual essence and status seeking as a competitive rather than collaborative pursuit. Nevertheless, the pursuit of status during Bismarck's consulate centred on a mediated struggle for status markers, notably exemplified by the Scramble for Africa (1881-1912), which suggests that national habitus alone cannot fully explain status-seeking practices. According to the logic of distinction, the German Empire's position in Europe as a dominant power and the collective recognition of imperialism as a distinction practice of the dominant powers were equally influential.

Bismarck acknowledged Germany's newfound dominant position in Europe. In his private correspondence, he observed that another military conflict with France would likely lead to the latter's demotion from the great-power club (Pakenham 1992, 118). For Bismarck, dominant

positions in Europe depended on material criteria, namely military capabilities (Winkler 2006, 1:214), rather than processes with little material gain, like overseas expansion. Indeed, in 1868, Bismarck publicly shared his anti-imperialist stance, defending Prussia's decision to refrain from colonial expansion: "The advantages which people expect from colonies for the commerce and industry of the mother country are mainly founded on illusions, for the expenditure very often exceeds the gain" (quoted in Stoecker 1986, 17). Amidst the economic crisis of 1873, Bismarck expressed concerns about the costs associated with administering colonial territories, for it required military means that Germany did not yet possess, particularly a powerful naval fleet that, ultimately, had "to achieve a decisive victory in an all-out battle of annihilation in the North Sea" (Berghahn 2017, 153).

However, as German historian Treitschke argued, "a country which has no colonies will not be counted amongst the European Great Powers any more" (quoted in M. Hewitson 2004, 156). This notion gained currency among the ruling class, primarily through the German Colonial Association, which promoted a colonial agenda among elites (Winkler 2006, 1:226). It was soon apparent to policymakers, including Bismarck, that colonies and their effective administration, beyond their potential economic value as markets, were a rare prerogative and recognised practice of dominant powers in the European status struggle. Britain's reluctance to support Germany's colonial interest in the South West African port of Angra Pequeña (modern-day Namibia), despite having no intention of occupying the port, illustrates this shared understanding. As British officials declared, "any claim to sovereignty or jurisdiction by a foreign power (…) [will] infringe [our] legitimate rights" (quoted in Pflanze 1990, 3:124). Bismarck, in a move that reflected an introverted national habitus, challenged Britain's "Munro [*sic*] doctrine for Africa" (quoted in Barnhart 2016, 412), thereby establishing German colonial influence in New Guinea, Togo, and the Cameroons. The Berlin Conference (1884-5), promoted by Germany and France, reinforced the recognition of colonies as status markers and served Bismarck's goal to question Britain's overseas hegemony, which he thought to be grounded on the double standards principle, "quod licet Jovi, etc." (quoted in Barnhart 2016, 413). Germany became the "fourth largest colonial empire" (Conrad 2013, 544), and, having its distinction recognised, Bismarck "not for a moment did (…) seriously consider giving up these new additions to the Reich" (Strandmann 2011, 199).

Securing a permanent seat at the League Council

The Weimar Republic (1919–1933) tells a different story of the workings of the logic of distinction. Demilitarised and compelled to sign the Treaty of Versailles, Germany's dominant power status was threatened. While the period did not bring about a reconfiguration of the post-unification matrix of status perceptions and practices, not only did Germany's position in the European

hierarchy change, but the rules of the European status struggle changed with the League's institutional experiment.

