

Title: Exploring the Racial Habitus Through John's Story: On Race, Class & Adaptation

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Abstract:

This paper puts Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual tool habitus (1977) to work alongside Sara Ahmed's theory of racialization (2002) to conceptualise a racial habitus that is durable but not totally determining. The racial habitus is applied to the narrative account of John, a Black-Caribbean man from North East London, who finds himself a "fish out of water" within a racist society, which confronts him with the reality that he must actively acquire new dispositions, sensibilities and cultural capital, in order to survive. This paper explores the cost of this adaptation for people such as John and the uneven processes that enabled his constrained adaptation. It is argued that people, such as John, are forced to "carve" themselves out against the backdrop of dominant racist discourse in complex and creative ways that highlight the constrained but non-essential nature of racial subjectivities. In doing so, this paper argues against perceptions that Pierre Bourdieu is a structural determinist through offering empirically-driven insights that highlight his oft-ignored complex positions on agency.

Key Words: Bourdieu, Racial Habitus, Agency, Class, Social Mobility

Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical toolkit - namely the triad of capital, field and habitus - has been applied to a plethora of settings across a range of academic disciplines (see Wacquant & Akçaoğlu 2017). Yet, despite the recent resurgence of Bourdieusian work on race within the UK (see Rollock 2014, Rollock et al 2015, Wallace 2016, Meghji 2017, 2019), his tools, particularly

habitus, have been relatively underutilized in the study of race and racism. Using ethnographic material this paper deploys a racial habitus to demonstrate how racial identities are produced but also subject to constrained change and adaptation. To do this I put habitus to work alongside Ahmed's conceptualization of racialization (Ahmed 2002, 2007), particularly Ahmed's framing of a social world that is shaped by colonialism. In taking this approach I aim to draw out the racialized dimensions of social class that are perhaps absent within Bourdieu's work. More broadly I aim to demonstrate that drawing upon habitus can redress the fact that race is an identity that is socially constituted, whilst remaining attentive to the social reality of race in everyday life. I thus seek to draw out the complex nature of agency within Bourdieu's work that goes beyond perceptions that he is a structural determinist with a rigid individual.

I begin this paper by outlining Bourdieu's concept of habitus, paying particular attention to his positions on agency. I then intervene into debates on whether Bourdieu does or does not do race within his work before outlining how I will theorize a racial habitus through creating a dialogue between Ahmed and Bourdieu. Using this frame, I offer reflections on the experiences of John, a working-class "Black-Caribbean" man who was born and raised in North-East London. Through John's accounts, I argue that race exists as a form of habitus, as those with racialized subjectivities seek to contest the boundaries of their race through the acquisition of new sensibilities and dispositions, whilst remaining attentive to the constraints of dominant racial discourse. In doing so I seek to highlight how Bourdieu's theoretical tools can offer rich insights into the production, maintenance and disruption of racialized subjectivities.

Situating Habitus

Although Bourdieu did not apply the term habitus until later, he developed the concept¹ out of his ethnographic fieldwork in Algeria and Béarn during the late 1950s and early 60s to account for the reproduction of traditional societies within shifting contexts (Bourdieu 1970, Bourdieu 1990). Bourdieu has since dedicated numerous texts to outlining habitus in greater detail (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990), broadly situating habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (Bourdieu 1977; pp. 72). Whilst Wacquant, a regular collaborator with Bourdieu, succinctly describes habitus as "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or

¹ Bourdieu does not claim to have coined the concept and refers to older usages of the term in (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) and (Bourdieu 2000).

trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them” (Wacquant 2005; pp. 316).

Bourdieu proposed habitus to overcome the limitations of objectivist and subjectivist sociological approaches, both of which he believed failed to capture the complexity of human practice. Yet his formulation of habitus as a “social aptitude” (Wacquant 2016) has resulted in accusations that he is a structural determinist who proposes a rigid subject (see Lovell 2000 & King 2000 for discussion) leading Bourdieu to lament “many fine minds reacted not to what I wrote but to what they thought they had read” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; pp. 133). A closer reading of Bourdieu highlights how he does offer space to explore how people can adapt within changing circumstances. For instance, in describing conditions of “hysteresis” (Bourdieu 2000; pp. 160), which occur when an agent finds themselves within a social context where their primary dispositions do not adequately guide them and thus require an agent to develop new practices; e.g. as a result of migration (see Nowicka 2015) or colonialism (see Bourdieu & Sayad 2015).

More broadly, Silvia argues that Bourdieu moves “from rigid to flexible notions” (Silvia 2016; pp. 167) of habitus over the course of his career. Notably, in *Weight of the World* (1999) and *Pascalian Meditations* (2000) Bourdieu identifies how one’s habitus can react to new fields in describing the “cleft habitus”; “a habitus divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and with its ambivalence” (Bourdieu 1999; pp. 511). The “cleft habitus” or “habitus clivé” can develop as a result of experiencing social mobility as Bourdieu did following his ascent from “a tiny peasant village” to some of France’s most prestigious academic institutions (Friedman 2016)².

