

## **APPLYING PIERRE BOURDIEU'S CONCEPTS OF *HABITUS* AND *FIELD* TO THE STUDY OF ETHNICITY IN KENYA**

**Fiona Wairimu Ngarachu<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Empirical research on ethnicity in the last thirty years has resolved the debate between the classic primordialist and instrumentalist schools in favour of constructivism. This is especially so when considering ethnicity in Africa where recent scholarship has utilised a constructivist approach while recognising the 'natural' appeal of ethnicity among populations. This paper is theoretical in its purpose and seeks to of this paper is to adapt Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field as a theoretical lens in the study of ethnicity in Africa. This is an attempt to provide an alternative way to theorise the process of ethnic construction in Africa that does not involve engaging the two above-mentioned theoretical debates. As the paper will show, it provides us with a way to take into account the influence of both structures and agents when looking at ethnicity without giving too much focus to either one of them thus reconciling theoretical debates. Secondly it provides us with a way of theorising the construction of ethnicity among young people. The paper will therefore articulate this argument by first briefly looking at how ethnicity is currently theorised before sketching out Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field It will then move on to provide an understanding of how it offers more resources for the study of ethnicity in Africa through two illustrative examples. This paper forms is a part of a larger research project that seeks to understand young people's attitudes towards ethnicity and politics in Kenya by engaging them in interviews and focus group discussions.

*Keywords: Ethnicity, Habitus, Bourdieu, Constructivism, Primordialism*

### **Introduction**

The motivation for this paper was provided by the work of Sian Jones, (1997) who studied the ethnicity in the context of archaeology. She sought to resolve the debates surrounding Primordialism and instrumentalism by adapting the concept of habitus through a theory of practice as developed by the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu. This was not a unique attempt as Bentley among a few other authors had earlier called for a theory of practice in the study of identity. The concern of this paper is to investigate whether this can be applied to the study of ethnicity in the Kenyan context? To start with, what are the key features of the theoretical debates surrounding the study of ethnic identity? In the early study of ethnicity, a dichotomy emerged between the primordialists (Geertz, 1963, Van den Berghe, 1979, Isaacs, 1974) and the instrumentalists (Cohen, 1974, Horowitz, 1985, Barth, 1969). The key features of

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<sup>1</sup> The author is a PhD candidate in Politics and International Relations at the University of Southampton, UK. The topic of her PhD is Why not ask the children? Understanding their perspectives on ethnicity and politics in Kenya. Email: [fwn1g11@soton.ac.uk](mailto:fwn1g11@soton.ac.uk)

this debate are summarized in the table below adapted from Kauffman’s work that adapts theories of nationalism to develop a typology of theories of religion (Kauffman, 2012).

| Category             | Theory   |  |
|----------------------|--|--|
|                      | <i>Primordialism</i>   | <i>Instrumentalism</i>   |
| View of human nature | Emotive, cognitive, irrational                                       | Rational, self-interested, contingent                              |
| View of history      | Pre-modern root to ethnicity   | Ethnicity a phenomenon of modernity, a colonial invention          |
| Structure/agency     | Human agency is essential  | Structures, institutions and individuals in society form ethnicity |
| View of ethnicity    | Primordial origin and deeply rooted in human evolutionary psychology | Ethnic groups constructed for political and economic reasons       |

Table 1: Theories of ethnicity

The debate vis-à-vis ethnicity in Africa has evolved or as some may put it been “resolved” in the last thirty years into the commonly accepted constructivist view (Brubaker, 2004, Chandra, 2012, Young, 2002, Kagwanja, 2006, Lynch, 2011) which notes that the process of social construction of ethnicity includes calls to shared common histories and ‘primordial’ appeals more so if we are to look at affective emotions and how, as Carola Lentz (Lentz, 1995, Lentz and Nugent, 2000) states, people would be willing to kill for their ethnic groups (307). The constructivist school, as with many theories has a number of strands depending on what the research topic of interest is and indeed the geographical location where you are conducting the research, the aspects of ethnicity being studied and even the particular group that you are studying. (Jones, 1997: 56) The various strands within constructivism include the ethno-symbolists and historical analysts and those who look at branding, negotiation and positioning of ethnicity. (Bayart, 2005, Lentz and Nugent, 2000, Young, 2004, Horowitz, 2001, Kagwanja, 2006, Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009, Lynch, 2006, Hodgson, 2011, Berman, November, 2010, Berman, 1998)

What this shows is that even with constructivism as the dominant paradigm in the study of ethnicity, there remains a lack of coherence about the study of the subject. The definition of ethnicity in itself is contested and there is an “absence of a conceptual foundation for thinking about ethnicity.” This includes issues of whether to refer to it as ethnicity in the first place which is an academic term rather than tribe which is what people refer to it locally, at least in a number of African contexts. (Baumann, September 2004, Berman, November, 2010, Jones, 1997, Wamwere, 2003, Chandra, 2008, Isajiw, 1974).

