



Vol. 1
The Forum

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yale.edu/habitus
yalehabitus@gmail.com

Moderator's Note

Welcome to HABITUS.

You hold in your hand an invitation to a conversation.

HABITUS is a new publication of undergraduate work in the social sciences, with a central focus on sociology, that seeks to render the social world more comprehensible. Through both theoretical dialogue and empirical inquiry, sociologists problematize the obvious and interrogate our assumptions about seemingly insignificant mechanisms and larger forces which shape society.

We draw the name HABITUS from the writings of the sociologists Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu. In its simplest articulation, the concept of "habitus" refers to the encompassing social context of our collective tastes, judgments, and habits. It is the logic that constructs our living culture and values, but one that remains fluid and subject to renegotiation.

It is this idea of renegotiation that informs the theme of our inaugural issue: The Forum. In this issue, we explore what happens when ideas, goods, and people collide. The Forum is both event and venue, object and dialogue. A cookbook as cultural document. A protest reclaiming public space. Contested terminology. These are some of the sites of dialogue visited within the larger forum of this publication.

The following seven essays together constitute varied points of entry into the richness of social science as a discipline, as well as points of departure for ongoing contemplation of the meaning of The Forum.

Welcome to the conversation.

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What of “the public”, adjective and noun? Is the public a sphere of contestation, a mass of persons, a civil society? Does it demonstrate elasticity - will it yield to us? “The public” assumes that a single entity has been created from a set of individuals - a kind of collapse, an alloy.

In “Public: An Intellectual Genealogy”, **Sam Huber** provides a tour of the ways in which “the public” has been theorized through intellectual history. He surveys the meanings that have been attributed to the fluctuating concept. From Benjamin to De Bord, the essay traces how our understanding of “the public” has changed.

Sam Huber is a sophomore in Morse College.

Contact him at samuel.j.huber@yale.edu.

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PUBLIC: AN INTELLECTUAL GENEALOGY

Sam Huber

“Public” can be a nebulous concept. We take it for granted, building upon its entire ideologies of how people relate to themselves and to others, but serious critical disagreement persists over what it signifies and how it behaves. In charting the term’s theoretical history, one encounters two primary uses for the word “public”: there is the adjective, referring to an object or event’s accessibility as defined in opposition to the private, and there is the noun, referring to the public as a delineated social group. Even those social and media theorists who do not confront the term directly or label it as such often find themselves grappling with the concept as a necessary foundation for their intended line of inquiry or relying on assumptions about the nature of “public” that imply unconscious conclusions about the topic. The theoretical genealogy that follows makes no attempt to be thorough, comprehensive, or chronologically linear, but it may still be useful in raising the questions and identifying the critical threads one might pursue in defining and employing the term oneself.

In his essay “Social Theory and the Media” (1994), John B. Thompson describes a public as relating to mass media through a model of mediated quasi-interaction, in which two-way communication is reduced to monologue. Because of the wide range of potential recipients for such a message (because TV and books cannot target individual receivers) and the ways that different localized conditions shape each recipient’s process of consumption and appropriation, Thompson’s public becomes a loose collection of private individuals that is difficult to delineate and relatively passive. This perspective is similar to Harold Lasswell’s transmissional model of the media, in which the public passively consumes media as transmitted by a sender. Walter Benjamin reinforced this idea of the public as a collection of spectators in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (1936), associating the disappearance of ritual with a shift from participatory engagement to passive consumption. The removal of temporal and local specificity from one’s engagement with art also implies the public’s decentralization.

Whereas Benjamin focused on modes of production, Siegfried Kracauer focused on modes of perception, asserting the centrality of social context in shaping perception. This idea of social context would be more firmly reinforced and applied to the organization of publics by Stuart Hall in his essay “Encoding/decoding” (1992), in which he proposes a model of social organization around the codes (interpretive contexts) through which we translate reality into a discourse and back again.

Jürgen Habermas in “The Public Sphere” (trans. 1989) elaborates on Walter Lipmann’s idea of public opinion as a society’s circulating narratives by proposing a conception of the public sphere as consisting of public opinion along with the social group that authors and consumes it,

in which both are engaged in a kind of reflexive feedback loop. The public-private dynamic was central to Habermas, whose public is both a unified group with shared codes and values and a collection of distinct individuals.

Guy DeBord and Jean Baudrillard both viewed the public as subject to distorted representations of or replacements for reality, though DeBord was more optimistic about the public's potential to reconnect with a reality that Baudrillard considered to have already been corrupted beyond redemption. In "Publics and Counterpublics" (2002), Michael Warner gives the agency back to the public that Baudrillard had dismissed, recasting its members as determining actors rather than passive witnesses and characterizing media as fundamentally subjective. Warner defines publics as being constructed by networks of circulating discourse (counterpublics being those defined in opposition to a mainstream discourse), emphasizing media's performative component and the fluid nature of publics, which are made up of whoever is engaging in the discourse at a given time. By examining all of these perspectives on "public" together, we arrive at a conception of the public as participatory, subjective, and defined by context.

You are at a Jay-Z concert at Yankee stadium. Why are you there? Moreover, why are your fellow audience members there? The concert is a communal - albeit exclusive - display. An enclosed spectacle. What motivates your entry?

Carl Chen grapples with the dissimilitude amongst rap concert attendees. By applying Bourdieu's sociocultural model of the 'field' to the case of a Jay-Z concert, Chen seeks to illuminate the motives behind concert going. What are the various forms of capital jockeying for power in this context? What role does taste play? Is there a desire to achieve a coveted cultural aesthetic?

Carl Chen is a sophomore in Morse College

Contact him at carl.chen@yale.edu

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SOCY 313: Sociology of the Arts and Popular Culture

NO DISRESPECT TO JAY-Z: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FRONT ROW AT JAY-Z'S CONCERT IN YANKEE STADIUM

Carl Chen

Last September, I had the once-in-a-Yale-lifetime chance of receiving free second-row tickets from a rich Yale alumnus for the sold-out Jay-Z and Eminem concert in Yankee Stadium in New York City. Although I am no longer the most devoted fan of the genre, I definitely enjoyed my share of blasting bass-heavy rap and hip-hop in the car, and so I hopped on the train with eager anticipation for a night of great music. Everything lived up to my expectations—the concert was amazing, the rappers were in top form, and they brought out all their celebrity collaborators. However, when I looked around at the other nearby people who could afford extremely expensive tickets, I had the disconcerting feeling that some in the diverse crowd—young African-American male fashionistas, an older rich white executive with a young blonde girl, and the wealthy middle-aged white Ivy League-educated gentleman with his teenage daughter and her friends—might have had other reasons for wanting to be in the front row. Perhaps Jay-Z was right in announcing that evening that rap had finally achieved status as a musical art form and that this star-studded spectacle was a historic night for the genre of hip-hop.

I mean no disrespect to Jay-Z's skills, but his declaration for the fans' appreciation of the genre might have been a bit grandiose and self-celebratory. Though the changes in cultural taste could be simplified to a shift of preferences or, as Jay-Z might prefer, an improvement in the product's aesthetic quality, taste is in fact much more complicated, often involving a variety of individual background factors. In order to deduce why these particular people like Jay-Z and his music so much that they chose to pay top dollar to see him, I believe the discipline of cultural sociology, particularly its theories of taste, may be very enlightening. In focusing on taste, I will forego the predictable idea that the audience could have enjoyed the music and instead choose other theories that focus more on the audience's social standing and background. Nonetheless, it certainly is possible that they were also captivated by what media theorist Walter Benjamin might call the "aura" of Jay-Z's performance. For some in the audience, this attractive aura was Jay-Z's uniquely famous persona, which, coupled with the particular grandeur of Yankee Stadium, might have transcended the physical limitations of time and space. Or as sociocultural theorist, Richard Peterson might explain, the audience might have craved Jay-Z's "authenticity" which is derived from his identity as the hustler from the projects who then became a multi-millionaire entertainment mogul. But these theories focus more on the performer, and would be more appropriate if we were focusing on the mass audience. Since this essay will focus on the particular cohort of the front row, these explanations fail to consider their wealthy background and high social status. In order to instead explore this sort of hierarchical society in which status is determined by taste or how good

one's seat is, the theories of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would best explain the expressed preference of these various people who as an elite class are virtually unlimited in their choices.

Before showing how the more individual characteristics within this group affect taste, a broad look at Bourdieu's sociocultural model of the 'field' would help clarify the reasoning behind this mode of analysis for Jay-Z's high-roller audience. In considering the production of culture and taste, Bourdieu formulated this concept of the 'field', which greatly differs from previous ideas of the culture industry as a market. The market assumes that consumers are equal in knowledge or perhaps all in a state of *tabula rasa* when choosing what culture to sample. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu challenges this concept by bringing in the additional societal factors of hierarchy, rank, and status, which become crucial motivating elements in the cultural field. In considering how these factors affect individual taste, Bourdieu emphasizes a person's social background, which is split into educational capital gained from schooling and social origin, which is a sort of cultural inheritance¹. Because of how taste is formulated in these methods, it can then be manifested through the "use of symbolic goods", which then makes choice a mode of distinction or a "key marker of class" within a hierarchical society². In this sort of structured world that values educational capital and social origin, everyone is then pursuing culture through expressed choices, which represent their try at climbing the social status ladder. Bourdieu then classifies these "indicators of the position occupied in the economic and cultural hierarchies" into the three forms of economic, social, and cultural capital³. Different activities offer different forms and amounts of capital and thus taste in choosing activities shows how much capital one has or what kind of capital one values. This method of accruing capital can be seen through the example of hosts offering guests a particular style of meal with the wish of seeming economically well off (economic capital) or being hospitable according to certain social rules (social capital). Similarly a person may attend a Jay-Z concert with the intention of seeming culturally knowledgeable.

Being in the front row of a Jay-Z concert in Yankee Stadium certainly creates some form of these three kinds of capital, but due to the nature of rap music as a genre, capital is only provided in limited ways or in varying amounts. Also, depending on the social background or social groups of the audience member, one type of capital may have less weight than another. For instance, the expensive price of the floor ticket (a resell value of around \$1500) definitely means not everyone can afford or would choose to pay to be so close, which makes being in the front row rather special for the majority of people. But for the rich white executive in a fancy suit, the money is just a pittance and actually would not mean much to his social group. However, the fact that he had the social power to attain front row seats that were limited to about a hundred people in all of New York City may have seriously awed his young scantily clad and possibly socially impressionable girlfriend. Bourdieu may also categorize this rich businessman's wealth based on his social origin, which depends on how and when his current position was established. If he earned his wealth through an elite college education, then perhaps he may have purchased a painting or saw a musical instead of attending a rap concert. But if he just inherited his money or lucked into it, maybe he is a playboy who just wants to party and have a good time. Lastly, I highly doubt he cared too much about the musical content since he was frequently texting on his Blackberry and

¹ Bourdieu, Pierre and Richard Nice. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pg. 63.

² Bourdieu, 66

³ Bourdieu, 79

did not know the lyrics to the songs except for an occasional chorus.

On the other hand, the young black male fashionistas were fully enjoying the capital gained from the performance as evidenced by their constant uploading of pictures to Twitter for showing off to their social group. Additionally, they knew nearly all the words to every song (but curiously enough they did not care very much about Eminem), which suggests that their social world highly values black rap music as a cultural form. Jay-Z is among New York City's most historic and notorious rappers and being there on that night was to be part of the cultural fabric of the city where anybody who was somebody was dancing to Jay-Z's hits. To be front row rapping almost alongside their heroes affirmed their own status through their dedication to the culture.

The Yale alumnus, his young daughter, and her friends do not easily fit into Bourdieu's schema. Although Jay-Z does have some pop crossover hits, he is largely still a rapper, so I doubt they were musically entertained the whole time. Most likely, the draw of seeing celebrity star power up close in person was too enticing and could also give a great amount of social capital to the girl when she told all her other friends at school. Or maybe he was just trying to be a cool dad by broadening her musical tastes. Richard Peterson, a modern American sociologist, builds off Bourdieu to suggest that people, especially in the high class, are becoming more varied in their cultural consumption so that they are now more like "omnivores"⁴. Perhaps being an omnivore is another way to express high taste by showing one's cosmopolitanism, or maybe people are now more mobile between social groups and need these different forms of social capital to appear superior or dominant. For instance, a white male teenager growing up in Los Angeles may be a rap expert in order to have common interests with friends, but he also might be a devout Christian in a gospel choir. For Peterson, these tastes in music are not conflicting or devaluing each other because they each have meaning in their respective social circles.