Yet, Bourdieu’s earlier work also offers oft-ignored accounts of social change. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) Bourdieu identifies moments of “heterodoxy” (Bourdieu 1977; pp. 164), situations where one’s doxa - one’s belief in the naturalness of the social world - can be challenged through the questioning of previously accepted taken-for-granted knowledge. Further, Bourdieu’s early work on Algeria, which “served as a generative site for his concept habitus” (Go 2013; pp. 51), was about hysteresis brought on through colonisation and the subsequent disruption to traditional ways of life. Bourdieu and Sayyad note that in this new colonial world “the fellah [agricultural peasant] finds himself confronted with the task of creating

² See Friedman (2016) for a further elaboration of “cleft habitus”/“habitus clivé” and also Abrahams and Ingram (2013).

a system of models of behaviour and thought that would enable him to adapt to this new situation” (Bourdieu & Sayyad 2015; pp. 123), even though this process is by no means seamless.

It is finally worth noting that Bourdieu’s theoretical works are formulated as rough guides, rather than canonical texts (see Wacquant 2014) and as such to uncover the complexities and richness of Bourdieu’s positions on agency one must test habitus empirically; “the proof of the theoretical pudding of habitus must consist in its empirical eating” (Wacquant 2016; pp. 70). In this context I aim to contribute to a growing body of work that has sought to empirically highlight the richness of Bourdieu’s positions on agency (see Ingram 2011, Abraham & Ingram 2013, Friedman 2016) through emphasising the existence of a racial habitus that is “durable, but not eternal” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992).

Bourdieu, Race & Habitus

Bourdieu’s early work on Algeria has oft-ignored anti-colonial and anti-racist positions (see Puwar 2009, Go 2013, Burawoy 2019). Yet, his work thereafter barely makes note of colonialism or racism, nor does it foreground the racialized dimensions of social class. In this context Stoler accuses Bourdieu of having a blind-spot on race, arguing that in *Distinction* (1984) he “assiduously sidestepped the racial distinctions that produced the habitus of modern bourgeois France” (Stoler 2016; pp. 137). Whilst this sidestepping of race was in part due to political restrictions on citing ethnic identification across France at the time he conducted his research (see Bennett et al 2009), the lack of focus on race, racism or colonialism since the publication of *The Algerians* (1961)³ reflects somewhat of an absence in Bourdieu’s approach. Yet, this is not to say that Bourdieu should be discarded when it comes to analyzing race; as Wallace notes, he can still offer “tools for unearthing the complexities of, and contributions to, social (dis)advantage, including their racialised dimensions” (Wallace 2016; pp. 2).

In this context there has been an increase in Bourdieu inspired work on race and racism over recent years. For instance, Bonilla-Silva uses habitus as a tool to explain how racism is reproduced in the context of “colour blindness” within the “post-racial” USA, as he identifies a “white habitus” to refer to the “racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and

³ See *On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason* (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1999) for exception

creates whites' racial tastes, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters" (Bonilla-Silva 2003: 104). In building upon this with colleagues he used the "white habitus" to explain how "whites' racialized attitudes and prejudice toward Blacks are continuously recycled and legitimated" (Bonilla-Silva et al 2006; pp. 247). Perry similarly drew upon a "racial habitus" (see also Sallaz 2010) to explore the "coercive domination of minorities by the white majority group" and the subsequent "hegemony of white moral standards" (Perry 2012; pp. 105) within interracial religious organizations. Whilst Cui's use of a "racialized habitus" also focused on how racism is "reproduced, and reinforced" within the school system by the "dominant white group" and amongst "Chinese youth themselves" (Cui 2015; pp. 1155). The focus of Cui, Bonilla-Silva and Perry is broadly on the durability and reproduction of racist thinking, not on potential change or agency, which is where my intervention lies. It's also worth noting that whilst Cui deploys a "racialized habitus", there is little engagement with scholars of racialization, nor is there a broader articulation of racialization as a concept.

Within the UK context, much of this emergent work has focused on class and education, particularly through drawing upon Bourdieu's notion of capital. Both Rollock (Rollock et al 2015, Rollock 2014) and Wallace (2016, 2019) explore how Black students utilize "Black cultural capital" to navigate experiences of schooling (see also Meghji 2019). Whilst Reay (1995, 2008, Reay et al 2007) has extensively used habitus to explore how racism is produced within the classroom in the absence of racist language (Reay 1995), as well as how white subjectivities are produced (Reay et al 2007, Reay 2008). Reay also intuitively observes how one's habitus is structured by both race and class in noting that the "privileged white children" in her study had a habitus "which has been, and continues to be, powerfully structured by their 'race' as well as their social class" (Reay 1995; pp. 368).

These works usefully highlight how habitus can explain the reproduction of racism, often in the absence of overt racist language. Yet less attention is paid to how race is negotiated in everyday life as there is little exploration within the outlined literature on how racialized subjects can exercise agency or adapt within a racist society. This paper is not concerned with the inevitability of racism or suffering associated with racism, but rather how race is negotiated in everyday life in ways that are attuned to the constrained agency of racial subjects.