As Lentz and Nugent would emphasize, it is an “ambiguous category which is at once descriptive, analytical and evaluative-normative.” (2000:2) For instance, ethnicity in the American context may denote categories such as African-American, Asian American and so forth; ethnic categories in Oman may include a religious element such as Shia or Sunni. While one integrated theory may not be possible, given the diverse nature of the subject, one way to negotiate this myriad of possibilities is to adopt a theory of practice as (Bentley, 1987, Jones, 1997, Connolly, 1997) have done in their studies of ethnicity and racism. They have done this by

adopting Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field, as an attempt to move away from the theoretical debates and look at practice as the guide to theorising on ethnicity. Indeed, the appeal in using this concepts comes from trying to find a conceptual framework that unifies thinking on ethnic attitudes that both takes into account agency and individual action in reproducing practices as well as the role of structures in keeping these practices active as well as reinforcing them. This is in order to move away from "theoretical theory" that focuses on theory in the absence of the subjects of investigation.(Swartz, 1997)

I attempt to situate myself in this field by explaining in the following paper how this theory of practice can be adapted to the study of ethnicity among young people in Africa in order to move away from selecting one strand of constructivism to utilize and focusing on citizens everyday lived experiences and practices. The argument that will be presented in the paper will highlight that we can move away from the ambiguity of the concept of ethnicity without the need to have a singular overarching theory of it or sacrifice the contextual richness that is provided by differing empirical situations. The next section will set out the frame of this by briefly introducing the concepts of habitus and field before moving on to argue how they benefit the study of ethnicity. The paper will then conclude with two illustrative examples of how this can be applied.

## **Habitus**

In its literal sense, habitus is derived from Latin and means "habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body."(Jenkins, 1992: 74) Habitus is a concept that was first clearly defined and utilized by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990) though its philosophical underpinnings can be traced back to the work of Aristotle and the work of Weber, Mauss, Hegel and Durkheim. His concepts of habitus, in addition to field and capital been widely used in social research, most especially in the educational context. It is most adaptable to research in education because of Bourdieu's focus on social class and the effect of this in an educational context on social mobility. Bourdieu's work can, however be applied to a wider context as an "analytical tool" that one can use to "understand human behaviour" more so by understanding how "various discourses impact upon the individual." (Connolly, 1997: 71) Habitus relates to what tools, be it myths, archetypes and rituals that operate at a subconscious level and help us define how we should act in our social world, and indeed define it. From when we are born we "learn from our experiences" and these teachings are incorporated into our everyday lives and "help to guide our future actions and behaviour and dispose us to thinking in a certain way."(Connolly, 1997) In Bourdieu's words, the habitus can be defined as:

Structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990: 53)

We can attempt an example here of these "structuring structures." The colonial and post-colonial experience in its various forms has had an influence on how Africans have come to view themselves. There is an underlying singular narrative of inferiority and underachievement (Ngozi, October 2009, Mamdani, 1996). We can hypothesize that the habitus of subsequent generations has been structured by this experience and that it is the reality of "how they come to

view themselves.” (Connolly: 71) As Adichie would say, “show a people as one thing, as only one thing, and that is what they become.” (2009) Habitus is therefore part of the socialization process where everything that we experience is understood and categorized according to what we have experienced in the past and events that we go through in childhood are particularly important in developing a “matrix of perceptions” that inform how we come to view the world and more importantly how we react in different contexts. (Jones, 1997, Swartz, 1997)

Habitus was Bourdieu’s way of moving from “objectivist and subjectivist explanations of human practice.” Subjectivism “asserts that social reality is a contingent on-going accomplishment” while objectivism is encompassed in theories of structuralism that “people more or less reproduce the objective structures of the society they live in. “(Webb et al., 2002:31-34) This was in an attempt, to solve the age old structure versus agency debate in sociology as has been attempted by others such as Giddens with his structuration theory.(Giddens, 1984) For Bourdieu, habitus enables us to transcend the objective and subjective “mistakes” and look at how people’s behaviour is reproduced by both individual action and the influence of the structures these individuals inhabit.