These speculations may appear overly speculative since I am suggesting that few of the audience members were actually real fans of the music. And there also is little room for someone to relate to Jay-Z's lyrical content or to appreciate his rapping skill. However, because Bourdieu's theory of the "field" relies heavily on the individual fitting into social hierarchy, it does not give objective aesthetic quality a substantial role in establishing taste. It may give some credit to the individual for knowledge, such as in memorizing the lyrics, but overall Bourdieu would claim that we weren't just there as true Jay-Z fans, but also that we were trying to borrow some of his shine (or capital) for ourselves.

⁴ Peterson, Richard A. and Roger M. Kern. "Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore." *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 61, No. 5. (Oct., 1996), pp. 900-907

A cultural document, placed within a greater social and historical context, reveals how it represented and reinforced the values of its time. The document has incredible power because we often do not realize that we are engaging it in conversation. And even when we are aware of its didactic power, are we unaffected by its influence?

In the following essay, **Katelyn Roth** offers a sociocultural interpretation of *Buckeye Cookery and Practical Housekeeping*, written in 1877. The cookbook is revealed to be a place where values associated with gender roles and domesticity in American society are concocted and served.

Katelyn Roth is a junior in Calhoun College.

Contact her at katelyn.roth@yale.edu.

*This paper was originally written for **WGSS 120: Women, Food, and Culture**.*

MORE THAN RECIPES: COOKBOOKS AS ITEMS OF CULTURAL LITERATURE

Katelyn Roth

What is a cookbook? On first approximation, it would not seem unreasonable to claim that a cookbook is simply a well-organized compilation of recipes. However, such a bleak characterization as this leads one to overlook a cookbook's value as a truly unique piece of literature. To the careful reader, a cookbook can indeed offer much more than lists of ingredients and instructions. As a genre traditionally written by women, for women, cookbooks allow a rare and raw glimpse into the mentality of women from generations gone by. They allow their readers to better understand the values, concerns, and general attitudes of the women who lived during the time period in which the book was written. Specifically, they offer a firsthand testimony of the cultural values centered on women and food.

Estelle Wood Wilcox first published her iconic Midwestern cookbook, *Buckeye Cookery and Practical Housekeeping*, in 1877 in the midst of an era in which activists, such as Catherine Beecher, strove to earn respect for traditional women's work, such as cooking and housekeeping.¹ As a result, through Wilcox's cookbook, readers are able to observe how this social reform movement affected the thoughts and attitudes of women during the height of its influence. In particular, *Buckeye Cookery* allows us a glimpse into how the movement influenced women's perception of food preparation and housekeeping, as well as how it affected their perceptions of themselves, as food preparers and housekeepers. From the immense amount of material this cookbook contains to the specific illustrations and language it uses, it is evident that Wilcox and other women of her time were inspired by this movement and viewed their roles as cooks and housekeepers as being of great importance to society.

One of the main focuses of the home economics movement during the late nineteenth century was to alter society's perception of domestic work. Cooking and housekeeping were no longer to be seen as simple or mindless tasks, but rather were promoted as being true sciences that required great knowledge and refined skill (Trumpler). The overall structure and immense volume of information contained within *Buckeye Cookery* makes a convincing argument for the "science of cooking." The book of over 450 pages (in later editions, it would become nearly 700 pages), is essentially an encyclopedia on everything about cooking and housekeeping. The first 325 pages provide the reader with detailed instructions on how to properly prepare dishes from bread to pickles to poultry. The following 125 pages address topics ranging from dress making to prepar-

¹ Trumpler, Maria. Lecture on Home Economics as Feminist Food Science. Women, Food, and Culture. Yale University, New Haven. 7 Oct 2010.

ing antidotes to poisons and even managing the hired help. Through this incredibly comprehensive compilation of the tasks a typical housewife was responsible for, Wilcox makes it blatantly clear to all those who encounter her book that a housekeeper's life was anything but easy or simple-minded. Indeed, the vast extent of knowledge and specialized skills outlined in *Buckeye Cookery* astonishingly and sufficiently shows that the domestic work of women during this era was worthy of society's respect.

This perception among women and society of cooking as a sort of science was also evident in the way Wilcox composed the recipes. Unlike more modern cookbooks, in which recipes are relatively short and mainly emphasize which ingredients to use and how to mix them together, an enormous amount of text in *Buckeye Cookery* focused on the proper technique required in every single step of the process. For instance, the first ten or so pages of each section in the cookbook were devoted entirely to a painstaking explanation of how to prepare each food item. Therefore, consultants (or readers) of *Buckeye Cookery* were also students eager to learn. As a result of the value placed upon using proper technique, the cookbook also often emphasized that it took much experience to become a good cook. For example, on page 7, Wilcox claims that "nothing but experience will secure the name merited by so few, though earnestly coveted by every practical, sensible housekeeper – 'an excellent bread-maker.'" These tasks that few can ever be said to have mastered surely cannot be seen as completely trivial.

In addition to demonstrating how women of this era approached cooking like a science to be mastered, *Buckeye Cookery* also provided a vivid depiction of how these women viewed their contribution to society through domestic work as vital. For instance, on the first page of her cookbook, Wilcox included an illustration of a young couple situated in a kitchen in total disarray. In the image, the young bride is completely distraught, and the husband attempts to console her by helping with the cooking. However, his attempts are an utter failure, and the illustration comically depicts him covered in soot, with a foot in a pan, offering an unappetizing looking duck to his wife. Beneath the illustration is a caption reading, "Never Mind; Don't Cry, Pet, I'll Do the Cooking" (Wilcox, pg. i). This illustration suggests that it was important for a woman to efficiently run her kitchen, but not simply so she could serve her husband, which may have been the mindset in years prior. In fact, the illustration shows the husband attempting to serve his wife. Therefore, the illustration instead stresses the importance of a woman's ability to run a kitchen efficiently because, if she was not able to do so, no one else could. That is to say, women alone were believed to have possessed the knowledge and ability to make a household run smoothly. At this time, men lacked the specific training and know-how passed traditionally from woman to woman and were therefore seen as comically incompetent in such areas. Wilcox's inclusion of this image in her cookbook not only serves to stress her belief in the importance of the acquisition of domestic skills by women, but it also signifies an understanding by women that they provide a difficult and specialized service for society that many cannot provide for themselves.

This cultural idea that women provided an indispensable service through their domestic work was also highlighted in Wilcox's preface to the cookbook. Here, she states that the book was written to "stimulate the just pride without which work is drudgery and great excellence impossible" (Wilcox, pg. vi). This phrase suggests that not only did Wilcox firmly believe that a woman should take pride in her work, but also that the importance of her work made her entitled to this pride. Furthermore, in this quote and throughout the preface, Wilcox refers to the idea of women loving their work, rather than perceiving it as "drudgery" (Wilcox, pg. v-vi). To love one's work often means believing it to be fulfilling, and therefore, this further suggests that women at this time

truly did identify with domestic work and did find it of personal and social value.

There is much evidence throughout this cookbook to suggest that, during the late nineteenth century, women were empowered by the social reform movements and took pride in their ability to provide domestic services to society. However, there is also evidence that suggests that although women valued and perceived their domestic contributions as distinctly female, they still perceived themselves through the lens of a masculine world. This is suggested by the fact that of the thousands of women who submitted recipes to be compiled in Wilcox's cookbook, the vast majority signed their names at the end of the recipe in variations of "Mrs. Danielle Miller," "Mrs. Dr. Koogler," or "Mrs. Governor Kirkwood" (Wilcox). Very few included their own first names, and the majority of those who did were single. This suggests that, although society began to recognize the value of the domestic female professions of the time, men and women alike still perceived the professions of men (Dr., Governor, etc.), as being of greater significance. The fact that these women, despite social reform, still took more pride in their husband's work, than in their own, likely contributed to the downfall of the home economics movement soon after 1920, at which time, women began pursuing careers outside of the home (Trumpler). Evidence that this trend was already occurring in 1877 is also found in *Buckeye Cookery* and is the greatest contradiction of this book. Although *Buckeye Cookery's* underlying agenda is unquestionably the elevation of home economics, stamped on its title page is an advertisement for "Paying Work for Women" (Wilcox). This ad specifically elicits "bright" and "wide-awake" women (Wilcox), almost suggesting that intelligent women should work outside the home. Such a suggestion completely contradicts the book's portrayal of housekeeping as a rewarding and challenging profession for all women.

In conclusion, Estelle Wood Wilcox's *Buckeye Cookery* is a complex literary piece, whose complete content, from its illustrations to its assertions and even to its contradictions, conveys the thoughts and values of many American women during the years of the home economic social reform movement. As suggested from the many different aspects of this cookbook, women during this period began to approach their domestic work with greater pride as society as a whole became aware of its necessity and value. However, the greater social value of home economics did not lessen the perceived value of the paying, professional careers occupied exclusively by men during that era. Therefore, although this movement did serve to empower the female workforce, its inspiration would come to lead it in a different direction than perhaps anticipated.

Food - its cultivation, preparation, and consumption is one of the great unifying activities of humanity. Yet as cultural symbols, national cuisines can also become jealously guarded points of national pride and the subject of contestation, both literal and figurative. Enter the Guinness Book of World Records.

In the following essay, **Matthew Claudel** chronicles what he calls the "Hummus War," an international battle over a culinary world title and the ultimate ownership of a cultural tradition. Can we gain new understanding over a great divide between East and West from the bottom of a giant bowl of hummus?

Matthew Claudel is a sophomore in Branford College.

Contact him at matthew.claudel@yale.edu.

This essay was originally written for

ENGL 120: Reading and Writing the Modern Essay.

WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST: HOSTILITIES ON THE EPICUREAN FRONT

Matthew Claudel

War is not new to the Middle East – in fact, the oldest bit of recorded history that exists is a description of war in the Indus Valley, or, modern day Iraq. The cradle of civilization, as it's known, is vast, hot, and dry, but sacred! and so we have marked the location with a history of battles for about as long as we've been around. Only recently, however, have hostilities taken a culinary bent, and produced, rather than casualties, ten and a half thousand kilograms of hummus.

* * *

A sweaty, patriotic and excited battalion of 300 chefs descended on al-Fanar on Saturday, May 8th, 2010, marking perhaps the largest convulsion of activity that the tiny Lebanese town had ever experienced. The ensuing event was unprecedented in human history, and crowds thronged to play witness to it. The atmosphere was part carnival and part religious convocation, with chefs elevated on a central dais at the center of a swarm of supporters. The focus of it all was an earthenware dish, the largest of its kind ever made, slowly filling with thick, goopy paste. Hummus. Lebanese chefs worked at a fever pitch to process the raw ingredients before the sun would reach its peak and bake the hummus into a hard, not-so-goopy paste (quality assured and taste-tested by a dispatch from the global offices of the Guinness Book of World Records).

All in all, mixing, crushing, pouring and tasting the dish took around five hours – a brief culmination of three months' planning for the event. A total of 8 tons of boiled chickpeas, 2 tons of tahini, 2 tons of lemon juice and 154 pounds of olive oil were distributed along rows of tables where ranks of chefs did their work. Pairs squared off around each bowl, alternately stirring and pouring, gyrating in an almost-choreographed dance that churned out hummus at an inhuman pace. A huge, New-Year's-Clock-esque dial suspended above the dish gave a real-time measurement of the total weight, and with each upward tick, a chorus of cheers rang out. Zealous fans clung to the railing and shouted encouragement. Mothers pushed strollers, as their children glutted themselves on pita, hummus and the festival spirit. Sections of the crowd broke into dance as singers performed an Arabic love song involving hummus. The celebration was of the same ilk as Texas Chili Festivals, the Gilroy Garlic Festival or the Maine Lobster Festival – as social as gastronomic – but with a political and cultural edge to boot. Lebanon's prodigious bid for All-time Hummus World Champion had a little something for everyone, and it marked a significant historical moment indeed.

Despite being the biggest, May's hummus record at al-Fanar was not the first of recent years. The hummus war began in 2006, in New York, when Sabra Mediterranean (the world's

largest hummus producer, holding a monopoly-reeking 40% of the market share) made what was to-date the biggest bowl of hummus, clocking in at just over 800lbs (It was regarded, frankly, as a wasteful endeavor, but not entirely surprising, coming from Sabra. The company has a propensity towards shenanigans, like commissioning sculptor Kirk Rademaker to create busts of John McCain, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton out of 100 pounds of hummus).