Habitus & Racialization

Bourdieu's proposal of habitus "to explain individual experience while still retaining a view of the world as a set of relatively obdurate objective structures" (Throop & Murphy 2002; pp. 189) lends itself to tackling the paradox that race is "simultaneously real and unreal" (St Louis 2009; pp. 560). In this paper I attempt to work through this dichotomy through putting habitus to work in conjunction with scholars of racialization, in particular Sara Ahmed (2002, 2007), who has fleetingly referred to the potential overlap between their approaches;

As Pierre Bourdieu (1977) shows us, we can link habits to what is unconscious, and routine, or what becomes 'second nature'. To describe whiteness as a habit, as second nature, is to suggest that whiteness is what bodies do, where the body takes the shape of the action (Ahmed 2007; pp. 156).

Ahmed goes on to identify "orientations" as guiding principles which inform our "styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits. Race becomes, in this model, a question of what is within reach, what is available to perceive and to do 'things' with" (*Ibid*; pp. 154). Whilst habitus and habit shouldn't be conflated (see Crossley 2013), Ahmed's position resonates with Bourdieu's formulation of habitus as "a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place'," which guides individuals through the social world (Bourdieu 1984; pp. 468)⁴. Instructively, Ahmed positions this "social world" as one determined by colonialism; "colonialism makes the world 'white', which is of course a world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach" (Ahmed 2007; pp. 154). Working with this conceptualization of the social world can allay criticisms that Bourdieu ignores the racialized dimensions of habitus through thinking of habitus as always being structured by histories of colonialism. This involves re-iterating how race and class are co-constitutive⁵ through conceiving of this (post)colonial social world as being orientated specifically towards "white bourgeois bodies" (Ahmed 2007; pp. 160). Here, there is overlap with Puwar, who drew upon Bourdieu to similarly argue that White middle-class people have the requisite "attributes or habituses" to seamlessly move through professional institutions (Puwar 2004; pp. 110) in ways that people marked out by their class, gender, sexuality or race - "space invaders" - are unable to.

⁴ It's worth noting that Ahmed takes a phenomenological approach which Bourdieu is critical of as he formulates habitus, in part, out of critiques of phenomenology (see Throop & Murphy 2002).

⁵ See Virdee (2014) and Bhattacharyya (2018) for an elaboration of how race and class are historically mutually constitutive. It is also worth noting that gender dispositions are also formed in relation to class/race dispositions.

The body is of central importance to both Bourdieu and scholars of race such as Ahmed. Ahmed situates the body as “the site of racialization itself” (Ahmed 2002; pp. 45), whilst Bourdieu conceived of habitus as a “meaning-made-body” (Bourdieu 1990; pp. 43), as “embodied history, internalized as a second nature” (*Ibid*; pp. 56). Using Ahmed’s frame we can conceive of a racial habitus as colonial “history turned into nature” (Bourdieu 1972; pp. 78). As Ahmed notes “such histories, we might say, surface on the body, or even shape how bodies surface” (Ahmed 2007; pp. 154). By working through “visible markers on the body” (Alcoff 1999; pp. 23) racialization involves the re-invocation of colonial racial knowledge. For Bourdieu “human action is not instantaneous reaction to immediate stimuli, and the slightest “reaction” of an individual to another is pregnant with the whole history of these persons and of their relationship” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; pp. 124). This “whole history” invests skin colour with discursive meaning and allows Black and white “to function, not as descriptions of skin colour, but as racial identities” (Ahmed 2002; pp. 46).

Through being materialized on the body racialization can produce “the experience that racial identity is immutable” (Alcoff 1999) despite the now widely accepted orthodoxy that race is not biologically real. Bourdieu’s framing of habitus as “imprisonment effected via the body” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; pp. 173), which perhaps fuels perceptions he is a structural determinist, is thus appropriate for thinking about the impacts of racialization on racialized bodies. Fanon, for instance, found himself incapable of constituting himself as anything other than “un Nègre!” (Fanon 1986; pp. 84) despite wanting to be just “a man among other men” (*Ibid*; pp. 85). Such a framing is not intended to fix race, or ignore the historic contingency of racial categories (See Wolfe 2015); “sets of dispositions vary by social location and trajectory” (Wacquant 2011; pp. 87), meaning that one’s racial “schemes of perception” are socially and geographically contingent, which can result in someone being racialized differently in different contexts⁶.