Regarding national habitus, the Weimar Republic did not bring about a shift in the introverted reading of national history produced by nationalism. Instead, by leaving the symbols, myths and accounts of the national experience untouched, policymakers and intelligentsia upheld the imperial imaginary that had contributed to the Great War. They failed to establish new rites of institution to symbolise the transition to a democratic regime and promote doxic adhesion and comprehension of democratic principles. Instances such as the "stab-in-the-back myth," the "war guilt clause", and the "innocence campaign" demonstrate how the ruling class channelled discontent with Germany's position within the Versailles order (Marks 2003, 14–15; Winkler 2006, 1:355–57). This sentiment was reflected in school textbooks, which portrayed Germany as "absolutely innocent with regard to the outbreak (…) Russia, France, and England wanted the war and unleashed it" (Dance 1960, 62). At universities, increasingly permeated by anti-Semitic beliefs, right-wing academics and students revived the nineteenth-century project of Greater Germany, which became popular after the Ruhr occupation (1923-5) (Ringer 1969, 62–70; Winkler 2006, 1:492). As German historian Oncken argued in 1920, "Greater Germany has now become possible, since the Austrian dynastic state no longer exists, and it has become necessary, since German Austria cannot survive by itself. (...) The Little Germany (...) must automatically be absorbed into the idea of Greater Germany" (quoted in Winkler 2006, 1:491). Incorporating the Great War and the Versailles diktat into the national experience radicalised nationalism's introverted facet and distinction concerns. This helps us to understand why Germany, despite its contested position in Europe, sought to overturn the Versailles order. The celebration of the Treaties of Rapallo (1922) and Berlin (1926), in which Germany and the Soviet Union prepared for conflict with Poland, effectively exposed revisionist intentions (Marks 2003, 51, 72). As Stresemann noted after 1925, "it will have to be our goal to delay Poland's final and permanent rehabilitation until such time as the country is ready for a border agreement corresponding to our wishes and until our own position of power is strong enough" (quoted in Winkler 2006, 1:418).

With the loss of continental and overseas territories, imposition of multilateral control over industrial regions (Saarland and Rhineland), dismantling of its military, and acceptance of war reparations, Germany underwent a process of status demotion. Materially, it was hardly in a dominant position in Europe. Economically, after the 1922 moratorium on payments, Germany faced a hyperinflation crisis due to the depreciation of the mark (Marks 2003, 53). Hence, rather than seeking status per se, policymakers sought to safeguard Germany's distinctiveness as a historically dominant power. Stresemann considered this his essential goal and developed a dual strategy. First, he worked to ease French hostility by cultivating a rapprochement with foreign minister Briand, crucial for socio-economic recovery as it impacted the reparation payments. The Dawes Plan (1924), which linked reparations to the Entente powers' war debts to the United States, and the Young Plan (1929), which ultimately granted Germany economic sovereignty, benefited from the Franco-German reconciliation (Marks 2003, 63; Winkler 2006, 1:402, 436).

Then, understanding that status-seeking practices needed to adapt to the changing rules of the struggle for distinction in Europe, Stresemann sought to secure a status marker linked to the League's effectiveness in the 1920s: a permanent seat at the League Council.

The Council's composition was a point of contention among powers holding permanent seats and states holding non-permanent seats (e.g., Brazil) (Marks 2003, 85). The allocation of permanent seats revealed two fundamental issues. Firstly, it reflected a vertical differentiation rooted in European Concert politics, where resolving international disputes was viewed as the prerogative of the dominant powers. While the number of non-permanent seats increased during the interwar period, the number of permanent seats remained relatively unchanged, illustrating the dominant powers' resistance to the vulgarisation of what was cherished as a rare symbolic propriety. Secondly, it expressed a horizontal differentiation among the dominant powers, now encompassing non-European powers (e.g., Japan). The Council denoted a Eurocentric conception of international politics, in which European dominant powers held sway and imparted the norms of European status-politics to non-European rising powers. As one British observer noted, "from the West-European point of view it seemed intolerable that the destinies of a region which was the cultural centre of the Western World should be at the mercy of outlying countries" (quoted in Marks 2003, 85). Weimar policymakers sought institutional engagement with the League and the acquisition of a permanent seat to reaffirm Germany's status among the dominant powers. European states, such as Sweden, recognised Germany's historical standing as a dominant power (status-derived capital) and supported granting it a permanent seat, and following the Locarno Accords (1925), France also agreed to consider Germany's membership and permanent seat, albeit reopening the debate about the Council's composition. After negotiations led by a Committee on the Composition of the Council, which involved increasing the number of non-permanent seats and creating "semi-permanent seats" to accommodate other states' status anxieties, Germany successfully negotiated its permanent seat and reasserted its status as a dominant power (Marks 2003, 86–88).