But the story doesn't end in New York with heavy-hitter Sabra – the Middle East still has a home team advantage. Loathe to be outperformed at their own heritage, the Association of Lebanese industrialists rebutted Sabra's batch with a gargantuan 4,532 pound, 11 ounce bowl. Israeli chefs entered the fray in 2010 and amassed their own spread at Abu-Gosh, which reached an unprecedented 9,016 pounds, 14 ounces. Jawdat Ibrahim, organizer of the record breaking Israeli hummus dish, said that not only will he make the biggest bowl, but his next party would go on for 48 hours (24 times as long as Lebanon's two-hour celebration in May). Sabra's busts were long past, but the attitude of playfulness remained: the event became a cultural attraction that married patriotism, competition, and carnival atmosphere in a wonderful day of hummus, setting the precedent for the experience at al-Fanar.

Consider the situation objectively (as a Westerner): glorifying hummus is strange. We know it as a goopy spread that sits, crusting over, in the back bins at sandwich stations and salad bars. A discerning majority of the American population avoids it, and for good reason – the more people circumvent hummus, the thicker, dryer, and less appealing it gets. The result of this continuum is a chalky ooze that is, incontrovertibly, revolting. There are, of course, some American institutions that keep (allegedly) fresh hummus on tap: Pita Pit (yes, a fast-food restaurant chain called Pita Pit truly does exist), and Daphne's Greek Café (a slightly more upscale chain restaurant cut from the same block as Red Lobster and Olive Garden). But most hummus experiences evoke the sinking feeling that your spread is a mix of pre-made powder and olive oil, or at best, something out of a can.

The thing that was celebrated in al-Fanar is a different beast altogether: it's like comparing caviar with bait eggs. Unlike caviar, however, hummus – even at its finest – is unpretentious: chickpeas, tahini, olive oil, lemon juice, and spices. But it's not really a matter of the ingredients. As a synthesis of component parts, hummus becomes a dish with the incredible force of social significance behind it. It is an understood but unspoken staple – not only a fine gustatory experience, with subtleties as intricate as wine, but a cultural institution, as foundational as America's baseball. "The one thing all people in the Middle East have in common is their love of hummus," said M. Ibrahim. "No matter what people discuss, agree or disagree on — they always do it over a plate of hummus." It sounds like sensationalism, or at least exaggeration, but in the Middle East, the question is not *Would you like hummus?* but rather, *Taste my hummus. It is my family's recipe that my wife cooked this morning, using olive oil from my brother's press and the very best chickpeas from...* etc. Hummus is tradition. It is culture.

And that's precisely the problem. Hummus is a foundation of Middle Eastern culture that dates back to a time when it was *just* Middle Eastern culture, not a billiard-table-mess of clashing states. No one knows for sure where hummus is from. Or rather, everyone claims to know where hummus is from, but no one's stories agree. One legend maintains that Saladin, Sultan of Egypt and Syria, solidified hummus as a cultural institution in the 12th century – a national dish, as it were. The truth is that Ancient Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Syria or any region between India and the Mediterranean could have been the originator. Chickpeas were one of the earliest cultivated crops – that much is known for sure – and hummus could be the first of all prepared foods, possibly

eaten as early as 7000 BC.

The word “hummus” itself is a westernization of the Arabic *صمّح*, meaning chickpeas. It can also be spelled *hamos*, *homos*, *houmous*, *hommos*, *hommus*, *hummos*, *hummous*, or any combination of vowels sprinkled among H, M, and S (although *humus* is generally steered clear of, so as not to be confused with humus, the dead material found in dirt). Arabic etymology aside, the top two modern-day contenders for the hummus title (or at least the only two countries who care enough to fight it out) are Israel and Lebanon. Needless to say, the competition to assert supremacy is fierce: victory means more than hummus or World Records – it marks the true mother of human civilization. “It is about proving that hummus is Lebanese, because it is being promoted as an Israeli traditional dish, and it is not,” said Chantal Tohme, the organizer of Lebanon’s most recent record breaking dish. Faïd Abboud, President of the Lebanese Industrialists Association, goes one step farther towards combative language: “It is not enough the Israelis are stealing our land,” he said, “They are also stealing our civilization and cuisine.”

Jawdat Ibrahim, the Hummus Maker in-Chief on the other side of the border, acknowledged their bluster: “People actually call me from Lebanon on a regular basis just to say that their hummus is better,” Ibrahim told CNN (interjection: envisioning these conversations unfold is the subject of nearly endless scenarios, each more comical than the last). Ibrahim continued, “If you live in the Middle East, before you’ve learnt to talk, you’ve learnt to love hummus -- so I just want the world to know that mine is the best,” he finished. Admittedly, the verbal repartee between Israel and Lebanon is not the worst thing that has been flung between the two countries, but perhaps it points to something deeper – something more sinister – between them. Hostility is not at all under the table in this situation; the Middle East has been convulsed by tragic conflicts for millennia. So hummus may just be the latest expression of a smoldering bone of contention that predates the Guinness Book of World Records. That two countries who have a history of exchanging SCUD missiles would even engage in such lighthearted badinage as a Hummus War is amazing in and of itself.

Nearly all conflicts in the Middle East – from hummus quibbles to deadly warfare – circle back to religion. Just about every creed began in the Indus Valley, or holds it sacred, or at the least has a kind of tangential interest in the place. So it isn’t surprising that hummus propriety is justified on religious terms. The most level-headed pacifists suggest that Abraham, the common father of all Middle Eastern peoples, was the originator of hummus. But Abu Shukri, one of the most famous hummus makers in Lebanon – presumably a title that carries a fair amount of social heft – defends the secularity of the dip (or the sanctity of the prophet, depending on your allegiances). “That is just made up,” he told Sky News, “Abraham was too busy being a prophet to have the time to make hummus.”

Regardless of the underlying problems, the arguments and counter-arguments and elephantine servings of hummus, Lebanon is in the process of suing Israel in international court to prevent the country from marketing chickpea spread as Israeli. The case follows a precedent set by Greece and France in the recent past: in 2002, Greece gained exclusive rights to the name “Feta Cheese” in a suit against Denmark, and four years later, it became illegal to market any “sparkling white” as *champagne* unless it was produced in the Champagne region of France. It’s a controversy that is complicated by economics, ethics, and debatable logic, but the central question remains: *What gives someone exclusive ownership of something as visceral as food? Should such rights even exist?*

In the modern era of Kraft™ Cheddar Cheese Flavored Instant Lunch© and Hostess™

Twinkies, the provenance of certain edibles is pretty cut and dried. If you synthesized the chemicals and slapped nutrition facts on the neon packaging, that cheddar flavored product is unquestionably yours. But we're not really dealing with orange cheese-ish tiles here. What's really at stake is a tradition that has grown over centuries with an entire culture. Take France: for all its endearing philosophers and brioches, the real hallmark of French culture is wine – neither would be the same without the other. So does that make France, as a nation, the proprietor of fermented grape juice? Or can an expatriate Frenchman produce a sparkling white in the Napa valley and call it *champagne*? French culture is, after all, just as much his own as it is his brother's, who still lives in Chaumont. So ownership of a food may be tied up in the state or in the culture or in the land itself.

In the case of hummus, it's hard to say. What we now call the Middle East is a fractured modern imposition on a broader cultural base that seeps from India to Turkey, which gives rise to the sticking point in our chickpea debate today: nationalism. A cankerous patriotic fervor has grown on top of the ancient cultural identification, and it has come to eclipse the commonalities between different countries. Today, hummus inspires the same fierce loyalty as British football (or an even more fervid allegiance, considering the current Israel/Lebanon offensive, which has graduated to named-conflict status, i.e. The Great Hummus War). But at a certain point it has to end, no matter the national pride that's at stake (if only because we simply can't make 30 ft diameter bowls. And who's going to eat 6 tons of hummus anyways?). Honestly, it's impossible for anyone with any shred of rationality not to recognize the abject preposterousness of this whole Great Hummus War. Creating enough hummus to cover the entirety of Lebanon (fact) is wasteful and absurd in and of itself, but using a world record as proof that one's country was the originator of hummus? A food that dates back to a time when country borders hadn't yet been drawn?

But there is another explanation of the situation, one that is infinitely more hopeful. Rather than the Hummus War being a consequence of deeper national friction, what if the belligerence is a conflation of societal minutia? A squabble between two brothers. The chance for reconciliation, then, is in the competition becoming about *the hummus* – about the *culture* rather than the *countries*. And it just might happen. Sanity may have its moment in the Middle East. Even in the midst of the chaotic, chickpea-induced fervor last May, one of the Lebanese chefs told the *Beirut Times*, “This is more than hummus. Maybe something will change if we don't talk about the conflict and we talk about people. We are very similar. We both love the good life. But most of all we love hummus,” he said, grinning and opening his arms wide. People on both sides are beginning to recognize hummus once more for the universal culture that it represents. Ibrahim, staunch defender of Israeli epicurean honor, even said that he would put up his (figurative) weapons if the Lebanese accept his invitation to cook the next hummus plate as a joint endeavor. “We're going to join a lot of people from all over the world, because a lot of people love hummus,” he said.

And the one thing they love more than hummus is 10,452 kilograms of it.

The concept of “the public” has been explored earlier in HABITUS, but now we are able to apply theory to case. Ownership is expressed through the usage of a space and so a group’s struggle for power often manifests itself as a contest over a geographic area.

In the following essay, **Kathleen Powers**, takes us to Cairo, Egypt to analyze the *Kefaya* social movement that reclaimed the Midan Al-Tahrir or “Liberation Square”. Here, we see how changing values sparked a new understanding of physical space that culminated in mass action.

Kathleen Powers is a junior in Branford College.

She can be contacted at kathleen.powers@yale.edu.

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KEFAYA: SYMBOLIC INSURRECTION AND THE LIFE OF THE 'ARAB STREET', RECONSIDERED

Kathleen Powers

The Midan Al-Tahrir, “Liberation Square”, (see picture below) at first glance, is immediately defined by the large disk-shaped island in the middle of the museums, universities, governmental buildings and hotels that flank the space. It is a site of transience at Cairo’s center. Traffic lanes tangle themselves and then straighten out as they circle the patch of green in the center, momentarily disorienting the drivers who ferry civilians through the brief *zahma*, or blockage, to the calm and quiet across the Nile. The pathways for travel are worn and known, moments of indecision last seconds at most. The right of way is explicitly predetermined. Simultaneously unequivocal and invisible, the momentum of the space, the directions of the never-ending, never beginning ring of traffic that dominates the square, carries the public blindly forward—halting on occasion in the stopping and starting of the *zahma*. In instants when movement ceases, “time loses its sense of forward momentum; one becomes philosophical” (Edwards, Cairo 2010), the logic of the movement is no longer choreographed. It is in the pause that the Arab & Egyptian public reclaim their real estate. Deviating from the directed swiftness, the *zahma*, alters the discourse of the space: it fractures the “natural” behavior of the square, and begins an alternative, subversive dialogue.

Besides the fleeting interruption of the *zahma* and a brief protest event in 1972, the public culture of the Midan al Tahrir remained unaltered until the year 2006. In 1972, students protested social immobility and economic destitution by demonstrating in the square, occupying it in a ritual of civic engagement—a kind of concretized *zahma*; it was made more substantial, more permanent. However, in April of 2006, the square was swarmed for over forty-eight uninterrupted hours. Students staged a two day sit-in in the square as part of the Egyptian *Kefaya* Movement, otherwise known as the Egyptian movement for change, demanding democracy and political reform and seeking a more transparent political process and legal system (Fahmi 99). They held candles, sang (Fahmi 99), and took shifts sleeping. The traffic flows were strangled as the protestors inhabited the square. The protestors embraced *non-traditional* forms of power and through the physical domination of the square, “acceptable” public behavior was changed: the *assumed* boundaries that circumscribed action within the space were breached. The meaning of the space was renegotiated in the moments when the space was used differently. Though Cairo’s “streets had been privatized” (*Urban Youth* referenced by Fahmi 104), orchestrated by those in control of Egypt’s political institutions, the “misuse” of the space practiced by the demonstrations of the *Kefaya* movement required the privatized to become public - as exemplified by the Midan Al-Tahrir sit-in. The public laid claim to the space, and the Midan Al-Tahrir square was surrendered to public use. Enhanced

by its transition to the visual realm, the highly symbolic protest repertoire was responsible for implementing a new standard for public operation within public space. They were a visible collective, they sang songs. They claimed their space in many dimensions.