Racial identities are not immutable, even if they can be experienced as such. Whilst Ahmed does not go into much detail about how racial subjects can exercise agency,⁷ Bourdieu can offer insights into how race exists as an interplay between dominant colonial discourse that pre-date

⁶ See broad postcolonial literature on whiteness (Ware & Back 2002, Ware 2008, Taylor 2014, Du Bois 1935, Roediger 1995, Ignatiev 1995, Jacobson 1998)

⁷In Bell (1999) Ahmed draws on Butler’s theory of performativity to offer some reflections on agency regarding “passing and transgression”

the subject and constrained agency. As noted, Bourdieu is not a structural determinist, “habitus is not a fate, not a destiny” (Bourdieu, 2000b, p. 180), he simply argues that these processes are constrained by broader social structures. Hall similarly notes “identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse” (Hall 1996; pp. 4) they are “both fluid and transiently essentialized” (Alexander 1996; pp. 194). Thus, within this paper, I argue that working with Ahmed and Bourdieu enables a rich account of how people experience their race as a socially constituted identity but one that still constrains them as they attempt to acquire new dispositions and sensibilities to navigate a (post)colonial social world.

Methodology

Drawing on fieldwork data from a wider ethnographic project, this paper focuses on the insights of John (pseudo-anonymized), whom I met in 2016 (before undertaking this project) at Origins Combat Gym (pseudo-anonymized), a Muay Thai/Kickboxing Gym in East London. When we first met John was competing as a professional fighter, whilst I had moved to Origins Combat Gym from another East London gym where I had been training, coaching and competing. Our relationship started as training partners, but we soon became friends⁸. It is not usual to conduct research with people whom you have prior relationships with, but as Duneier reflects, “there is no right answer to the question of the ideal relationship between the subject and the informant” (Duneier & Back 2006; pp. 547). Whilst this paper is not about Muay Thai/Kickboxing, it would not have been feasible to undertake a project within a Muay Thai/Kickboxing gym without an intimate knowledge of the sport and a capacity to engage in it. Wacquant made a similar argument to justify his immersive ethnographic project at Woodlawn Boxing Club (see Wacquant 2004; pp. 59)⁹ as he also acknowledged how his research was facilitated by “the bonds of friendship and trust I had forged day-to-day” (Wacquant 2005; pp. 450)¹⁰.

⁸ This diverges from ethnographies where researchers believe they are friends with their “subjects” but are not. See Stoller (2005) for example of this dynamic.

⁹ This has not been without critique (see Hoffman & Fine 2005). However, Wacquant has addressed criticisms of *Body & Soul* (2004) as well as his methodological approach on numerous occasions (see Wacquant 2014).

¹⁰ Returning to Stoller (2005), this critique centred on the notion that Wacquant was genuinely friends with his respondents. This ignores the close bonds of friendship that are forged through the brutality and hardships associated with combat sports. In my interview data from the broader project this paper comes from, people described their training partners as akin to “family”.

I sought to use my prior relationship with John to alleviate the asymmetry that exists within the traditional research encounter through using my “social proximity and familiarity” to undertake “non-violent communication” (Bourdieu 1999; pp. 610). My aim is to provide my respondents - in this case John - with a platform “to explain themselves in the fullest sense of the term... to construct their own point of view both about themselves and about the world” (*Ibid*; pp. 615). What follows are extracts from an initial semi-structured interview that took place via Zoom in April 2020 during the outbreak of Covid-19. This paper has since been re-worked and re-thought in constant dialogue with John since the initial interview¹¹ and as such I conceive of this paper as a co-production between myself and John. This research was facilitated by my prior relationship with John but also by my positionality as a researcher of colour who has experienced racism, which contradicts the view that white researchers are better placed to conduct research into both white and non-white communities¹².

Finally, I focus this paper solely on one respondent because it allows for a rich account that presents John as a “complex human” not as random “disembodied thoughts” (Duneier & Back 2006; 553-554). It is also through conversations such as the one foregrounded in this paper that a racial habitus, attuned to the complexities of agency, became clear to me as I muddled through my doctoral project; “the proof was in the empirical pudding”. A comparative and more comprehensive empirical study with more respondents could have allowed for wider reaching conclusions, yet this was outside of the scope of my doctoral project and would have come at the expense of my attempts to foreground the nuances inherent within John’s account. Despite these limitations, this paper can still open up space for applying Bourdieu to the study of race and racism, particularly through thinking about adaptation and change.

Race, Class and New Dispositions

John was born and raised in Tottenham, an area in North-East London with a historic presence of immigrants, particularly from West Africa, Ireland, the Caribbean and Turkey¹³. Relatedly,

¹¹ I discussed my interpretations of John’s words with him at length and we even discussed the reviewer feedback. I’ve also sent him the article to read, although he says he hasn’t had time to read it yet, but “will when it’s out!”

¹² See Carrington 2008 for elaboration - and critique - of these positions

¹³ See <https://hidden-london.com/gazetteer/tottenham/>

Tottenham is an area that is associated with high levels of crime¹⁴, deprivation and more recently the processes of gentrification¹⁵. Both of John's parents were born in Jamaica and moved to London in their 20s, which is where they eventually met. John retains a strong cultural connection to Jamaica and feels that this makes up a large part of his identity, as does his upbringing in Tottenham. He went to school in the local area until he was 16 when instead of attending college nearby, circumstances led to him commuting to Barnet, a suburban borough in North London that is far less diverse than Tottenham.

Amit: Remind me why you went to college in Barnet?

