
Book review

Book review: *Outlines of a Theory of Plural Habitus: Bourdieu revisited*, by Miklós Hadas

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This is a fantastic book on the concept of habitus. Potential readers will be scholars concerned with Pierre Bourdieu's theory and those interested in cultural sociology. The author, Professor Miklós Hadas, a former student of Bourdieu and co-founder of the Centre for Gender and Culture at Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary, critically carries forward Bourdieu's concept of habitus and develops a theory of plural habitus. In addition, the book provides an inspiring discussion of social mobility theory, the progress sociology of Norbert Elias and the sociology at the level of the individual proposed by Bernard Lahire. In this sense, this book also provides an analytical perspective for scholars who are interested in these topics.

The concept of habitus has been controversial since its introduction by Bourdieu. In response to the charge that the concept of habitus impedes class mobility and social change, and the critique of the determinist position of this concept (King, 2000), Bourdieu (2000) insists that the concept of habitus and the theory of practice are perfectly suited to analysing social actors' change in habitus, and to explaining social change. However, Hadas argues that Bourdieu's conceptual tools are still unable to provide 'a general theory of action' (99) for the complexities of social life. How can we understand the harmonious

coexistence, neither contradicting nor conflicting, of different dispositional patterns that social actors develop at different periods of their lives? How do these different types of habitus relate to social structures and actors' social positions? By introducing the concept of plural habitus, Hadas outlines a framework intended to answer these questions.

The book consists of five parts. In the Introduction, Hadas recalls his complex and contradictory relationship with Bourdieu. To better relate to Bourdieu's theory, the author presents an autobiographical narrative of three milieux that conditioned his habitus, namely, the middle-class milieu of his mother's family, the rural milieu of his father's family, and the cultural milieu of the academic field. By reflecting on his own trajectory, Hadas develops the concept of plural habitus to illustrate how dispositions are constantly being rearranged, transformed and altered at different periods of an individual's life (7). In Chapter 1, Hadas critically summarises Bourdieu's definition of the concept of habitus, with the discussion focusing on the relationship between social structure and the change of habitus. He accepts Bourdieu's idea of the habitus as an unconscious spontaneity that is the product of the structural conditions in which the actor is embedded.

In Chapter 2, Hadas convincingly presents approaches that support the new concept of plural habitus. Among them, the author highlights the sociology at the level of the individual proposed by Lahire. By discussing the various socialisation processes facing the internal plurality of individuals, Hadas agrees with Lahire (2003) that social actors are multi-socialised and multi-determined, and can incorporate a plurality of habitus that are activated according to the context. With the change in structural conditions, Hadas suggests that habitus should change accordingly. While generally agreeing with Lahire's position, Hadas criticises Lahire for ignoring the discussion of the cleft habitus in Bourdieu's work. His main disagreement is that the sociological analysis based on the individual level proposed by Lahire is overly obsessed with explaining the particularities of the individual, and therefore cannot be applied to the analysis of social groups in as general a way as Bourdieu's theory of practice. Instead of developing a new paradigm against Bourdieu, Hadas chooses to complement Bourdieu's theory with the concept of plural habitus.

In Chapter 3, Hadas demonstrates the emergence and operation of plural habitus through historical examples. By drawing on Elias's (2000) analysis of the civilising process in Europe, Hadas elaborates the expanding process and the strategies of inculcation of the habitus in both historical long-term processes and individual life-course processes. At the end of the book, Hadas summarises the logic of his argument, and suggests future research based on the perspective of plural habitus.

The main contribution of this book is to provide a new perspective for understanding the concept of habitus. Contrary to the accusations of determinism faced by Bourdieu's concept, the theory of plural habitus not only retains a close connection with the social structures that condition its emergence, but also creatively accommodates the habitus that actors develop at different periods of their lives. Hadas modestly sums up his work as an elaboration of the theoretical interests developed at the very end of Bourdieu's career. Through the theory of plural habitus, Hadas fills a theoretical gap about the transformation of habitus that was neglected by Bourdieu. In this sense, this book is a useful expansion of Bourdieu's concept of habitus.

On a more critical note, I have found that several aspects could be better developed. In Chapter 3, the author draws on Elias's (2000) example of the control of violence in medieval European society to analyse the concept of expanding habitus. However, the examples chosen by the author are conscious actions, whether this is the knight's control of the fighting urge or the cleric's dispositional pattern of self-restraint and asceticism. Considering that the author treats the habitus as 'the non-conscious, non-reflected, and non-intentional forms of social action' (92), it is ambiguous how to reconcile unconscious habitus with expanding habitus. Furthermore, Hadas argues that through the strategies of coercion and reinforcement, the schooling system in contemporary societies can provide the conditions for the generation of plural habitus (98). However, the educational system is considered complicit in promoting social reproduction by inculcating the legitimate forms of knowledge and definitions of the world of the dominant class, and by rewarding those who have demonstrated such knowledge and definitions, thus maintaining the structure of society (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). In this sense, the different roles that schooling plays in generating the plural habitus and in promoting social reproduction deserve more discussion.

In sum, Hadas brilliantly argues that the plural habitus is shaped by both historical, long-term processes and individual life-cycle processes, and he presents the principles of the operation and inculcation of such plural habitus. As an extension of Bourdieu's theory, this book expands the

boundaries of his concept of habitus. It serves as a convenient starting point for empirical research by scholars interested in Bourdieu's theory, cultural sociology and social mobility.

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