In the academic tradition of symbolic interactionism, which explains social movements through interpretive frames as developed by Snow in the 1980s, the “frame” is the “general, standardized, predefined structure (in the sense that it already belongs to the receiver’s knowledge of the world), which allows recognition of the world and guides perception...allowing him/her to build defined expectations about what is to happen, that is to make sense of his/her reality” (Della Porta & Diani quoting Donati 74). Different “framings” of a given movement would dredge different channels of meaning by which the social movement participant would make sense of their experience. By reflecting on previously established messages, symbols and interpretations, the social movement participant approaches the present. But even as the “frame” constrains *how one perceives*, it is a plastic medium: it is liable to be changed. In the example of *Kefaya*, through public action, the reality impressed upon the actor shifted. Frames of meaning were altered amidst protest events such as the Midan Al Tahrir sit in, and other actions like it. The reclamation of public space by the public had a specific consequence: the purposeful misinterpretation of the meaning of the square. Prior to such events, the square was an arena of Egyptian statecraft, a seemingly public space that had been calibrated such that a discourse of non - intervention, non- engagement ensued. In the square, a logic of subordination was made concrete. However, public behavior, essentially what it meant to be a civilian, a member of Egyptian public society, was first contested and was subsequently redefined by the sit-in and by the other demonstrations that characterized the *Kefaya* movement through adding an active, symbolic and public repertoire of action, in which masses congealed repeatedly at different sites and gave birth to a public collective identity that was responsible for fashioning a new reality out of the old.

The *Kefaya* movement was a radical departure from the traditional procedures of the Egyptian political sphere. Formally begun in 2004, by a group of frustrated intellectuals who considered themselves the first members of the “Egyptian Movement for Change” or *Kefaya*, a word that means “enough” in Egyptian dialect, organized themselves in response to certain amendments to the Egyptian Constitution, specifically Articles 75, 76, which were passed by President Mubarak’s regime. By way of these articles, the Egyptian government eliminated institutional checks, which might have previously restrained the executive branch. The amendments followed twenty years of an assault on civil society: through legislation, Mubarak’s regime had gradually suffocated the public and restricted their ability to partake in political processes. However, the blatant dictatorial abuse of the constitutional amendments roused the public, stirring them to seek a new system of political and societal organization through *Kefaya*.

Egyptian politics over the past half century can be best characterized by an oppression that amplified in its duration. The political system in Egypt was able to *design the behavior* of the Egyptian public by way of an authority, which over time, fortified a specific discourse defining what was or what was not appropriate public behavior. The government not only crippled civil society through legal institutions—laws preventing civil society from achieving an active role—but it also infected the very consciousness of the members of civil society: members of civil society could not even imagine themselves as such. It began in the law, but ultimately contaminated the public social imagination, begetting a culture of inaction. The Mubarak regime particularly reduced the possibility for public demonstration. Protests dispute how power is “regularized”, what procedures become realities, and what roles become tradition. Thus, in 2004, when President

Mubarak passed Article 75 to the Egyptian constitution, giving him the right to create ‘emergency laws’, he effectively gave himself the right to forbid protest—and by extension the right to sustain a culture of public action of his choosing.

Before *Kefaya*, the public spaces of Cairo had been colonized by the logic of the Egyptian government. Bahaa Ezzelrab, author of *Kefaya: An Egyptian Movement for Change*, expresses how members of the “opposition...were rarely involved in any action that would make them visible” (8), and yet *Kefaya* effectively jammed the usual operations of public space, in a fully apparent and public display of frustration. This deviance allowed for an alteration in the logic of Egyptian public spaces. Through the street-action of *Kefaya*, heterogenous actors, achieved a homogenous product. Through their homogenous behavior they birthed a single identity. The implied, unscripted rules of the space—how public actors perceived themselves acting within its atmosphere—shifted as a result of their action. Emphasizing the discursive opportunity established by the public space, Marc Lynch in his *Voices of the New Arab Public* reveals how “the public sphere therefore establishes expectations about the normative payoffs within which strategic actors maneuvered” (71). The *sensational* quality- the ability of *Kefaya*’s protest to be sensed, witnessed, seen - granted autonomy to the Egyptian public. The public set forth a *display*. Through site-specific action, the public identity and the notion of public duty were dually reinvented. The logic of territorial reclamation proved tremendously powerful.

By 2005, demonstrations were weekly, omnipresent, taking different forms and taking over different locations. For three years between 2004 to 2007, women and men, youths and the elderly protested in front of churches, governmental buildings, on streets and in squares. The particular issues at the center of the movement fluctuated during this period. Iman Ramadan, one of *Kefaya*’s central advocates, appeared on Al-Jazeera in 2004 demanding both an end to the so-called ‘emergency power’ laws and a repeal of the laws hindering the freedom of the press. He articulated the need to limit the duration of the presidential term, the need for the separation of powers of government, the need for the judicial oversight of elections. He maligned the discrimination practiced by the government against unions, and asserted the necessity of the right to establish opposition parties in Egypt (RAND 13). Clearly, the issues at hand were many. Even if by 2008, the lack of structure, “factionalization” among members of the movement, and violent governmental reactions caused the frequency of protests to dwindle, the individuals who participated in the movement had differing socioeconomic statuses as well as differing political orientations (RAND 12). Students, politicians, low-level professionals, professors, doctors, members of the press, business persons and bankers, who possessed a variety of political *needs* and *wants*, abandoned their former identities, and instead engaged in the development of a collective consciousness formed through the public action that renders the example of *Kefaya* movement an exception in the general trajectory of Egyptian history.

In the second decade of Mubarak’s presidency, he modified the electoral system such that it was nearly impossible for opposition parties to be elected, transferred the administration of Egypt’s ‘syndicates’ or labor unions to the government, restricted their ability to act independently for the public benefit, and ordered mass detentions of political activists (RAND 8). In 1995, a law was passed such that journalists were legally liable for publishing anything that carried messages adversarial to the regime (RAND 8). Furthermore, Mubarak eliminated the ability for social movement organizations to form, prosecuting those who divided the Egyptian public or who sought an adjustment of popular ethics (RAND 8). These gradual restrictions occurred over the span of several years, creeping on the ability of the Arab public to have a voice in “the impact of a

constant stream of converging information from multiple sources that builds conventional wisdom of society” (Lynch 71). The ‘conventional wisdom’ of the 21st century in Egypt required very little from civil society. Consequently, as a logic of disengagement embedded itself in public consciousness, the Egyptian public became increasingly unable to perceive of itself as a coherent entity. A discourse of subordination solidified over time.

The practice of “identity politics” is not part of the political trend in Egypt. Moreover, outsiders often perceive the Arab political process as having a void where there should be an active civil society. Marx, as an early commentator on the political systems of the Middle East, discussed what he called the “Asiatic mode of production” in editorials of the *New York Times*. For instance, he referred to the operating systems of the Middle East as: “empires founded on a passive and vegetive society” (Marx 87). In his opinion, the public lacked the will to be politically relevant. Fascinatingly, Marx’s early observations on the sociopolitical relations of the Middle East have laid the foundation for the academic discourse on the Middle East produced within the last twenty years. Obviously, the characterization of the Middle East as a black hole of educated public opinion and civic participation is unfortunately a familiar one. In another recent editorial titled “Under the Arab Street” in the *New York Times*, another writer, Thomas Friedman echoed Marxist, orientalist sentiments when he emphasized how “the ‘Arab street’ is the broad mass of public opinion, which is largely passive and nonviolent”. Friedman attempts to prove that social inaction is an inherent problem of the Arab *individual* and a result of the individual’s conscious obeisance. However, he forgets that control over the ‘Arab Street’, or in the case of *Kefaya*, control over Arab public space, has become the end of the Arab government. Over time, the laws and whims of rulers have controlled how public space can be used and how public space can be thought of. Absolute rule over generations constructed a robust discourse of inaction on the part of the public, such that what was, at one point, perhaps a statute or a momentary military crackdown on public opinion, has come to create what the public sees as reality. Social theorist Michele Foucault highlights the manipulation of the public opinion by discursive power when he submits how “over time, not only what is thought changes, but what can be thought or conceived of as well” (Della Porta and Diani 77). The opinion that popular protest is the duty of an active and engaged civil society and the notion that demonstrations are important symbolic iterations capable of changing society are not present. Layers of fabricated cultural codes have frustrated any fledgling spirit of activism. Though it might appear that the populaces of the Middle East have a distinctly “Arab problem” and that they practice an unquestioning “subservience to power and their acceptance of self-censorship” (Lynch 31), the mechanisms of public opinion in the Middle East have been dictated by the constant presence of autocratic regimes. Over decades, the public has been effectively—if I might be so bold—castrated. Any deviance from what has been reinforced over hundreds of years requires special analytic attention. The *Kefaya* movement is such a desired, deviant case.

As discussed, in 2004 with Articles 75, 76 and 77 to the constitution, Mubarak amplified his ability to exercise arbitrary, dictatorial power. Explicitly and suddenly, Mubarak sought to circumscribe public discourse. But fascinatingly, in his attempted rapid consolidation of power, Mubarak’s authority was *lessened*, due to how his actions identified where the powers controlling societal reproduction were *located*. Mubarak unveiled the blunt unnaturalness of the regime’s authority. Just as Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon prison (see picture below) kept the prisoner powerless through the application of constant supervision coupled with an invisibility of the supervisor (Foucault 200), so the inability of the Egyptian civil society to determine who prescribed their

actions kept them from realizing that their action, or in this case inaction, was prescribed. An imperceptible power overran them - a scattered power. Within the Panopticon:

Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. (Foucault 200)

Public behavior in public spaces was under the surveillance, perhaps not of any central supervisor situated high in a tower, but by the established norms and by the necessity of behaving in a way that was *expected*. Yet, when the locus of power is perceptible, the dominant culture cracks, the holders of power become apparent and the supervisors - once invisible - form targets. In consequence, over 500 intellectuals (RAND 10) gathered to discuss the arbitrary power of President Mubarak at a conference held in summer of 2004 and resolved that a new order was necessary and consequently founded *Kefaya*.

One of the most powerful qualities of the *Kefaya* street-action was the ability to unite a group of actors who carried different political backgrounds. The fact that there was no one political agenda only reinforces the argument that *Kefaya* was a movement and not simply an expression of political discontent. The participants in *Kefaya* sought to calibrate the culture which provoked it. The cultural sphere, of course, includes but is not limited to the political arena. More significantly, the cultural arena has the potential to dictate how the political sphere is arranged and how actors within it perceive themselves. The National Defense Institute describes *Kefaya* as having a “non-political status” (10), and characterizes it as fostering a “union that was historic; there had never been such a coalescence of Egyptian political groups around any set of issues” (11). *Kefaya* was thus unprecedented in giving Egyptian communists, Islamists and Nationalists common motive and providing a common space for renegotiating what public behavior meant. *Kefaya* was able to unite those individuals who thought that ‘Islam was the solution’—those participants in the al-Wasat center-Islamic party, and those who self-identified as Marxists (RAND 12) given the collective identity fashioned by *Kefaya*’s repertoire of constant and public action. In what can be characterized as rituals of self, or reification, amongst the demonstrations, new selves materialized. Della Porta & Diani in their standard text *Social Movements: An Introduction* define collective identity: “the process by which social actors recognize themselves -and are recognized by other actors—as part of broader groupings and develop emotional attachments to them” (91) as based on “shared orientations, values, attitudes, world views, and lifestyles as well as on shared experiences of action” (92). It is the recognition of common circumstance that appears to cultivate a collective identity, and the common ‘abuse’ of public space appears to provide a vehicle for realizing a shared circumstance. The physical becomes *metaphorical*: the “physical, geographical aspects of staging and managing collective actions the decisions and practices... are incorporated in the process of changing established societal practice, the norms, rules and laws which form the basis of society” (Eyerman 194). The masses in their various protests practiced governing the meaning of space, providing new codes of behavior for Egyptian civil society, which over time transitioned from behavior that was entirely rogue to behavior that verged on *automatic*. Their behavior moved the unusual to the usual. Thomas Hayden, founder of Students for a Democratic Society and leader

of the American leftist student movement in the 1960s, perceived a need in what he perceived as a vapid, empty society, to “mak(e) values explicit—an initial task in establishing alternatives” (10). In the context of *Kefaya*, protests explicated a behavioral system for individuals as members of the active and able public. It was because of this that “participants would act as individuals, leaving their partisan hats at the doorstep as they work(ed) for *Kefaya*, bringing with them only ideas and practices from past experiences but not the institutional structures in which they are embedded” (Shorbagy 48). Individuals came to the movement and through the union fostered by the public performances of *Kefaya*, became able to negotiate what it meant to be a self-aware public.