John: At the end of secondary school I got into a fight. Someone got hurt badly. I got arrested and got tried for GBH [Grievous bodily harm] and I got found innocent... It was quite a traumatic stage of my life so I wanted to go outside of Tottenham to get away from this stuff. Barnet was far but not far, far. So it gave me a different place. I wasn't a roadman¹⁶, but you know, I wanted to get away from that life

Amit: What was it like in Barnet, did you like it?

John: Not really... In college, people were completely different. A lot of them challenged my views, but at the expense of me losing a bit of myself through trying to fit in... In Tottenham I could express my cultural background... but when I went to Barnet it was more like suppressing your cultural identity and assigning yourself to a British identity. It was a middle-class white place, they deemed those things to be normal. Tottenham was more accepting. I could speak in Patois or whatever. People had an interest in other people's backgrounds. You'd go round their house and eat their food. You'd go Turkish place and get like a shish init, or go Caribbean place and get a patty and coco bread. But at Barnet, I invited some guy round my house, some white posh boy... I'd gone to his

¹⁴ See for example; London murders: Youngsters are 'locked in war fuelled by social media' as violent crime surges; <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/london-murders-youngsters-locked-in-war-fuelled-by-social-media-as-violent-crime-in-capital-surges-a3808506.html>

¹⁵ New York Times 2018; *Renewal or Gentrification? London Borough Grapples With a Revamp*; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/world/europe/london-tottenham-regeneration.html>

¹⁶ A term often applied to young Black men who may or may not be involved in gangs and criminal activity (see Gunter 2004, 2008).

house before... but in my house, I felt self-conscious... I'd never felt that before. I said to him "you want a snack? I'm gonna get bun and cheese"... he was like "what's that?" and I brought it over and he sniffed it! He said, "that smells horrible"...

John had a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu 1984) in Tottenham which allowed him to negotiate social interactions as second nature; an understanding of Patois and an appreciation of different cultures were taken-for-granted. Yet in Barnet, John stood out as being "out of place" (Ahmed 2007; pp. 155) resulting in him experiencing "hysteresis" as the dispositions and sensibilities he had acquired in Tottenham did not equip him to navigate his new surroundings in a "middle-class white place". Whilst Bourdieu broadly argues that people's habitus conditions them to avoid situations such as this (Bourdieu 1984), John's trial for GBH led him to move out of Tottenham in order to "get away from that life". Becoming a "fish out of water" in Barnet resulted in him developing a newfound self-consciousness about his cultural background and class position. This was compounded by experiencing denigration, such as the "white posh boy"'s dismissal of bun and cheese, which led John into "suppressing" his cultural and racial identity to conform to white-middle class norms.

Amit: You said you suppressed yourself, did you change your behaviour?

John: Not so much in college. But uni I did... That was like a new phase... I think then I realised if I wanted to progress in my career I had to change my behaviour, certain mannerisms... I went from being roadman to wearing hipster clothes, jeans and shirts... stopped wearing tracksuits. Changed how I spoke a bit, stopped using a lot of slang. I altered myself in some other ways. But culture-wise, I was always into art and reading and stuff. But I couldn't express it...

Amit: How did you learn?

John: Trial and error man! I'm just being honest. With secondary school most people get it. In Tottenham, if you're white you still get it. If you speak Patois white people get it and will speak back. But elsewhere you say things and people are like what? It was a trial and error thing. The more I think about it, there wasn't one moment. Like the Police Station was one. Different things, which led to me suppressing different things. In uni a lot of stuff was clear, things were meant to be a bit British. I felt that.

John speaks of a thriving hybrid culture (see Hall 1991) in Tottenham that operated across racial lines; “if you’re white you still get it”. Yet in Barnet and at university people did not get it - “people are like what?” - as what held currency within Tottenham reinforced a racial and class distinction within his new settings where “things were meant to be a bit British”. This led John to develop an awareness that “there is very little space for those who do not want to undergo self-erasure and conform to the cultural norm” (Puwar 2004; pp. 151) within institutions and spaces orientated around whiteness (Ahmed 2007; pp. 158); “I realised if I wanted to progress in my career I had to change my behaviour”. He subsequently set about acquiring new dispositions and sensibilities through a process of “trial and error” as he distanced himself from being a “roadman” - a subject position almost exclusively associated with working-class Black men - by shunning tracksuits to dress in “jeans and shirts”, which are seen as more respectable professional attire. He also attempted to alter his speech patterns as he developed an awareness that the language that guided him in Tottenham - “slang” and “Patois” - was inherently tied to his racialized class position and would subsequently prevent him progressing at work.