Habitus operates unconsciously and this is one of the challenges that emerge when trying to apply the concept empirically; how can we observe it in an empirical research context? Reay(2004) was able to operationalize the concept by focusing on four key elements which are habitus as embodiment, habitus and agency, habitus as individual and collective trajectories and habitus as past and present. Habitus as embodiment looks at the way in which “dispositions” are not only reflected through words, thoughts and feelings but also through “bodily hexis” which is how our conditioning comes to be reflected in us through how we act and carry ourselves and hence bodily.(Bourdieu, 1977) For instance in a study of Russian Jewish immigrants in Israel, Rapport and Lomsky-Feder (2002) noted that it was taken for granted by the interviewees that Jews had a certain bodily appearance. This can be applied to ethnic stereotyping in the Kenyan context where certain physical characteristics are attributed to certain groups and taken as ‘fact’. If I take an example of Kenya, some common ones include; Luo’s are dark skinned, Kikuyu women tend to have an inverted pyramid shape and Maasai’s are tall and fair and these are sometimes accompanied by explanations such as, you don’t *look* like X group because you do not display Y characteristics. Habitus therefore provides us with a way of understanding the phenomenon of ethnic stereotyping not as a completely social construction or instrumental creation but also as an internalized disposition that manifests itself when it interacts with different fields or contexts.

The second aspect of Reay’s four elements focuses on how individuals negotiate their positions within society and social structure, albeit within the frame of their dispositions. The third aspect looks at the influence not only of the individual in the habitus but the “collective history” of the community in which they inhabit.(Cillia et al., 1999) In addition, a person does not only have one habitus but possesses habitii relating to different social situations. This can be class specific habitus, ethnic specific or even a national habitus. In the final element, while habitus operates in the present, it is informed by the experiences of the past, and as stated previously, early experiences retain a particular weight.

The key elements of habitus that it is important to emphasize are:

1. It is a relational concept. This means that habitus cannot be viewed in isolation but must be viewed relation to the various contexts or fields in which it operates
2. Past conditions or socialization produce (and reproduce) habitus.
3. Habitus is durable, across space and time but it can change when a person is confronted with contexts that challenge the pre-conceived notions

In order to understand the first of these key elements as highlighted above, the next section will look briefly at the concept of field and how it relates to habitus. This will enable us to understand how habitus operates in order to apply it to our two illustrative examples.

### **Field**

Fields are the contexts within which the habitus operates. Swartz(2013) would refer to these fields as “power arenas” because for him, it is essential to understand the power relations within these fields. These are for instance the field of politics, education and various other social institutions where there is a constant struggle for position and the power to maintain these positions. We will take our understanding of field from the definition below:

A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action.(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 16)

The cultural field for instance can be defined as the set of “institutions, rules and regulations” (Webb et al, 2002: 22) and the interactions between them that influence the behaviour of people as they are seen as authorities within which certain actions are either permissible or not. Power relations, are therefore inherent to both the habitus and the field. The difference comes about in the field operating within institutions and the habitus within the individual. “If a field is the game, the habitus is the ‘sense of the game.’”(Bourdieu, 1990) In what way therefore, do the concepts of habitus and field presented above help us in the study of ethnicity in Africa? This will be investigated in the next section, first by looking at how habitus helps us reconcile the theoretical debates surrounding ethnicity in Africa, and secondly by highlighting how habitus allows us to understand children’s experience of ethnicity. These two will be highlighted by two illustrative examples.

### **Theorising ethnicity using habitus**

#### ***Reconciling theoretical debates***

Habitus serves to bridge the divide between the primordialist and instrumentalist schools of thought in the study of ethnicity. It moves away from the irrationality of belief to understand how as Lynch (2011) would put it, ethnicity has a “primordial appeal” among people. Ethnicity becomes something that is “grounded in experience and moreover, something that comes to engrain itself within a person’s very being and their own sense of self.”(Connolly, 1997: 72) This is especially so at a younger age when all these learned experiences, both from family, peers and the education system come into play. Moreover, peoples experiences make them act and feel as they do and reproduce those actions and conditions.