Participation in European Integration

The end of the Second World War marked a shift in German status-seeking practices. Occupied by the Allies, Germany was again in a position of subordination, grappling with its loss of status in Europe, where multilateral norms were gaining prominence (Jackson 2006). Unlike previous periods, however, this did not lead to the status-seeking practices of the 1920s, let alone the 1930s. While still acting on the status-seeking implicit in nationalism, West German policymakers made a long-term adjustment to Germany's logic of distinction, based primarily on the reconfiguration of the external dimension of German nationalism along extroverted features – in short, the configuration of an extroverted national habitus. This reorientation, together with Germany's subordinate position and the new rules of status politics in Western

Europe, distanced postwar West German policymakers from their predecessors' status-seeking practices and the enduring introverted outlook of nationalism. Without ignoring the influence of the Allies on West German elites, for example, in the provision of the 1949 Basic Law on the sharing of sovereignty, the successful internalisation of new national dispositions that framed the pursuit of status in a new, more cooperative context depended on the efforts of postwar intellectuals and policymakers who reinterpreted the national experience. Personalities such as Thomas Mann, who reflected on the unity of good and evil in Germany, played a crucial role in shaping a discourse that internalised cooperative approaches to status seeking. As Mann famously wrote, "Wicked Germany is merely good Germany gone astray (…). It is all within me. I have been through it all" (quoted in Winkler 2007, 2:106).

The early years of West Germany were focused on rites of institution that marked the symbolic transition to democracy and ensured doxic comprehension and adhesion to democratic norms. Through the efforts of writers, artists, and intellectuals, who refused to downplay, excuse, or forget Nazism, Germans confronted their collective experiences to varying degrees (Kater 2023). The transformation of German nationalism's external dimension facilitated this endeavour. It conveyed an account of national history that, in addition to countering Nazism's radical views on nationhood, reenvisioned international politics in cooperative terms. Germany became a nation whose prosperity was intertwined with Europe's. As Theodor Heuss (Free Democratic Party – FDP), West Germany's first president, stated: "Germany needs Europe, but Europe also needs Germany" (Deutscher Bundestag 1949b, 11).[2] With few exceptions, policymakers embraced this extroverted interpretation, particularly following CDU's victory in 1949, despite seldom diverging on courses of action, as Ludwig Erhard's Atlanticist orientation typifies (Spencer 1964). Paul Löbe (Social Democratic Party of Germany – SPD), a former president of the Reichstag (1925-32), notably declared: "Germany wants (...) to become a sincere, peace-loving, equal member of the United States of Europe" (Deutscher Bundestag 1949a, 2). Therefore, the Little-Greater Germany projects and the Franco-German relationship were recast along extroverted lines. Policymakers, such as Carlo Schmid (SPD), not only recognised the perverse consequences of Greater Germany: "it became the impulse of (...) Germany and made it the imperialist power of continental Europe" (Deutscher Bundestag 1949e, 180). They also agreed that Franco-German hostility had to evolve into an enduring peaceful partnership with European integration at its core. As Adenauer (Christian Democratic Union of Germany – CDU) remarked: "The Franco-German antagonism which has dominated European politics for hundreds of years and caused so many wars, destruction and bloodshed must be finally overcome" (Deutscher Bundestag 1949c, 30). Kurt Schumacher (SPD) similarly argued that "a Franco-German understanding, which is so vital, cannot be created through pathetic oaths, but only through objective democratic discussion of the problems" (Deutscher Bundestag 1949d, 42). After solving the Saarland question, then-foreign minister Heinrich von Brentano

[2] Quotations from the Bundestag minutes have been translated by the authors.

(CDU) posited, "The French people and their government (…) may rest assured that the Federal Republic will do everything in its power to deepen the close and friendly relations between the German and French peoples, to contribute to close political cooperation and to develop cultural, economic and human relations" (Deutscher Bundestag 1957a, 10640).