Relatedly, John notes how he always had an interest in “art and reading” but felt these interests were “out of reach” (Ahmed 2007) due to his race and class. This speaks to how one’s habitus can lead people to exclude themselves from activities that are seen as not being for them (Bourdieu 1984; pp. 473). However, on leaving university John worked in the white middle-class world of photography as a photo assistant which led him to consciously draw upon “high art” to help navigate this social world;

John: You know there is a snobbery about books and if you read some sorts of books it gives you access to some middle-class things. I read like literature, Virginia Woolf and all those ones. Hemingway, stuff like that. I’m not saying I read it when I was much younger, but I read other stuff like one Hemingway and a few classics. None of my mates were really reading that stuff. Some of my friends' reading ability wasn’t really great. But when I was an assistant I used it in a way to access something and throw people off. We’d be speaking about books and that and I’d say what I’d read and it’d surprise them. James Joyce and that. It’s like a white middle-class type of thing. You know what I mean?

John was aware that someone of his race and class position was supposed to be excluded from these literary works. He notes that he had always enjoyed reading, but describes how at one stage in his life he took the conscious decision to read “classics” to access a level of social and cultural capital - “access to some middle-class things” - that would help him navigate social situations at work, which he otherwise might have been excluded from. In undertaking these processes John surprised his colleagues through disrupting their taken-for-granted knowledge of both race and class, as “high art” is typically used to compound class and racial distinctions (Bourdieu 1984). Through John’s experiences at college, university and at work, he was able to consciously develop tools to facilitate his immersion into new surroundings where he was situated as “out of place” due to his race and class. Through deploying these tools he was able to challenge his colleagues' preconceived racial doxa; “I’d say what I’d read and it’d surprise them”. Yet, whilst this was successful there was a “personal cost” involved in this process as it occurred at the expense of him “losing a bit” of himself through the “renunciation” of former dispositions (Bourdieu 1986; pp. 244).

Constrained Agency

John’s account demonstrates how he learnt to shift his dispositions and sensibilities over time to enable himself to succeed within educational institutions and later the white, middle-class world of photography. This corresponds with Bourdieu’s position that agents can bring consciousness to social situations;

It is likely that those who are “in their right place” in the social world can abandon or entrust themselves more, and more completely, to their dispositions (this is the ‘ease’ of the well-born) than those who occupy awkward positions such as the parvenus and the declasses; and the latter are more likely to bring to consciousness that which, for others, is taken for granted, because they are forced to keep watch on themselves and consciously correct the ‘first movements’ of a habitus that generates inappropriate or misplaced behaviours (Bourdieu 2000; pp. 163).

Returning once more to Ahmed’s conceptualization of a (post)colonial social world, allows us to take Bourdieu’s position further by arguing that histories of colonialism determine who is born “in the right place” and who is born “out of place” (Ahmed 2007). John, as someone who became aware that he was born out of place, learnt that some of his behaviours were “inappropriate or

misplaced” and thus needed to be corrected through “trial and error”. This resonates with Du Bois’ notion of “double consciousness”, as those who are born out of place must look at themselves “through the eyes of others” (Du Bois 1903/1994; pp. 2). This led John to realise that he could “move up only by approximating the habitus of the white bourgeois body” (Ahmed 2007; pp. 160) as he set about “suppressing” himself to adopt middle-class dispositions and sensibilities. The way in which John set about this process is not dissimilar to how Bourdieu, the son of a sharecropper turned postal worker, negotiated being out of place at boarding school;

I spent most of my youth in a tiny and remote village of Southwestern France, a very “backward” place as city people like to say. And I could meet the demands of schooling only by renouncing many of my primary experiences and acquisitions, not only a certain accent... (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; pp. 204).

John, like Bourdieu, developed a realization that he would only be able to succeed in new situations through “renouncing”, or at least temporarily casting aside, many of his “primary experiences and acquisitions.” Yet, not everyone is able to do this. John’s brush with the UK legal system offers insights into these complex processes;

John: Getting arrested was an awakening. It made me realise that the system wasn’t on my side... I spent the whole day in a prison cell ‘cos they arrested us super early in the morning. The police officer reacted to me differently to the other boys. Some of the other boys ... the way they behaved... Now I’m older I can see and break it down, it was because of certain behaviours he saw as problematic... I spoke in slang.... I wasn’t as good at changing between being super informal and trying to be formal... but I could a bit. They couldn’t. I was reading in there, talking to him a bit differently. That made me realise, maybe not consciously, but I felt I could see what qualities in life is frowned upon and what isn’t. He’d end up asking me sometimes “are you ok?” whilst he was grabbing them up!

Amit: Why do you think those other boys couldn’t adapt in the same way?

John: Hmmm... I think it’s to do with family dynamics. I hate to say that. But, one boy, his brother went prison too. He wasn’t the first one to go. I think his older brother was running the house, like the father figure. I don’t think his Dad was about. It’s a lot of

family dynamics. The others' parents were different from mine. I think growing up I was exposed to different people. My Mum worked in Enfield so had a lot of different friends, including white friends. We'd go to church holidays (but not to the church!) with them. The dearest shittiest trips with them in parts of England or France. Different places. They were older white people. Some people of colour, quite diverse, well sort of. But they were older, so I got exposed to that. Most of them weren't working class. But now I'm older, I think of the other guys from school, a lot of them had very problematic home environments. Young parents, different lifestyles.

