



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Social Science

## Bourdieu and His Concepts

**KEY WORDS:** Bourdieu, Kabyle, generative, hexis, doxa, structure, practice

Ms. Taruna Jain

Designation: Assistant Professor Organization: Mata Sundri College for Women  
Pandav Nagar, Delhi-91

**ABSTRACT** Here, in this essay, I have tried to bring out how Bourdieu's notion of practice and generative schemes perception, thought, and action as well as of social structures help us understand the social reality of the Kabyle society. I also discuss how his analyses bring out the relations and dynamics of individual and collective in an agrarian setting. I have tried to interpret different concepts and terms given by Bourdieu in order to bring out his conceptual understanding at macro-level.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, there has been a concerted effort in the discipline of sociology, mostly by European scholars, to integrate agency and structure in social analyses. The relationship between agency and structure as a problem can be seen as a basic concern in modern social theory debates. Four major works can be considered in this regard – Anthony Giddens on Structuration theory, Margret Archer on Culture and Agency, Pierre Bourdieu on Habitus and Field, and finally Jurgen Habermas on Colonization of the life-world.

Bourdieu offers a unique framework to overcome what he considers to be a "false opposition" between objectivism and subjectivism, the "absurd opposition between individual and society" (1990:31). Bourdieu was not comfortable with labels on his works. He dealt with the genesis of schemes of perception, thought, and action as well as of social structures, and his sociology involved the way of people perceiving and constructing the social world, on the basis of their position in the social space. Here, in this essay, I try to bring out how his notion of practice and generative schemes perception, thought, and action as well as of social structures help us understand the social reality of the Kabyle society. I also discuss how his analyses bring out the relations and dynamics of individual and collective in an agrarian setting.

The major concern of the Bourdieu's quintessential work *The Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) is the relationship between practice and its meta-pragmatic representations of the Kabyle society. Bourdieu contrasts that kind of knowledge with the practical knowledge – the tacit understandings and strategies, or the felt sense of how the social world works – that people engaged but by definition can never be metadiscursively articulated, as he puts in his own words as "knowledge that goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu 1977:167).

In a Kabyle marriage, it is the practical kin who makes the ceremony, and the official kin celebrates it. The official marriage proposal (akhtab) is presented by elder brother (who is least responsible) and not the father, the paternal uncle or grandfather, etc., accompanied, especially if he is young, by a kinsman from another line. Bourdieu feels that the genealogical diagrams of kin relationships that anthropologists construct merely represent the official version of the social structure, ignoring other practical dimensions (1977:34).

Bourdieu writes that the practical groups exist for particular functions, in pursuance of which they have been effectively mobilized. They continue to exist only because they have been kept in working order by their very use and by maintenance work (including the matrimonial exchanges they make possible) and rest on a community of dispositions (habitus) and interests (1977:35).

For instance, the power relations between different individuals or groups, and the existing stratification structures are nothing but manifestation of practice. Bourdieu writes on the gender relations of power in the Kabyle society as:

"Even when women do wield.....to the subversive refusal of the

rule-breaker, in that it still serves the authority it uses" (1977:41).

He tries to locate the exercise of power among individuals in the Kabyle society within an apparent "neutrality that is both enabling and restricting or limiting for women as is indeed often the case in different forms of social organisation. Such a perspective indicates both the forms of oppression that women may experience as well as points to the possibilities for strategising and the skilful maneuvering they may engage in to achieve their goals" (as quoted by Thapan 2002).

Accordingly, proverbs and sayings are "the product of the same generative schemes as the practices they claim to account for" (1977:20); they "reinforce the structures by providing them with a particular form of 'rationalization'" (1990a:66-79). Through proverbs, then, Kabyles unknowingly could give voice to the "truth" of practice. Bourdieu believed that proverbs were located in a collective habitus, and are verbal instantiations of the logic of practice.

A calendar, to Bourdieu, is one of the most codified aspect of social existence owing to its extremely important function of coordinating group activities in a society that largely depends on agriculture and whose way of life revolves around it. Just as genealogy substitutes a space of unequivocal, homogeneous relationships that are established once and for all for a spatially and temporally discontinuous set of kinship, a calendar substitutes a linear, homogeneous, continuous time for practical time, which is made up of incommensurable islands of duration, each with its own rhythm and functions conferred on it by the activity in progress (1977:105).