The instrumental – primordialist debate still rages in a certain sense and even within the constructivist school, there are a number of theoretical strands. There are those who feel that this debate tends to move attention away from other important aspects of the study.(Chandra, 2012 )The role that habitus can play is by highlighting “the way we have developed and internalized ways of approaching, thinking about and acting upon our social world.” (Connolly 1997: 71) To contextualise this to the Kenyan situation it would be the way people have internalized ways of approaching, thinking about and acting upon ethnicity in various contexts. This is where Bourdieu’s related concept of field comes into play, which is the context through which the habitus manifests itself and operates. For instance, in his study of racism in children, Connolly had fields such as national politics and the school, which interacted with the habitus. This is essential even in the broader sense of looking at the various national and international contexts in which ethnicity operates. Ethnicity is still essentialized as a universal concept though its manifestation differs depending on history and geographical location.

If we take our definition of ethnicity as a ‘discursive construct’ which as Bourdieu would state is “constitutive of reality, willing into existence that which they name,”(Fox and Idriss-Miller, 2008: 538) then we can move its study into the realm of ‘everyday ethnicity’ as Fox and Idriss-Miller advocate for in their paper looking at nationalism ‘from below’. They look at how “nationhood is negotiated and reproduced and sometimes undermined and subverted.” And the same process can be investigated in ethnicity. This would bring ethnicity from “analytical models which social scientists construct” (as stated in the introduction where the academic term is ethnicity) to locate ethnicity within the peoples experience of their day-to-day lives (where we can refer to ethnicity in people’s terms by using the word tribe). (Jenkins 1992: 72) This is in line with a growing body of literature (Hosbawm and Ranger, 1997, Lynch, 2011, Klopp, 2002) that finds that ethnicity is constructed through a dialectical relationship between elites and institutions at one end of the spectrum and the people on the other. In addition, Bourdieu would whole heartedly agree with this stance as his intention was to show that peoples “practical knowledge” is relevant and cannot be subverted by academics and theorists who would claim to know more or rather know better than the subjects that they study. (Bourdieu 1991: 252)

A ‘good constructivist’ view of ethnicity and identity therefore should cater for the affective dimension of identity as an emotional product of people’s interactions which is seen as constant and unchanging on the one hand and identities being ways of shaping our interests and thus constructed and shifting over time on the other. We can see how people were attracted to the classical theories of Primordialism and instrumentalism and how these came to change into the constructivists view. Primordialism was able to account for the human agency aspect and was often the answer if the question was posed to a population. Instrumentalism emerged to challenge this and take into account the political and economic manipulation of identities as well as the rational and self-interested motivations for identity construction. This ‘good constructivists’ view can be taken from Young (2002) who in his work on ethnicity and politics in Africa took the constructivist view but still noted the primordialists as well as the instrumentalists had made contributions to the literature with the primordialists explaining the emotional aspect of identity and the instrumentalists highlighting material considerations of ethnic mobilization. (3)

This is similar to what habitus enables us to do. Habitus can account for not only identity formation but why such formation can come to be theorised in those particular ways. Let us take a look at instrumentalism for example; it is the changing contexts or fields that make it look like interests are shaping our identities. Habitus also accounts for the human agency in primordialism as when it is connected to field it shows that people are not simply cultural dupes and they reproduce the culture and identity within changing contexts. So then habitus provides a different way of approaching ethnic identity formation by being able to explain the features that both the above theories have a problem explaining and also gives a deeper explanation without taking the phenomenon at face value. For instance, the concept of embodiment and “bodily hexis” gives a way of understanding of how identity can come to be essentialized and reproduced as such through the socialization and inculcation of practices of being that constructivism in its purer form would not allow us to do.

Our first illustrative example will provide a background for the discussion presented above. Let’s take a person from the Luo tribe in Kenya who has grown up in his community that practices fishing, his father has passed on the knowledge of the best places to get a good catch and other cultural practices that are tied to this socio-economic activity. His father would note that he learned it from his father and so on and so forth and this experience of upbringing would, from the first person account look like a fundamental feature of their identity and be related as such. On the other hand, an external researcher could come in to the community and conduct a construct this same practice and experience in more fluid terms from a third person perspective and relate it as such. For example they would say this socio-economic activity of fishing that is seen as such an integral part of Luo culture only arose with the migration of the community to that area and the subsequent relevance of fishing for subsistence. The researcher and the subject of the research operate within different fields, one an academic field, while the other the field constructed by his community. Both these accounts are ‘right’ in a sense but what habitus does is remove the need to report them from different viewpoints. The table below further illustrates the points stated above.