John found himself receiving slightly preferential treatment compared to those who had been arrested alongside him as he navigated the situation through code-switching and drawing upon reading as a tool to help "throw off" the police officer as he did his colleagues later on at work; "I was reading in there, talking to him differently". In attempting to make sense of the divergent experiences of those arrested alongside him John notes "a lot had very problematic home environments" in comparison to his own. John's parents separated when he was young and as such he was raised primarily by his Mum who worked as a carer in Enfield and subsequently introduced him to a range of new people. The "church holidays" enabled John to develop a better understanding of how to interact in the company of older, white middle-class people. These experiences enabled John to shift his behaviour within different contexts in ways that his friends could not, despite their seemingly similar social position. Thus, John was not attempting to recreate conservative discourses on the "matrifocal family" (see Lawrence 1982) in reluctantly - "I hate to say it" - citing family dynamics. Rather his account helps problematize neo-liberal discourses on pulling oneself up by the bootstraps.

John: We all had the same financial background, similar cultural background. We were different but the same. Different circumstances led us to different outcomes. It was luck kinda. Being exposed to different things.

Although Bourdieu broadly notes that habitus "produces individual and collective practices" (Bourdieu 1990; pp. 54) he acknowledges that it is "impossible for all members of the same class (or even two of them) to have had the same experiences, in the same order" (Bourdieu 1977; pp. 85). Our habitus is inculcated through a combination of past and present experiences, including family upbringing and experiences of education, which means that people who have similar backgrounds (or habitus) can exhibit starkly different practices; "different circumstances

led us to different outcomes". John's account thus demonstrates how "all new experiences" are "mediated by perceptions laid down through past experience" (Abraham & Ingram 2013) as his experiences in the "police cell" helped him see what "qualities" (behaviours, dispositions) were "frowned upon" which subsequently informed his future practice. John acknowledges how these realisations were "maybe not" conscious, which highlights how his acquisition of new dispositions and sensibilities, as well as his ability to deploy them, works at both a reflexive and pre-reflexive level. As Bourdieu notes, "the degree to which one can abandon oneself to the automatism of practical sense obviously varies with the situation and the area of activity" (Bourdieu 2000; pp. 163).

Battling Expectations

John's acquisition of new dispositions enabled him to navigate new social surroundings, yet this did not mean he was insulated from racism as dominant racial discourse exists outside of his control and thus placed limits upon how he could construct his own identity.

John: Even my Dad had an idea of what sort of Black man he wanted me to be. And white people impose their idea too... The thing with my Dad yeah... He had certain expectations. I'd see him and if I didn't always speak Patois he didn't like it. He thought I was a coconut. But working in photography I never pretended I didn't like dancehall or whatever. I was what they thought Black men were like. But once I was playing *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* on the I-Pad and got a few questions right and they were all like "wow you got that right!"... I got an answer about Ernest Hemingway and they couldn't believe it... went on about it for weeks. I feel like it shattered their view of a typical Black man. As we got on I could tell they tip-toed around me a bit and I wouldn't have progressed like that, to be honest. To really do well you have to just play nice.

Amit: Was it hard navigating those two differing expectations?

John: It was difficult... It didn't always feel right. I had my barber from young. But I went regular and one time he was like "oi you're using your big words now, who you think you are?" and then I remember one of my mum's friends calling me a snob! Like if you use certain words people assume you think you're better. But it's not that. People have a rigid view of what "Black culture" is. How Black people should behave. That comes from

Black people and white people. You get caught in purgatory, thinking “where do I belong?” You just get this clash of people’s views and if you don’t fit into those you’re different. You’re trying to be different or this or that. Purgatory init.

John articulates the expectations placed upon him by white people at work and Black people in his personal life, a situation he likens to being “caught in purgatory” as he experiences what Ingram terms the “habitus tug”, “where conflicting dispositions struggle for supremacy and the individual can at times feel pulled in different directions” (Ingram 2011; pp. 290). At work his colleagues’ “racial gaze” (Ahmed 2002; pp. 51) prevents him from being a “fish in water”, as despite his acquisition of new dispositions John was what his colleagues “thought Black men were like” which was imbued with discursive meaning and tied to his class position. This resulted in him disrupting their preconceived racial doxa by drawing upon his acquired knowledge of Ernest Hemingway. Thus, even when deploying the tools he had developed through code-switching and drawing upon cultural capital, John remains subject to racializing discourse through the “marking out of boundaries” between Black and white bodies (Ahmed 2002; pp. 61) as highlighted by his colleagues’ pre-conceived “view of a typical Black man”. In such circumstances John - and racial subjects more broadly - find themselves “walled in”, as Fanon did; “no exception was made for my refined manners, or my knowledge of quantum theory” (Fanon 1986; pp. 89).