"True rigor," according to Bourdieu, "does not lie in an analysis which tries to push the system beyond its limits, by abusing the powers of the discourse which gives voice to the silence of practice and by exploiting the magic of writing which tears practice and discourse out of the flow of time" (1977:155). Instead, Bourdieu sought to uncover the "generative schemes" that connected various temporal and ritual dimensions of Kabyle life, from the agricultural cycles to women's activities, from ploughing rituals to marriage rites, from the structure of the day to the cycle of reproduction. He identifies something called as "Body Hexis" that forms key to his argument on the dialectic relations of the objectification and embodiment of the habitus. Body hexis speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values (1977:87). Children imitate not models but other people's actions to become accomplished adults. He touts this process not as a mechanical learning by trial and error, but as a mastery over the structures grasped from verbal products (such as oral lore discussed earlier in this essay), objects (tools, houses, villages), or from practices such as contests of honour, gift exchanges, rites, etc..

To Bourdieu, the 'meanings' objectified in things or places can only be understood in the practices structured according to the same

schemes, which are organized in relation to them (and vice versa). In his observation of the interiors of Kabyle houses, he makes an interesting analogy in the opposition between the male and the female as reappearing in the opposition between the "master" beam and the main pillar, a fork open skywards. The lower, dark part of the pillar is opposed to the upper part as female to the male, in most intimate place within the world of intimacy, thereby equating sexuality with fertility. The opposition between male sexuality which is public and sublimated, and female sexuality which is secret and alienated, is only a specification of the opposition between the extraversion of politics or public religion and the introversion of psychology or private magic, made up for the most part of rites aimed at domesticating the male partners. The feminine virtue such as modesty, restraint, and reserve orients the whole female body downwards, towards the ground (or inside, the house) whereas male excellence is asserted in movement upwards, outwards, towards other men (1977:93). He views the house as organised according to a set of homologous oppositions - fire: water :: cooked: raw :: high: low :: light: shade :: day: night :: male: female :: nif: hurma: : fertilizing: able to be fertilized (1977:90).

He then extends his approach to the same oppositions established between the house as a whole and the rest of universe - the place of assembly, the fields, and the market. The proverb "Man is the lamp of the outside, woman the lamp of the inside" must be taken to mean that man is the true light, that of the day, and woman the light of darkness, dark brightness; and we also know that she is to the moon as man is to the sun.

Thus, Bourdieu's approach helps in revealing unique meanings to the generative schemes of practices. In his discussion on union and separation of logic of practice, he opines that every object (or entity) in a society receives different properties according as it is apprehended in the state of union or the state of separation, but it is not possible to consider either of these states as its objective truth, with the other being regarded as an imperfect (1977:125). Thus, the negative definition of house as dark, nocturnal, female world, changes its definition when it becomes the place par excellence of cohabitation and of the marriage of contraries, like the wife, "the lamp of the inside", encloses its own light.

Through the habitus, the structure which has produced it governs practice, not by the processes of a mechanical determinism, but through the mediation of the orientations and limits it assigns to the habitus's operations of invention. Because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products - thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions - whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings (1977:95).

Bourdieu observes that there is a correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization in agrarian societies, as does the natural and social world. He calls that as "doxa", so as to distinguish it from an orthodox or heterodox belief implying awareness and recognition of the possibility of different or antagonistic beliefs. Doxa is a pre-reflexive intuitive knowledge shaped by experience, to unconscious inherited physical and relational predispositions.

Thus, to conclude, Bourdieu's framework on "Practice" as an archetypal logic of the organisation of societies stand apart from the other major efforts within sociology, aforesaid in the beginning, to integrate agency and structure. At the heart of Bourdieu's work lies in the concept of habitus and field, as well as their dialectical relationship to one another. While habitus exist in the minds of the actors, field exists outside their minds. With his writings on the Kabyle society, this idea of habitus-field relationship brings together the importance of individual endeavour and collective life in an agricultural setting. The Kabyle study raises a new relationship between theory and ethnographic practice in anthropology. As Deborah-Reed Danahay puts it, his key concepts of habitus, field, and symbolic capital from the

Kabyle study continue to shape research and theory in many disciplines (Danahay 2002).

## REFERENCES

1. Bourdieu, Pierre (1977): *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Trans by Richard Nice), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
2. Bourdieu, Pierre (1990): *The Logic of Practice*, Polity, Cambridge. Bourdieu, Pierre and Loic JD
3. Wacquant (1992): *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
4. Danahay, Deborah Reed (2002): *Remembering Pierre Bourdieu 1930-2002*, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 2, pp. 375-380
5. Goodman, Jane E. (2003): *The Proverbial Bourdieu: Habitus and the Politics of Representation in the Ethnography of Kabylia*, *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 105, No. 4, December, pp. 782-793
6. Grenfell, Michael (2008): *Pierre Bourdieu Key concepts*, Acumen Publishing Limited, Durham.
7. Thapan, Meenakshi (1988): *Some Aspects of Cultural Reproduction and Pedagogic Communication*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 19, pp. 592-97
8. Thapan, Meenakshi (2002): *Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002): A Personal Tribute*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 2-8, pp. 826-828