Actions erect boundaries—delineations as simple as “us” on this side of the street vs. “them” on the other, “us” running from the police, from the “them” chasing us. In the *Kefaya* movement, action was a tool of separation; spatially and emotionally, action severed those within the action from those uninvolved. The National Defense Research Institute highlights the “state of immense hatred between the rulers in the Arab world and the Arab populace who want these governments to disappear... the governments have responded by indulging themselves in even more repression, using a bunch of laws that institutionalize their grip on power” (31). This antagonism manifested itself in the violence the Mubarak regime practiced against demonstrators, which included physical assault, rape, torture after detainment, public humiliation, clothing removal, sodomy and sexual assault (RAND 29). Less violent, the Egyptian security forces also practiced the “squeezing protestors technique”, hunching up against the demonstrators, such that there was an obvious visual and physical cleavage between the two, black against color, physically and visually at separate poles, representing a *simplification* of identity—the protestors as an definitive entity, posed against repressors.

Within the context of *Kefaya* the mass (one, made from a heterogenous many) reclaimed powers of articulation. Manar Shorbagy, in *Understanding Kefaya: the New Politics in Egypt*, discusses the role of the intended, purposeful occupation of public space by the public and notes how *Kefaya* “with its... creative street action, in fact has dealt with the most acute of Egypt’s political problems, namely political apathy on the part of the vast majority of Egyptians” (54). Protestors emerged from their participation with an altered interpretation of their own ability as public actors. To have experienced a protest event was to have one’s frames of meaning realigned. The consequences of public action radiated out from the act itself, to support the formation of an alternative cultural sphere which would give agency to members of civil society and which would establish the memory of action as a tool for empowerment. Through the ‘collective effervescence’ accompanying mass action, the Egyptian civil society was resurrected. Ron Eyerman notes the *naturalizing* qualities of public action in his *Performing Opposition, or How Social Movements Move*:

...individual identities are transformed as groups form. In this sense, an emotional transference occurs, which produces a charged, collective emotional energy, a sense of belonging to some force greater than oneself. An empowering can take place, especially as cognitive shifts occur, and clarity of vision or purpose give direction to the sense of movement (195)

The protests of *Kefaya* normalized civic participation by employing the symbolic display of mass power. It was also an exercise in learning power, or as Ezzelarab notes in his *Kefaya—An Egyptian Movement for Change*, “experienc(ing) democracy through a process of trial-and-error” (12); thus the ‘first movers in Egypt’ were ‘trained’ (10) by the tactics of their action. The protestors reified

their power through the rehearsal of that power. It was done in the streets.

Highly personal, the *Kefaya* movement was not merely a political phenomenon. The potency of the movement resided in its ability to “develop a credible long-term vision” (Shorbagy 48). The movement, like its name and slogan (which was simply *Kefaya* meaning ‘enough’), was “at the heart of Egypt’s popular culture... and widely opens up the prospects of future action... and presents a *radical alternative* for Egypt’s future” (53), including the future of those whose sense of self was changed by their participation in the protest events of the movement. The movement was comprehensive, consuming. As, for the first time, the crowds of public actors consumed public space, individual actors were forced to re-imagine their society and their role within it. In the illegal invasion of places with previously defined rules of interaction, invigorated members of civil society, fully cognizant of the degree to which their action was an invasion, visually and emblematically displayed their power. Over time protest as a *ritual*—defined by Della Porta and Diani as “symbolic forms of expression by which communications concerning social relations are passed on in stylized, dramatized ways” (109)—engendered a culture, the rules and norms of which were created from the emblem of protest itself: those who claimed power in the public spaces of protest (the masses) were encouraged to do so in practice, and the repetition of protest fostered an *expectation* of civil power. Culture was revised in the manner that Todd Gitlin, a sociologist specializing in American social movements of the mid 20th century, discusses the cultural revision involved in the American civil rights movement: “Instead of saying that segregation ought to stop, they acted as if segregation no longer existed... the idea of establishing the good society right here and now” (85). To the extent that the *Kefaya* movement was all-encompassing, engendering a new culture in the space it occupied—disputing what was and what was not natural public behavior and reconfiguring the perceived ability or duties of the individual—it highly resembles what are referred to as the “new movements” by social movement theorists. A term used when describing the leftist student movements of the 1960’s, or more recently the global justice movement, “new movements”, as characterized by Della Porta and Diani, emphasize the heterogeneity of actors within the movement (8), innovative strategies used to develop the movement (10) and most importantly, the location of the actor at the center of the movement (10). The new movements fed off of the energy created by identity, fermenting at the center.

In the case of the “new movement”, the individual’s perception of herself or himself generated and sustained the movement. The identity of the actor was not only relevant in the moment of protest but also affected all other spheres of the actor’s life. Public action and the identity formed in events of collective resistance, merged with the actor’s private self. The “new movements” were productive. Participants in these “new movements” were advocates for the abandonment of the dominant reality, so that it might be replaced by reality constructed by the actors themselves. Due to their constructive quality, the “new movements” no longer sought inclusion within the societies they resisted, but instead favored the creation of new communities. The actors in these movements were not isolated individuals at the margins of society, but, as Touraine concluded, players in the “central forces fighting one against the other (in this case the burgeoning forces of the new movement) to control the production of society by itself” (Della Porta and Diani 12). Similar to how the students of the American leftist movements in the 1960’s re-examined the viability of their society, and concluded that society’s flaws could not be mended, the *Kefaya* movement departed from the political in its “transformative potential... at once a cross-ideological force that has the potential in the long run of creating a new mainstream” (Shorbagy 1). In the minds of the *Kefaya* participants, Egyptian society needed to be *re-created* and like the “new

movements”, which were involved in “reclaiming individual’s right to define their identities... against the omnipresent and comprehensive manipulation of the system” (Della Porta & Diani 9). Thomas Hayden, in his *Letter to the New Left* glorified the “opportunity of making new and revolutionary departures” (5), but qualified his demands by emphasizing the need to erect a new society in the old society’s stead, the need to “visualize and then build structures to counter those which we oppose” (7). Similarly, *Kefaya* did not propose a simple distaste with the misuse of political power, but a new system for operation—a restructuring of the social contract the government had with its people. As the National Defense Research Institute noted, “a complaint” of *Kefaya* by Western and Egyptian intellectuals was that “*Kefaya* lacked a program that went beyond simply targeting Mubarak” (RAND 39); however, this opinion ignores the nuances involved in the birth of identity politics in Egypt and refuses to acknowledge the *opportunity* for the crystallization of a new discourse, which provided by the protest repertoire - on display and event-oriented - of the movement.

It is understood that *Kefaya*’s participants disagreed with Mubarak’s use of arbitrary and dictatorial power, but as evidenced by the movement’s official proposal, “A Project for Democratic Change in Egypt - Toward a New Socio-political Contract”, which elaborates on themes of freedom, political accountability, power, and civil rights (Shorbagy 49), the movement transcended the political arena. The proposal was a verbal validation of the Egyptian citizen’s role as a *member* of society. It was this *membership*, this participation in the institutions of society that marked *Kefaya*’s departure from the rest of Egyptian history. It sought a communion, a partaking. As revealed by Marc Lynch in his study *Voices of the New Arab Public*, “public political arguments threw open wide questions of what it meant to be Arab” (4). The reality of daily life had been oriented around a culture of inaction fostered by the Mubarak regime, and the *movement* encapsulated the varied issues that frustrated the Egyptian masses. Wael Salah Fahmi notes the opinions of bloggers of the movement who stated that *Kefaya* “broache(d) issues that touch(ed) all sectors of life—form transportation costs to healthcare access to unemployment” (97 Blogger K - anonymously quoted). One activist also established that “we’re a group of youth protesting the current conditions of no health, no education, no work, no housing, no freedom” (97- A detainee). The movement gave possibility to contest the culture of submission.

The visible, public action of *Kefaya*, drastically countered assumptions of the people’s efficacy. What the individual could and could not do as a member of civil society was re-examined, and frames of meaning that governed the individual’s interpretation of the surrounding world shifted as “definitions of criteria for determining normality and deviance for areas that were previously left to the regulation of other institutions have become the object of public intervention” (Della Porta and Diani 47). Like the leftist student movements in the United States, and the “new movements”, *Kefaya* was fundamentally *constructive* and composed new systems for operating amidst the collective identity created by the many demonstrations of the movement. The radioactive quality of the protest events that characterized and sustained *Kefaya*, reorganized society. The protest event introduced cultural pathways and traditions that changed the role of the Egyptian public, and forced the individual to realize her or his place within the active community. It was almost as if the action of the movement could not be severed from the identity generated by the movement, as the action gave means to the materialization of identity that effected the life of the individual: public and private. *Kefaya* exemplifies the ability of the ‘Arab Street’ to engage in public engagement, in a comprehensive movement for change in the totality of society. Action and the individual were at the center while public displays were responsible for propelling the movement

forward. In instances in which the public intentionally implemented a *zahma* of their own in public space—as opposed to simply and occasionally being effected by it, the public formed “narratives of solidarity and enmity (that) has shaped the meaning of all that has happened” (Lynch 11). These narratives sanctified public action: demonstrations were redemptive and bestowed power upon those who had none. The demonstrations were periods of transition, in which the interruption of day-to-day life was fueled by a radical *intent*. There was purpose and vision. *Kefaya* heralds an era of the Arab public sphere in which the *zahma* that redirects and freezes automatic, practiced movements of one culture is no longer spontaneous and surprising but calculated, preconceived by those who imagine a different routine produced by what others might see as simple chaos.

Images



Image 1. Midan Al-Tahrir. Photograph by Muhammad Ghafari

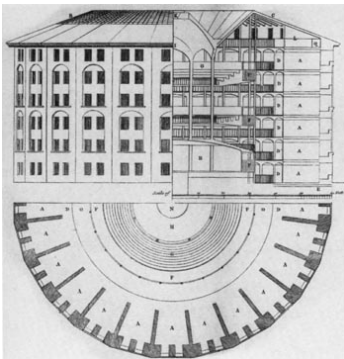


Image 2. Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon

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Post-colonial theory attempts to reckon with and react to the cultural legacy of colonialism. In his now-iconic book, *Orientalism*, critical theorist Edward Said sought to expose a colonial mindset that reinforced the unequal power relations between the East and its Western colonial masters. But contemporary scholars have since grappled with both the power and limitations of Said's framework.

In the following essay, **Blair Lanier** explores one particularly provocative critique: might Said's theorizing fail in some ways to escape the very "orientalism" he critiqued? Such debates prompt us to reconsider the relationships between our academic discourse and material reality, our ideas and our changing perspectives on history.

Blair Lanier is a senior in Pierson College.

Contact her at blair.lanier@yale.edu.

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DEBATING ORIENTALISM: COMBATING COMPLACENCY THROUGH CRITIQUE

Blair Lanier

Tracing the evolution of an idea through academic discourse reveals important truths about our changing perspectives on history. New theories, new modes of interpretation, and the debates over them have shaped the study of Imperialism and continue to influence our knowledge of the historical forms and societal effects of Empire. In his 1978 work *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said proposed one such new reading of the ideological processes and mechanisms of power at work in European Imperialism. The concept of Orientalism suggests a particular reading of the history of Empire, which, like most influential theories, has been profoundly influential both in its own right and also because it provoked new academic work seeking to dissent, qualify, or improve that theory. Frederick Cooper is one such scholar who engages with Orientalism, acknowledges its intellectual value, and makes his own critical claims about how the study of Imperialism can be pushed beyond Orientalism to the betterment of our historical understanding of imperial actors, colonized peoples, and the Empires constituted by their respective communities and identities. Cooper advocates for the academic and political importance of a more historically aware treatment of Empire and the language of imperial identities and processes. Frederic Cooper is justified both in his critiques of Orientalism's generalizations and also in his project to work from Said's concept towards the bettering of our theoretical and pragmatic understanding of Imperialism through closer attention to historical variability.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* is a remarkably broad conceptualization of Western attitudes towards the East. He argues that Western Imperialism was inextricably tied to and even constituted by a set of ideologies that constructed a fictional 'Orient' and, through that construction, defined the power relationship between the 'Orient' and 'Occident.' Orientalism, Said writes, has both an academic and ideological life in the Western world and is built and expressed through language, art, literature, and statesmanship. As he writes, "Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment." *Orientalism* is the study of this concept, this "idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West."¹

To construct his argument, Said defines Orientalism, traces its manifestations in the history of British, French, and American cultural artifacts, and suggests that uncovering the existence and nature of Orientalism is key to understanding Western power over the 'Orient.' He writes that the scholar of Imperialism must understand "Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."² This 'style' consisted of "the enormously

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 5.

² Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.”³ According to Said, studying this ‘discourse’ reveals that “in a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.”⁴ By creating the ‘Oriental’ as the iconic ‘other’ to the European ‘self,’ “European culture gained in strength and identity.”⁵ The specific content and character of this ‘othering’ resulted in “the relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony”⁶ between West and East. Said posits that Orientalism ideologically divides the world⁷ into binaries: Western reason and Oriental mysticism, European power and Oriental subjugation, colonizer and colonized. Orientalism, like all other “ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied.”⁸ Said’s own engagement in this ‘study’ consists of identifying how the ideological binaries of Orientalism function to build and enhance European power over materially real but ideologically imagined colonies. Said’s work succeeds in complicating a purely logistical reading of Empire by questioning the ideological and conceptual frameworks inherent to European Imperialism.

Frederick Cooper engages with Said’s concept by acknowledging the importance his intellectual framework – the interpretive gains from examining the ideological structure of Empire – but he critiques Said’s understanding of those ideologies, his concept of Orientalism, by advocating for a more complex conceptual approach that works to acknowledge the local particularities of Empire and imperialist action. Cooper argues that *Orientalism* fails to appreciate sufficiently the differences between communities of European colonizers and groups of colonized persons as they vary over both time and geography. Cooper’s article suggests that although Said pointed out Orientalism’s fallacy in grouping all ‘Orientals’ under one discourse of ‘other,’ the analysis of the dynamics of colonialism which he began is not complete without particularizing that analysis to individual contexts and moments and expanding anthropological, sociological, and historical treatment of Empire to include the colonizer as well as the colonized. His critiques of Said therefore logically include arguments that the broad terms used by Said to identify European ‘colonialists’ require more nuanced and specific delineation according to context, and that the need for recognition of individual conditions and identities applies to the Europeans as well as the colonized. In *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, Frederick Cooper focuses on a critical analysis of the academy’s tendency to become stuck in conceptual ruts. He suggests that academics working with the concept of Orientalism are not exempt from such academic stagnation, and he argues for a heightened sensitivity to the particular conditions of any area of study – including Empires, imperial outposts, and colonies. By analyzing Cooper’s engagement with the concept of Orientalism and exploring in what ways his critiques are justified, we learn more not only about Said’s seminal work but also the broader study of Empire.

For Frederick Cooper, understanding what is problematic about academic treatment of Empire is integral to understanding the Empires themselves. Cooper argues that only by understanding the biases, gaps, and fallacies in academic work on Empire can historians move once

³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 3.

⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 45.

⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

again towards a more complete, nuanced, and useful understanding of Imperialism in its historical and contemporary forms. The difficult question facing academics who study Empire is “How can one study colonial societies, keeping in mind—but not being paralyzed by—the fact that the tools of analysis we use emerged from the history we are trying to examine?”⁹ Cooper’s answer hinges upon an awareness of and fight against disciplinary stagnation.

Cooper argues that Said’s concept of Orientalism is an historically rooted theory like any other and, therefore, must be subject to the same historical criticisms and reevaluations of terms that Said himself applied to earlier understandings of Imperialism. *Orientalism* played an important role in pushing the study of Empire forward: “Historians’ complacency about the European boundaries of their field was shaken up by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*.”¹⁰ But Cooper is able to move beyond *Orientalism* to a productive critique of the Said’s terminology and the contextual specificity of his history while still acknowledging the intellectual usefulness of Said’s concept. Cooper writes, “Interdisciplinary studies can be impoverished by once provocative constructs that have become clichés, just as a discipline can be narrowed by professional hierarchies, required methodologies, or theoretical conservatism.”¹¹ Thus Cooper heeds his own intellectual warning by critiquing Said. If Said becomes a cliché and histories of the ‘colonized’ become the norm, the intellectual dismantling of Orientalism becomes as institutionally pervasive as Orientalism itself once was. As Cooper writes, “there is a delicious irony here, for Europeans become the ‘people without history,’ a notion once reserved for the colonized.”¹² History cannot move forward towards a more complete understanding of the world if any ideology becomes too entrenched, reified, or unquestionable. Said’s concept cannot be taken as the final word but instead must be questioned, examined, and explored.

Cooper critiques Said’s concept for being so broadly generalized over such an expansive geographic and temporal landscape. Cooper argues for rooting concepts back into the specific conditions of a given colony when he writes, “Colonial power, like any other, was an object of struggle and depended on the material, social, and cultural resources of those involved. Colonizer and colonized are themselves far from immutable constructs, and such categories had to be reproduced by specific actions.”¹³ ‘Colonizer’ and ‘colonized,’ Cooper argues, must be thought of as historically specific terms. Clarity in terminology prevents the danger of conflating drastically different historical moments and the distinct effects of various Empires. Continuing to work within the academic framework stemming from Said’s concept of Orientalism can lead to the following historical error:

The sharp separation of a certain kind of Empire—which produces colonial and post-colonial effects—not only precludes the posing of important questions about critical historical moments and interrelated processes, but reproduces a form of Eurocentrism. Central Asian Muslims conquered by the tsars and subjected to the violent and modernizing project of the Soviets do not receive the attention devoted to North African Muslims colonized by the French; 1989 is not marked in postcolonial circles as a milestone of decolonization.¹⁴

⁹ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.

¹¹ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.

¹² Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.

¹³ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.

¹⁴ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.

This warning from Cooper incites the historian to push into a deeper understanding of Empire by broadening the scope of analysis beyond the British, French, and American Empires discussed by Edward Said and his intellectual disciples who engage with the history of the formerly ‘orientalized.’ Cooper proposes a concerted effort towards specificity of terms and attention to particular historical conditions of their use as an antidote to this intellectual propensity towards flawed generalizations. Understanding the connections between Empires is useful as long as those similarities are not mythologized into universal truths by academics. To this end Cooper writes, “the need to understand the range of forms of imperial power entails appreciating both the general condition and its specific forms, including Empire and colonies.”¹⁵ Academic terms must be conceptually useful – able to increase our understanding of Empires in general – but also not conceptually misleading – not glossing over of geographic particularities and historical change. Cooper’s academic critique of Said therefore centers on *Orientalism*’s status as a historical work that must be questioned by history.

But these academic debates about terms are not confined to purely academic historical debates. They are integrally related to the material nature of Empire and its impact upon individual lives. Cooper writes, “Europe’s ambivalent conquests—oscillating between attempts to project outward its own ways of understanding the world and efforts to demarcate colonizer from colonized, civilized from primitive, core from periphery—made the space of Empire into a terrain where concepts were not only imposed but also engaged and contested.”¹⁶ The vocabulary of Empire was not created in an intellectual vacuum but arose from the realities of Imperialism. The language of Empire therefore reflects, to some extent, the conditions of that Empire’s form of Imperialism. Terms which allow individuals and groups of people to conceptualize of themselves against an ‘other’ – whether the imperial authority or the subjugated colonized – are terms which, as Said suggested, hold real power. Therefore contestations over the terms of Empire within colonies are contests over the power dynamics of Imperialism itself. Cooper explains, “political activism in and about Empire has posed not only possibilities of accepting or rejecting the application to colonial worlds of ideas and structures asserted by Europe, but also the possibility, however difficult, of changing the meaning of the basic concepts themselves.”¹⁷ Here we see the intersection of academic debates about terms and the power of language in lived history. Cooper’s engagement with Said therefore crosses the intellectual line from conceptual critique to a teleological argument. Terms have a purpose and a use in the real world, so it is crucial for imperial actors, the subjects of Empire, and the academics who study both to get those words right.

Frederick Cooper’s engagement with Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism pushes the reader towards a broader and more nuanced understanding of the ideological power dynamics at play in Imperialism. The argument in Cooper’s article aligns with Said’s requirement that a study of ideological terms must connect those terms to manifestations of power. The study of Empire is not a passive investigation purely for intellectual satisfaction or merely to create an internally consistent set of definitions. The study of Empire has political implications as the effects of Imperialism continue to reverberate in the former colonies around the world. Cooper’s critique of Said, and Said’s critique of an ideologically entrenched hegemony through ‘othering the orient’ are not dusty-office musings and academy in-fights but outcome-oriented criticisms of a history that truly

¹⁵ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.

¹⁷ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.

affects the world and its citizens. Complacency in the historical analysis of empire reflects an unacceptable distancing from the political realities and lived experiences of people past and present.

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If academia is a forum, social theory is one of its moderators, constantly shaping and renegotiating the very terminology used in its discourse. Theory is by nature an abstraction from the empirical world. Yet theorizing is a live practice that still engages with it. Different theoretical perspectives confront “big questions” and fundamental assumptions about human nature and social reality. And theorizing implies a continual dialogue with one’s predecessors and future critics. Ideas and paradigms are not allowed to rest but are continually pitted against each other in debate.

In the following essay, **Sherman Tan** explores one “big” theoretical debate: what lens should we use to understand the very nature of human action? Should the social sciences view action as shaped most by individual agency or by the constraining forces of social structure? The essay surveys the so-called “structure vs. agency” debate with admirable clarity, highlighting the inescapable relevance of the individual-agency vs. social constraint debate to any social science discipline.

Sherman Tan is a third-year student at Australian National University.

Contact him at U4761730@anu.edu.au.

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UNDERSTANDING THE “STRUCTURE” AND THE “AGENCY” DEBATE IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Sherman Tan

Introduction

How should we, as social scientists, best comprehend the nature of social life and organization? Are individuals in control of their own actions and destinies, or are they merely (and unconsciously) subject to particular social circumstances which determine their behavior? In other words, do human beings possess some degree of autonomy over their actions, or are they compelled to obey powerful “social forces” which exert control over them? All in all, these contentious questions form the basis for what has come to be known as the “structure-agency” debate in the social sciences. These sociological discussions are especially important, given that they are representative of certain (more fundamental) philosophical concerns, for instance, that of free-will, choice, and determination in human life and conduct. Also, it is equally crucial to recognize that these issues are implicated (and implicit) in social scientific research across a vast range of disciplines. Over the years, both sociologists and anthropologists have been captivated by the debate; correspondingly, they have developed a myriad of theoretical perspectives which seek to address these concerns.

This essay attempts to describe and understand the different (and conflicting) positions held with regards to the structure-agency question. To do so, it is necessary to outline the historical trajectories of this debate, beginning with classical social thinkers before going on to examine various contemporary theoretical insights. Essentially, there are *three* broadly discernible positions on the structure-agency issue:

(1) On one hand, some social theorists have suggested a vision of the world where powerful “structures” are dominant and responsible for orchestrating the conduct of human individuals. The example *par excellence* here is Emile Durkheim’s theoretical work which emphasizes the importance of “social facts” and rules which structure and organize human behavior. This essay will suggest that these theoretical perspectives greatly impacted social-anthropological research: in particular, the influence was especially evident in the ethnographic work pursued by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Meyer Fortes, and E. E. Evans-Pritchard in their analyses of small-scale social orders.

(2) On the other hand, others have been eager to stress the primacy of individual judgments, decisions, and actions -in other words, emphasizing human “agency” in social life. The view adopted

here is that individuals, to a large (or complete) extent, possess the ability to plan, define, understand, organize, and execute their actions. Correspondingly, this perspective suggests that society is *a result of* human creativity, rationality and autonomy; it is an aggregation of individual action (and autonomy) that “makes up” society. This essay will show that such sentiments are present in Max Weber’s social-theoretical work, which stresses human intentionality and calculation in the process of social action. Additionally, this essay recognizes that “rational choice” and “transactional” approaches in social anthropology have been ardent proponents of these perspectives. In particular, Fredrik Barth’s ethnographic fieldwork and analyses will be examined in greater detail as an excellent example of research that has been influenced by these theoretical trends.

(3) A third discernible position is adopted by scholars who have attempted to reconcile both of the perspectives mentioned above. More specifically, they have presented theoretical frameworks that acknowledge the *dialectical relationship* between “structure” and “agency”; in their view, *both* “structures” and human “agency” are important in the explanation of social life and organization. This has been the approach adopted more recently by a number of contemporary social theorists. In particular, this essay will discuss Anthony Giddens’ work on “structuration theory” as well as Pierre Bourdieu’s views on a “theory of practice”.