Yet, amongst other Black people, John similarly finds himself somewhat out of place as he is positioned as a “snob”/“coconut” for altering his dispositions and sensibilities. This is impact of the “cleft habitus”/“habitus tug” as John’s “new habitus is made up of conflicting elements: the internalization of new experiences and schemes of perception” which “lead to the internalization of conflicting dispositions” (Ingram 2011; pp. 290). He thus finds himself in a “double blind” (Bourdieu 2000; pp. 160), “caught” between the racist ethnic absolutism (Gilroy 1987) of his colleagues and the defensive racial nationalisms (Gilroy 2000) of his peers. Such defensive nationalisms, as Gilroy importantly notes, are produced in relation to histories of racism;

When ideas of racial particularity are inverted in this defensive manner so that they provide sources of pride rather than shame and humiliation, they become difficult to relinquish. For many racialized populations, “race” and hard-won, oppositional identities it supports are not to be lightly or prematurely given up (Gilroy 2000; pp. 12)

Through reading Gilroy with Bourdieu, one can assert that these processes can naturalize positions of subordination, through confining oneself to place. This can be understood as a form of “symbolic violence”, “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; pp. 167). In this context, naturalizing racial subordination does not need direct intervention as “the dominant group have only to let the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise its domination” (Bourdieu 1977; pp. 190). As a result, John is sanctioned for behaving incorrectly in the context of those racial nationalisms that serve to unwittingly reproduce the logic of essential races. It is through processes of social sanctioning that “the habitus tends to generate all the ‘reasonable’, ‘common-sense’, behaviours” as “improbable practices” are deemed “unthinkable” (Bourdieu, 1990; pp. 55). This is why John felt he couldn't “express” his interests in art or reading when he was younger.

Whilst John found himself “caught in purgatory” due to his failure to meet the expectations of how “a Black man should behave” amongst his colleagues and also his peers, these experiences of attempted adaptation and the “personal costs” associated with it, confronted John with the reality that race and culture are not essential categories (Gilroy 1987, Hall 1996).

John: My insecurities don't come from my culture or my social identity or from my working-class background. I don't feel like I have to put on a mask in order to fit in. As you get older you learn to take some stuff. You don't take other stuff. You just grow up and are ever-changing. You just have to carve yourself out as you grow and be unapologetic.

In part, John has learnt the falsity of trying to “put on a mask in order to fit in” as a result of his experiences at work, wherein his colleagues still marked him out, regardless of his ability to deploy the tools he had developed throughout his life. Yet, these experiences do not lead John to totally shun attempts at adaptation. Rather, John sees adaptation as part of life, especially for those who are born out of place and confronted with the need to acquire new dispositions and sensibilities; “you learn to take some stuff. You don't take other stuff”. The experiences of being “caught in purgatory” and of the “cleft habitus” led John to understand his identity - and identities more broadly - as being “never unified”, “never singular,” but “in the process of change and transformation” (Hall 1996; pp. 4). Importantly, these insights arise within the context of John reflexively looking back at his life now he is older, as he accepts that he must “carve” himself out

against the backdrop of racist and classist discourses that exist outside of his control, but in ways that are by no means fixed. This might not mean that John has closed the cleft in his habitus, but rather, he has learned to live with it and to find some form of peace through these experiences. He is now 31 years old and knows he is able to be Black and Jamaican, like dancehall and bashment but also enjoy the works of Virginia Woolf and Ernest Hemingway in complementary, not contradictory ways.

Conclusion

This paper sought to establish a racial habitus through initiating an engagement between Bourdieu and scholars of race/racialization, particularly Sara Ahmed. Drawing upon Ahmed's conceptualisation of a social world shaped by colonialism puts race firmly at the centre of Bourdieu's approach which can provide a strong account of how our class dispositions are inherently raced and vice versa. In taking this approach I sought to emphasize how race is a socially constituted identity that is materially real, in how it is lived, but also subject to contestation. In applying these theorizations to John's account, I demonstrated how racialized subjectivities, whilst constrained, can be subject to change and adaptation, as his experiences of the police station, educational settings and later the white world of photography led him to develop new sensibilities and dispositions through both a conscious and subconscious process of "trial and error".

Yet, despite John navigating his new social settings relatively successfully, he still found himself constrained by wider racial discourses that existed outside of his control. The acquisitions of new dispositions could not insulate him from racist discourses. Whilst there was also a "personal cost" of renouncing former dispositions, as at times John was "out of place" amongst his peers, as well as his colleagues at work. The "cleft habitus" left John feeling "caught in purgatory" as he knows he cannot completely break free of dominant discourse, but instead must carve himself out against the backdrop of dominant "race thinking" (Gilroy 2000). Whilst John lacks the power to alter the broader structures of race, this paper highlight how one's racial habitus is "enduring but not static or eternal" (Wacquant 2016; pp. 66) as John's account empirically demonstrates how one's habitus "change[s] constantly in response to new experiences" as his dispositions were "subject to a kind of permanent revision" (Bourdieu 2000; pp. 161). It is finally worth reiterating that this capacity to adapt and to change is mediated through one's prior experiences, which can result in other people, who have different

experiences and less access to capital than John (such as those arrested alongside him), experiencing their race and the social suffering associated with racism, as more difficult to escape.

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