| <b>Habitus</b>  | <b>Primordialist-instrumentalist</b>   | <b>Constructivism</b>  |
|---|--|--|
| Habitus reconciles all of these as shows how both may be plausible from the standpoint of habitus. Habitus as a root is able to account for the features of ethnicity that are visible. | Primordialism taken seriously as a result of its grip on 1 <sup>st</sup> person experience. Rooted in bodily reactions                             | Constructivism reconciles the primordial-instrumental debate but has a number of strands relating to different contexts and areas of research. |
|   | Instrumentalism taken seriously as seen from the 3 <sup>rd</sup> person (and some first person accounts) and focuses at the interests of the group |  |

Table 2: Reconciling theoretical debates of ethnicity

### *Children's experience of ethnicity*

Children are socialized into society in a variety of ways. In the first instance, it is their parents who teach them what the proper code of conduct is in their particular society. Then it is through the education system (for those fortunate enough to attend school) that they are inculcated with societal values and civic duty. All these are topped off by the peer relationships and influences these exert. In the field of education research, the concept of habitus has been widely utilized to understand the challenges that young people from various class and social backgrounds to their social mobility. (Lehman, 2012, Reay, 1995, Harker, 1984)

The reason for this use of habitus in this field is that it provides a way to view the connection between socialization and educational achievement. Lehman for example uses Bourdieu's habitus and game analogy to understand how working class students play the education game though they may not fully understand its rules. He notes that Bourdieu states that "we are most likely to... seek out experiences that confirm our habitus."(Lehman, 2012: 542) The habitus provides a frame of reference for children and young people to process their experiences. As Lehman found in his paper, it is not a forgone conclusion that these experiences will conform to the habitus but they can serve to interrupt [or reinforce] those frames of reference. As he notes: "Both habitus transformation and resistance require individual agency to either embrace new experiences, or resist them."(Lehman, 2012: 542)

From the research example presented above, we can see that it is our early experiences that form our habitus and these "retain a particular weight." (Connolly 1997: 88) The question that can be asked in relation to ethnicity is Africa: what is the ethnic habitus of children in Kenya? What are its features and how are they negotiating, transforming, accepting and resisting it in relation to their daily experiences? To parallel Lehman, we need to be aware of the role that ethnic habitus plays in the development and interaction of Kenyan children for a greater understanding of the interaction of ethnicity and various aspects of society such as education, politics and even the environment. As Jones states:

The habitus involves a process of socialization whereby new experiences are structured in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, and early experiences retain a particular weight. In this way, structures of power become embodied, resulting in certain dispositions (cognitive and motivating structures) (1997: 88)

Connolly gives an example of the operation of habitus among children in his work with African and Caribbean children in the UK. He talks about peer group relations among African/Caribbean children and certain aspects of their culture, which come to be valued symbolically, and being able to be successful in this bestows a certain amount of cultural capital (respect/status) on the individual. And the reverse of this is deviant student that is those who diverge from the accepted forms of cultural capital are identified and disciplined. Children over time, through these



competing forms come to “develop an unconscious, practical sense of what actions and behaviour are valued and can be capitalized on.” (Connolly 1997: 75)

This can tie in to ethnic experiences of children in Kenya. For instance I can relate a personal experience similar to the one of the African-Caribbean children. I went to a primary school located in a predominantly Kikuyu area and so the school was drawn majorly from this community. I spoke only Kikuyu up till the age of four when I went to kindergarten. The language of instruction in school was English, and in order to ensure that we picked it up quickly, we were not allowed to speak our mother tongues while in school. As a result of this, and not speaking it at home either, my spoken Kikuyu deteriorated. By the time I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> year (13 years old) I remember being teased for not being able to speak it properly and hence being excluded from certain conversations and activities. I had lost this particular “cultural capital”, and my peers saw this as not acceptable.