West Germany also came to terms with its status as a subordinate, divided and semi-sovereign state, whose foreign and domestic affairs were overseen by the Allies under the Occupation Statute (1949-55). However, policymakers turned this handicap into an opportunity for post-1945 status pursuit. They constitutionalised the transfer of sovereign powers to European supranational bodies in Article 24 of the Basic Law (1949) and presented this interpretation of sovereignty as a positive feature in line with the postwar multilateral spirit. As the first president of the Bundestag, Erich Köhler (CDU), remarked: "Article 24 of the Bonn Basic Law commits us (…) to voluntarily renounce sovereign rights if this can bring about a peaceful and lasting order in Europe and between the peoples of the world. (…) The Federal Republic of Germany will always draw its strength for a happier future from this belief that we want to serve peace, from a new order for Europe and the world" (Deutscher Bundestag 1949a, 5). West Germany's self-restrained sovereignty did not result in an inferior status. In postwar Western Europe, status was defined by economic interdependence and adherence to the international liberal order's principles, such as renouncing war to resolve disputes. Status-seeking practices in postwar West Germany involved engaging with the emerging Western European architecture. Adenauer championed this multilateral orientation by negotiating the Treaty of Paris (1951), securing membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (1955) and endorsing the Treaty of Rome (1957). Reporting on the meeting of the North Atlantic Council (Paris, 1954), Adenauer claimed that West Germany had once again regained its sovereignty (and started its quest for status): "the representatives of all the powers expressed their unanimous satisfaction that the Federal Republic of Germany has now acquired full sovereignty and has formally joined the community of free peoples of the West" (Deutscher Bundestag 1955, 4601).

In the postwar period, West German policymakers consistently maintained their concerns for distinction. However, status-seeking practices, from economic recovery to integrating former territories, had to conform to the European rules of status struggle. For instance, as Adenauer stated: "The problems associated with the Oder-Neisse line should not be solved by force but exclusively by peaceful means" (Deutscher Bundestag 1953, 20). Germany's status recovery could not jeopardise the status-driven and interconnected processes of European integration and German reunification. As Hallstein (CDU), then-foreign office state secretary, argued, "The recent reaffirmations by the French, Italian and Belgian Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the need for German reunification and on the compatibility of reunification with community law and order give us every confidence that we will continue to have reliable allies in our partners" (Deutscher Bundestag 1957b, 11332). In sum, West Germany sought distinction by favouring equality within the European project, the only practice suited to the parameters of the new logic of distinction: the extroverted national habitus, subordinate position, and postwar rules of status struggle.

Concluding Remarks

This article presented an integrative framework for understanding the persistence of status in international politics, the logic of status seeking and the differentiated influence of nationalism's external dimension on status-seeking practices. Applying Bourdieu's logic of distinction to international politics showed that status matters due to intrinsic social distinction processes between states, and his notion of national habitus clarified that nationalism's impact on status seeking is not deterministic – nationalism, as a practice shaping the national experience, can be associated with different status-seeking practices. Across three empirical sections, the article showed that Germany's logic(s) of distinction was based on the configuration of its national habitus, its position in Europe, and the collectively agreed rules of status struggle. When an introverted nationalism shaped the national habitus, policymakers were inclined towards status-seeking practices rooted in a reading of status as a zero-sum game. These practices were, however, tempered by Germany's position in Europe – whether as a dominant power under Bismarck or a temporarily subordinate power under Stresemann – and by what were considered status markers: initially, colonial territories and, later, a permanent seat at the League Council. Conversely, when the national habitus was influenced by an extroverted nationalism, combined with a subordinate position in postwar Europe and the recognition of multilateralism as a norm, policymakers sought distinction through the European integration process.

Finally, there is room for methodological and empirical refinement. For instance, the national habitus merits further attention, particularly in developing ways to verify it empirically. Constructivist approaches to identity might prove helpful in this respect. It would be equally fruitful to extend the analysis to more recent times, given the apparent resurgence of an introverted perspective among the German Radical Right, which raises the question of whether status seeking still steems from the postwar doxic adherence to an extroverted reading rooted in the European project. Nevertheless, it is essential to apply the logic of distinction beyond the German case, including other classic examples of European nationalism, such as France, and emerging powers like Brazil. Moving beyond Europe is imperative because "the same habitus can lead to very different practices and stances depending on the state of the field" (Bourdieu 1987, 64). Status in non-European hierarchies, such as South America, may manifest in ways different from those observed, and particularly in post-colonial spaces where issues such as race are cornerstones of national experiences, status struggles may highlight the mutually constitutive relationship between the internal and external dimensions of nationalism.

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