To some extent, positions (1), (2) and (3) follow a particular temporal trajectory. While (1) appeared to be dominant in sociology and social anthropology for some time, (2) arose as a challenge to (1) -as an attempt to rehabilitate the role of human agency in understanding society. Subsequently, position (3) is an effort to reconcile the insights suggested by (1) and (2), and offer a “middle-ground” solution to the structure-agency debate. Of course, this should only be taken as a *general* trajectory in mapping the proceedings of the structure-agency debate, and it would be an oversimplification to claim that there was *absolutely* no instance where (1), (2) and (3) simultaneously existed in the social sciences. Additionally, other qualifications need to be made. For the purposes of this essay, the homogeneity of each of the three positions expressed here has been assumed. However, in actual fact, one must acknowledge the possibility of various disagreements and conflicts *within* each of the positions, as well as certain similarities and consensus *among* them.

On the whole, this essay will argue that at present, the structure-agency debate is far from over. In fact, a substantial amount of criticism has been directed at the theoretical frameworks proposed by contemporary social scientists such as Giddens, and Bourdieu. At the same time, this essay suggests that instead of claiming that any *one* of them have formulated the “best” account in which to reconcile “structure” and “agency”, it is perhaps more appropriate to recognize the utility of *each* of their different conceptions through constant attempts to apply their views in empirical studies of social organization. Indeed, attempts to demonstrate the usefulness of their frameworks should be grounded in actual research rather than premised on (endless) theoretical disagreement.

Having outlined its objectives and proposed arguments, this essay will now describe and explain, in relation to theory and research, the first of three positions presented above, namely, that of an emphasis on powerful “structural” forces which determine individual conduct. Within the context of this discussion, This position may be more simply regarded as the “structural-emphasis” perspective.

Position (1) - The “structural-emphasis” perspective

According to Barnes (2001:344), the sociology “established in the English-speaking world half a century or so ago” had commonly held that there were “external coercive powers [and] social pressures” involved in the constitution of society. More specifically, he went on to explain that the logic and theory of social research was such that:

Curiosity was satisfied by appeal to [norms and rules] as externalities. What is making people act thus and so? They are conforming to norms. Why is there an overall pattern in their actions? Because there is an overall pattern in the norms. What is the pattern? It is that of the social system or structure of the society in question; and by reference to that system or structure, wherein rules and norms are ordered around statuses to form social institutions, actions may be understood and explained. (Barnes 2001:344)

Indeed, this account of “social structure” consisting of objective and external constraints on human beings was evident in Emile Durkheim’s theoretical vision at the beginning of the 20th century. His sociological theory suggests that individuals are subject to real and external “social facts” which constrain and define their behavior. In *Rules of the Sociological Method*, Durkheim (1938 [1895]:10) emphasized that “a social fact is to be recognized by the power of external coercion which it exercises [...] over individuals”. For example, social facts can be seen as “collective habits find[ing] expression in definite forms [like] legal rules, moral obligations, popular proverbs, social conventions, etc” (Durkheim, 1938 [1895]:45). In essence, these collective habits are

apart from the individual acts to which they give rise, [...] have a permanent existence and do not change with the diverse application made of them [in individual acts], they constitute a fixed object, a constant standard within the observer’s reach, exclusive of subjective impressions and purely personal observations. (Durkheim 1938 [1895]:45)

This suggests that in Durkheim’s view, society is a reality “irreducible to individual psychology and behavior” -essentially, “explanations of even the most individualistic appearing acts [are] a function of impersonal laws and forces characterizing social wholes” (Fay 1996:51). On the whole, the structure of society exists above and over human action, and it is the former which exerts a unidirectional force on the latter.

It is also important to point out the *functionalist* aspects of Durkheim’s vision of the social world. It is often claimed that Durkheim’s theoretical work presents society “as though it were a single-unified entity in the way that the human body is an integrated assemblage of organic parts” (Hughes et al. 1995:205). This organic analogy, inherited from his predecessor, Herbert Spencer, stresses the “harmony and continuity of society” and how “parts of society, [such as] institutions and practices, contribute to holding society together and keep it going” (Hughes et al. 1995:206). In Durkheim’s (1933 [1893]) own words, social solidarity is maintained by means of “repressive and restitutive sanctions” which punish deviations from the social order and to “re-establish what had been disturbed by putting it back into its normal state”. Therefore, not only is society “structured” and exerting powerful forces on individuals, its mechanisms (inclusive of rules, sanctions, conventions, obligations, etc) function in such a way as to *sustain* its given structure.

Subsequently, this kind of structural-functionalism was especially influential, particularly among a number of social anthropologists. Through their ethnographic research, the Durkheimian theoretical perspective on the social world was simultaneously reflected and validated. For example, Durkheim's influence is especially evident in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's ethnographic fieldwork on Australian Aboriginal tribal communities. In establishing his theoretical framework, Radcliffe-Brown's commitment to structural-functionalism is expressed:

[...] following Durkheim and others, I [Radcliffe-Brown] would define the social function of a socially standardized mode of activity, or mode of thought, as its relation to the social structure to the *existence and continuity* of which it makes some contribution. Analogously, in a living organism, the physiological function of the beating of the heart, or the secretion of gastric juices, is its relation to the organic structure to the existence or continuity of which it makes its contribution. [emphasis mine] (Radcliffe-Brown 1940:10)

As such, Radcliffe-Brown believes in social mechanisms which allow for the continued reproduction of any given social-structural system. More importantly, in analyzing the kinship structure of the tribal communities, Radcliffe-Brown argues that

we have an example of a society in which the very widest possible recognition is given to genealogical relationships [...] these relationships are made, in Australia, the basis of an extensive and highly organized system of reciprocal *obligations* [...] In native Australian society it *regulates more or less definitely the behavior of an individual* to every person with whom he has any social dealings whatever. [emphasis mine] (Radcliffe-Brown 1930:43)

Again, in his overall conclusion, Radcliffe-Brown (1930:63) explains how

[in his] general survey of the forms of social structure in Australia [...] one of the tasks of culture is to organize the relations of human beings to one another. This is done by means of the social structure and the *moral, ritual and economic customs* by and in which that structure functions. But another task of culture is to organize the relation of man to his environment. In Australia this involves *a system of customs and beliefs* by which the human society and the natural objects and phenomena that affect it are brought into a larger structure [...] *The function* of much of the myth and ritual is to *maintain or create this structure*. [emphasis mine]

Therefore, it is clear that Radcliffe-Brown's research confirms Durkheim's theoretical view of powerful influences on individuals by means of an external social structure. In his fieldwork, he suggests the efficacy of customs and obligations due to individuals' positions in a larger kinship system, to bring about certain regulations on these persons' behaviors. And most certainly, he emphasizes the stability and continued perpetuation of that particular structure, in the same way that Durkheim does. Interestingly, he extends the efficacy of "structure" to more than just individuals -Radcliffe-Brown also considers natural objects and phenomenon to be subject to operative systems of customs and beliefs. This can be seen as a broadening of the scope of application of

Durkheim's ideas concerning powerful and determining structural forces.

Another instance of Durkheimian theoretical perspectives being validated by social-anthropological research is visible in Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard's fieldwork in Africa. In short, their analysis of socio-political systems in the region suggests that

African society [operates] in the frame of a body of interconnected moral and legal norms[,] the order and stability of which is maintained by the political organization. Africans, [...] do not analyze their social system; they live it. They think and feel about it in terms of values which reflect, in doctrine and symbol, but do not explain, the *forces* that really *control their social behavior* [emphasis mine] (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940)

Once again, the picture that emerges is one which emphasizes that individual action is dependent on a compelling social force and organization beyond human agency. In this respect, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's work is quite similar to that of Radcliffe-Brown's: taken together, both their ethnographic studies suggest that individuals are subject to coercive social structures, affirming the Durkheimian-type "structural-functionalist" sociological vision. It is precisely this portrayal of individuals as *merely passive* recipients of social (and structural) determinations that eventually came to be rejected by perspectives arguing for the agentive efficacy of human beings. This essay will now examine some of these starkly different theoretical inclinations and research work in greater detail.

Position (2) - The "agency-centric" perspective

Sztompka (1994:30) traces how sociology, at least until the late 1960s, was dominated by the "Durkheimian problem" -a belief in the "self-regulating system" of "structural constraints" which "determined human conduct". Following this period, he describes a renewed theoretical interest in the "Weber problem" -an emphasis on "human action instead of social structure as the main object of research", focusing on "the analysis of intimate, everyday interactions" (Sztompka 1994:30). Clearly then, the "agency-centric" perspective came about as a reaction to the "structuralemphasis" of the previously mentioned position. In order to rehabilitate the role of individual efficacy and suggest that humans can actively decide on the courses of actions they wish to pursue, social scientists became especially interested in the theoretical views of Max Weber.

In his exposition on sociological theory and method in *Economy and Society* (1922), Weber places the focus of social-scientific inquiry on the acting (and active) individual. In particular, he proposes to

[...] speak of 'action' insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior -be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course. (Weber 1978 [1922]:4)

In this sense, Weber is suggesting that sociologists should focus on the "*rational, goal-directed* activities of individuals [emphasis mine]" (Gordon 1991:477). In his view, the task of the sociologist is to reveal the rationalizations of the individual in any given situation, taking into account the "interpretive understanding" (*Verstehen*) of social actors positioned in various contexts of action

(Weber 1978 [1922]). More specifically, for Weber,

[...] the particular act has been placed in an understandable sequence of *motivation*, the understanding of which can be treated as an explanation of the actual course of behavior. Thus for a science which is concerned with the *subjective meaning* of action, explanation requires a grasp of the *complex of meaning* in which an actual course of understandable action thus interpreted belongs. [...] even where the processes are largely affectual, the subjective meaning of the action, including that also of the relevant meaning complexes, will be called the intended meaning [...] [we shall speak of] intention in this sense in the case of *rationality purposive* action. [emphasis mine] (Weber 1978 [1922]:9)

From these excerpts, it is clear that Weber aimed to explicate the reasons, intentions and reflexive deliberations of social actors, and he believed that this could only be achieved by examining the salient “meanings” which were intrinsically involved in any given social situation. On the whole, the Weberian view of the social world differs greatly in comparison with the Durkheimian perspective. For Weber, there is a theoretical emphasis on “agency” rather than “structure”; in fact, he does this by suggesting that individuals reason and decide on certain actions through micro-level processes of interaction and meaning-orientation. The individual is not a static entity who is inscribed on by powerful social forces, rather, he/she is a dynamic, rational, and motivated actor in any given social context.

Another theoretical perspective which stresses the “agency” aspect is that of “rational choice” approaches in the social sciences. According to Baert and da Silva (2010:127), rational choice theory (or RCT) fundamentally assume[s] intentionality. Rational choice explanations are indeed a subset of so-called ‘intentional explanations’ [which] do not merely stipulate that individuals act intentionally; rather they account for social practices by referring to beliefs and desires of the individuals involved [and they] are often accompanied by a search for the unintended (or so called ‘aggregation’) effects of people’s purposive action.

Additionally, other than intentionality, RCTs also assume rationality:

By rationality, it is meant, roughly speaking, that, while acting and interacting, the individual has a coherent plan, and attempts to maximize the net satisfaction of his or her preferences while minimizing the costs involved. Rationality thus implies ‘the assumption of connectedness’, which stipulates that the individual involved has a complete ‘preference ordering’ across the various options. (Baert and da Silva 2010:128)

All in all, RCTs, while not necessarily influenced by the Weberian theoretical vision, nonetheless share certain similarities with the latter. Again, the focus is on the individual instead of the “social structures” above and over him/her, and the emphasis is on the ability of individuals to contemplate and rationalize in their pursuit of action. However, it should be noted that “Weberian action theorists [...] are keen to distance themselves from any form of economic reductionism”, including certain perspectives held by RCTs which represent “the subordination of *homo sociologicus* to *homo economicus*” (Baert and da Silva 2010:125). In other words, Weber’s sociological theory does not necessary endorse RCT arguments that man’s action is essentially and fundamentally driven by a maximization of economic profit. Yet, for the purposes of this discussion, the similari-

ties between between RCT and Weber's theoretical work in suggesting "agency-centric" views must be emphasized. A good example of the application of RCT to research is evident in Fredrik Barth's social-anthropological work. In his analysis of cultivation activities in the society of the Fur, a village-dwelling population in the Dafur province of Sudan, he found that

the strategic constraints of social life [...] enter and affect behavior: people's activities are canalized by the fact of competition and cooperation for valued goods with other persons and thus by the problems of adapting one's behavior to that of others, themselves predictive and adaptable. (Barth 1967:665)

More specifically, with regards to economic-productive activities within the familial unit, he explains how

One may hypothesize a persistence of values in [...] different situations: (a) a preference for husband-wife autonomy, and (b) a preference for the minimization of effort in production. [...] Where effective production can be pursued individually, persons will be able simultaneously to *maximize* both *interests*. Where pooling of labor in orchards gives great returns with limited effort, this allocation on the balance gives the greatest advantage to both spouses. [...] In this example, then, we find that change in household form is generated by changes in one variable: the *relative advantage* of joint production over separate production. [emphasis mine] (Barth 1967:667)

All in all, it is clear that Barth emphasizes individuals' ability to understand and calculate the utility of different courses of action before pursuing them. He concludes by re-iterating his belief in a rational choice approach to understanding social behavior; Barth (1967:668) suggests that

The aggregate patterns that can emerge in the population will thus be shaped by the fact of competition and the constraints of strategy. To depict these constraints on actors and the way they will determine the aggregate pattern of choices in a population, we need models in the tradition of a game theory.

Therefore, on the whole, it can be concluded that Barth's work reflects as well as offers corroboration for RCT approaches in the social sciences. Having examined both the "agency-centric" position, and in the previous section, the "structural-emphasis" perspective, this essay will now look at more recent theoretical trends which have attempted to bridge "structure" and "agency". With regards to this endeavor, two especially prominent frameworks stand out among others: Anthony Giddens' work on "structuration theory" and Pierre Bourdieu's views on a "theory of practice".

Position (3): Attempts to bridge “structure” and “agency”

Anthony Giddens cogently sums up the social-theoretical work previously done, before his introduction of structuration theory. In short, he explains that

In interpretative sociologies, action and meaning are accorded primacy in the explication of human conduct; structural concepts are not notably prominent, and there is not much talk of constraint. For functionalism and structuralism, however, structure (in the divergent senses attributed to that concept) has primacy over action, and the constraining qualities of structure are strongly accentuated. (Giddens 1984:2)

As such, he set out to understand “how the concepts of action, meaning and subjectivity should be specified and how they might relate to notions of structure and constraint” (Giddens 1984:2). In this sense, Giddens’ intentions were to construct a coherent framework with which “structure” and “agency” can be both captured (in an account of social life) and systematically analyzed.

At risk of simplification, the central concept in Giddens’ work is that of the “duality of structure”. For him

Crucial to the idea of structuration is the theorem of the duality of structure [...] The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality. According to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices that recursively organize. (Giddens 1984:25)

Therefore, Giddens sees “structure” and “agency” as an iterative process. While individuals act under given social structures and circumstances, they are, at the same time, re-creating those very same structures. He even suggests that

Structure is not ‘external’ to individuals: as memory traces, and as instantiated in social practices, it is in a certain sense more ‘internal’ than exterior to their activities in a Durkheimian sense. (Giddens 1984:25)

On the whole then, what he argues is that positions focusing on merely “structure” *or* “agency” have performed “an illegitimate form of reduction, deriving from a failure to adequately conceptualize the duality of structure”. Essentially, he asserts that structuration theory takes a step forward in the structure-agency debate by explaining how “the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life” (Giddens 1984:26).

Giddens’ work has received mixed reviews. On one hand, sociologists like Jonathan Turner (1986:977), have suggested that structuration theory has “offers [...] much insight into the basic properties and dynamics of human action, interaction, and organization”. He also explains that Giddens’ theory “has far more potential than Giddens would admit for developing a natural science of society -that is, for articulating the abstract laws that govern the operation of our universe”. It is evident that Turner sees structuration theory as a potentially comprehensive and beneficial set of assertions about the workings of the social world.

Sewell (1992), similarly, positively acknowledges the contributions of structuration the-

ory. To him, Giddens' work is on the right track; in particular, he believes that Giddens' "notion of the duality of structure underwrites theoretically what social historians (and in recent years many historical sociologists and historical anthropologists as well) do in practice" (Sewell 1992:5). More specifically, he is in agreement with Giddens' on (i) the idea of "dual structures" -how "human agency and structure, far from being *opposed*, in fact *presuppose* each other [author's emphasis]" and also on (ii) the understanding that "structure must be regarded as a process, not as a steady state" (Sewell 1992:4). Clearly, he takes Giddens' formulation of the relationship between "structure" and "agency" to be a cogent and well-developed one, and understands structuration theory to have been (and to continue to be) ultimately useful for sociological and anthropological research.

However, on the other hand, Giddens' structuration theory has also been subject to a number of scathing criticisms. For instance, Bryant (1992) has argued that structuration theory has not provided a clear enough specification of its principles, and as such, is potentially difficult to test and apply to actual empirical research. He explains that Giddens provides "neither positive nor normative theories, but fashions concepts that [merely] satisfy the desiderata of social theory (such as the simultaneous avoidance of objectivism and subjectivism)" (Bryant 1992:141). For example, he suggests that it is "hard to know how to move from such structures of rules and resources to actual, more systematic patterns of interaction" within the framework of structuration theory (Bryant 1992:141). This charge against Giddens' model of structure and agency was initially raised by McLennan (1984:125), who claimed that his framework failed to specify concretely "*which* structures, *what* agencies, in what sequences go to make up the object of enquiry of social theory [author's emphasis]".

Others, like Archer (1982), have also pointed out the inherent flaws of Giddens' structuration model. In particular, she suggests that

the 'duality of structure' *itself* oscillates between the two divergent images it bestrides - between (a) the hyperactivity of agency, whose corollary is the innate volatility of society, and (b) the rigid coherence of structural properties associated, on the contrary, with the essential recursiveness of social life. (Archer 1982:459)

Therefore, Archer (1982:460) argues that Giddens

rather than transcending the voluntarism/determinism dichotomy, the two sides of the 'duality of structure' embody them respectively: they are simply clamped together in a conceptual vice.

Clearly, her disagreement with Giddens revolves around the fact that his idea of a recursive loop (of structure into agency and vice versa) makes it difficult "to discover what aspects of social organization govern the interconnection between the two, [thus] avoiding concrete propositions of this type" (Archer 1982:461). On the whole, Archer's work implicitly concurs with Bryant and McLennan's criticisms concerning the lack of precision in the structuration model, but more than that, she takes it a step further by pointing out that Giddens' *conflation* of the concepts of structure and agency is to blame for this theoretical handicap. In sum, all these critiques of structuration theory essentially highlight inadequacies in its attempts to articulate how "structure" and "agency" are interrelated.

Apart from Giddens' work on structuration theory, another more recent attempt to con-

nect “structure” and “agency” within a coherent framework is that of Pierre Bourdieu’s “theory of practice”. According to Swartz (1997:9), Bourdieu wishes to

integrate micro and macro, voluntarist and determinist dimensions of human activity [...] into a single conceptual movement rather than isolated as mutually exclusive forms of explanation.

This theoretical endeavor is not unlike what Giddens’ tried to achieve with structuration theory. However, with regards to Bourdieu’s work, the difference lies in *how* the structural and agentic dimensions of social life are understood; within his work, the concepts of “habitus” and “field” are developed precisely to fulfill this purpose. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:126),

To speak of habitus is to assert that the individual, and even the personal, the subjective, is social, collective. Habitus is a *socialized subjectivity*. [...] [it is] the durable and transposable systems of schemata of perception, appreciation, and action that results from *the institution of the social in the body* (or biological individuals) [...] [emphasis mine]

Another way of viewing habitus, is to understand that

Being the product of history, [habitus] is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:133)

Additionally, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:97) define a field as

a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions [...]

Essentially then, they explain that “habitus” and “field” are connected in a dialectical relationship, in which there is

a *relationship of conditioning* [where] the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of a field, [and] a *relationship of knowledge or cognitive construction* [in which] habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one’s energy. [...] [Therefore] *social reality exists, so as to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents*. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a ‘fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted. *Habitus being the social embodied, it is ‘at home’ in the field it inhabits, it perceives it immediately as endowed with meaning and interest.*[emphasis mine] (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:127)

The vision of the social world that emerges from Bourdieu’s model is a complex one, more so than Giddens’ “duality of structure”. For him, “structure” and “agency” is not recursively related

in a simple manner. The entities involved, namely habitus and field, come into contact with each other as a result of a particular historical trajectory. In this sense, external structures are, as it were, inscribed into individuals' own dispositions (habitus), and the latter is implicated when it comes into contact with those familiar fields (in which it was initially formed). As such, this is Bourdieu's view of "structure" and "agency": individuals act *in* and *through* their habitus in relation to given fields (agency), keeping in mind that their habitus has been conditioned by prior experiences (structure).

However, in the process of outlining Bourdieu's theoretical framework, one might have begun to notice some of the problems it inherently runs up against. Elder-Vass (2007:328) points out that Bourdieu has been criticized for "his apparent denial of conscious decision making in the determination of human behavior, in marked contrast to most theorists of action". Indeed, social theorists like Jeffrey Alexander have argued that Bourdieu's notion of habitus simply reinforces the idea of structure and determination rather than agency -in fact, it seems like "Bourdieu wishes not to free up creative and interpretive action but to attach it to structures in a noninterpretive way" (Alexander 1995:135). In a way, it is unclear how much room Bourdieu leaves for agency, especially if agency is considered to be deliberative and conscious action on the part of human beings. If these critiques are right, Bourdieu would then appear to be suggesting a vision of the social world in which there is "more structure" and "less or no agency".

On the other hand, some would be more sympathetic towards Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Crossley (2001:117), for instance, explains that Bourdieu is certainly "by no means oblivious to the question of reflexivity [and deliberative action], [but] the nature and possibility of reflexivity are something of a mystery in his work". And to be fair, Bourdieu (2000:162) himself does acknowledge moments where habitus "misfires or is out of phase", and where actors can enter into "an instant of hesitation into which there may slip a form of reflection". Yet, while this is a possibility, one could argue that the frequency of such occurrences is somewhat elusive in Bourdieu's overall model -in fact, the picture presented by him suggests that habitus seems to operate successfully most of the time.

Conclusion: Future theoretical and research directions for the structure-agency debate

After examining Giddens' and Bourdieu's attempts to bring together "structure" and "agency", it is clear that the structure-agency debate is far from over. Instead, one can safely say that it has taken a new turn. The debate is no longer about whether it is "structure" or "agency" that provides an explanation for social life; rather, the issue has now become: *how* do social scientists best understand the interrelationship *between* structure and agency? It can be claimed that this is where the most interesting debates lie -at least in view of the most recent trends in social theorizing (Marsh 2010, personal communication). At the same time, one could argue that the fundamental questions which have been of great interest to social researchers in the past (say, in the time of Durkheim and Weber), continue to be ever-so-relevant, albeit being consciously and consistently weaved together in various disciplines. Questions like 'What are the ordered and constant determinants of social order?' and 'How can we understand individual creativity and action?' continue to demand answers, but presently (*contra* previous understandings), they are no longer perceived by social scientists to be mutually exclusive concerns.

So, where do we go from here? Indeed, Giddens and Bourdieu have certainly advanced the structure-agency debate by and through their theoretical work. In short, they have suggested

some important issues with regards to the interrelationship between “structure” and “agency”. While Giddens’ has raised the concern that there may be a recursive process between structure and agency, Bourdieu’s ideas have emphasized the possibility of routinized (as opposed to reflexive) action in an account of “agency”. Regardless of whether one agrees with these insights on a *theoretical* level, both Giddens and Bourdieu’s work have been undoubtedly useful in raising these issues, which should be *tested* and *applied* to *actual research* in specific social contexts. In particular, Bourdieu’s framework has been put to the explanatory test—in fact, Bourdieu himself applies the notions of habitus and field to an analysis of education, class distinction (and segmentation), and artistic taste. As such, this essay suggests that more empirical research should be done to further theorists’ conceptualizations of the structure-agency interrelationship. In essence, the cogency of Giddens and Bourdieu’s views will only be ascertained through their explanatory utility for concrete social situations.

On the whole, it is clear that the structure-agency debate in the social sciences has come a long way since earlier theoretical views and empirical research. This essay has shown that, within the historical trajectory of this debate, theoretical developments have largely influenced actual research, especially with regards to the ethnographic fieldwork being carried out in small scale societies. It is important to acknowledge that the structure-agency debate can be advanced by means of comprehensive communication between theoretical endeavors and their concrete applicability to research work. In conclusion, instead of only pursuing the structure-agency question on a theoretical level, social scientists should attempt to operationalize social-theoretical concepts in their empirical research to demonstrate their viability for a comprehensive understanding of society. To echo Margaret Archer (1996), dealing with questions of structure and agency demands a confrontation of “the most pressing social problem of the human condition”. Indeed, this debate continues to be relevant today, and remains the bedrock of all scientific inquiry into the nature and conditions of social organization, order, control, and action.

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