The second illustrative example will provide an instance of the dynamic of the interaction between habitus and field in the context of ethnic identity. This example takes a leaf from Bentley (1987) who looked at what he called the “ambivalent ethnicity” of a Maranao (minority in Indonesia) woman. Ambivalent ethnicity here means a feeling that a person is not quite sure of their identity and we can use this to illustrate the effects of habitus interacting with a variety of fields in the context of ethnic identity. They feel they do not belong to any one particular group, either the one they were born into or the one they currently reside in which may be different from the former. I will use the experience of a Kenyan lady whom we shall call Yvonne. Yvonne was born in Kenya, a Luhya, but went to kindergarten in another country as her mother worked in the export business, trading in African curios. Her first language is therefore not Luhya or Kiswahili or even as a matter of fact, English. She then moved back to Kenya in a short time and then to another country for about a year before returning to Kenya more permanently. Luhya was not regularly spoken in the household, so she never learned her mother tongue and she went to a GCSE school where the national language of Kenya – Swahili was never taught. With her mother, she spent summers working in a number of countries around the world.

She grew up with friends from many ethnic groups and countries but was still teased for her lack of language skills. Having graduated university, she now works in Denmark after having spent the last two years working in Europe. She once said to me: “I do not consider myself a Kenyan, let alone even a Luhya.” When I questioned her further on this, she said something along the lines of, “I consider myself a global citizen.” But, she still feels torn as she confessed she does not feel quite Kenyan but still refers to Kenyan culture that she is part of when speaking to her colleagues, nor does she feel European although she resides in Europe. She still asserts her ‘Luhyaness’ when speaking of her love for *ingoho* [chicken] as a Luhya stereotype and her ‘Luhya hips.’ But, all the push and pull have led her to feel in limbo with regards to her ethnic identity, part of both but not quite accepted by either.

What we can see from the above example is the case of a habitus that was inculcated by her parents and perhaps extended family of what it means to be a “Luhya” interacting with the various fields that she found herself interacting with such as a GCSE school and a job in Europe. And it is through this interaction that we glimpse the habitus emerging in statements that reflect her Luhya identity but also being contested when she refutes her ‘Kenyaness’ in favour for a

more neutral and global identity. The durability of habitus is shown by the fact that even with a diverse background she still feels a “call” to identify as a Luhya. If we had taken a primordialist stance when analysing this story, we would not have been able to account for her shifting identities in her movements around the world. If we had taken an instrumentalist/constructivist stance, we would not have been able to effectively account for the affective dimension that keeps her routed to her Luhya identity. While constructivism acknowledges the ‘primordial appeal’ of ethnic identity among populations, it does not take it seriously as a unit of analysis. Rather, it looks at it as a result of the process of ethnic creation. As Lynch (2011) argues ethnic identities must include “real cultural experience” and “ethnicity by consent” whereby ethnic cultures are created by people not related to one another by descent but who claim primordialist sentiments, which they pass on to their children. Primordialism is considered an interesting phenomenon but one that is a result of peoples lack of understanding of the bigger picture. In addition, constructivism is good at explaining ethnic identity construction at the macro level but does not do it so well when investigating identity formation at the individual level.

This story may not be unique, and indeed is an entire subject of study in diaspora research, but it may also highlight the conflict between tradition and modernity, more so among urban youth. From this example, we can see the relationship between habitus and agency, as noted by Lehman above. So while Yvonne would state she is not a Luhya or a Kenyan, her implicit upbringing as such still influenced certain choices she made or would make. It is the lens through which her world operates and indeed how she presents her identity shifts depending on the context in which she finds herself.

Bourdieu’s purpose in developing his concepts was for them to be applied empirically and not just stand to be debated upon, which is the purpose of the wider research project within which this paper situates itself. Habitus can be viewed as both a theory and a method as Bourdieu himself termed it a thinking tool that should inform empirical research. It provides a way to look at “the experience of social agents and...the objective structures which make this experience possible.” (Bourdieu 1998: 782) Importantly, it is not so much used for data collection as for the reflective interpretation of the data by interrogating it by using it as a method of analysis. (Reay 2004: 440) As has been seen above, there are a number of studies that employ his concepts as an ‘analytical tool’ that serves to guide their research. According to Rapport and Lomsky-Feder (2002) there are different ways of interpreting habitus when researchers look to apply it in within their research, either by using habitus to look at a process or using it to understand a category. He notes that there are those like Reay (2004) whose research looks at “how habitus produces differences in daily interactions....by gender, race and class,” they look at “how habitus is inculcated and transformed within the context of one group.”(234) The latter are particularly interested in how it is acquired in childhood and how it is transformed and reproduced through a variety of “social changes” and indeed through time and space. For the purposes of research on ethnic identity among young people that this paper is based on, both these strands can be incorporated. In terms of the actual methods of data collection, a number can be used but there is a movement towards more qualitative methods such as life histories and narratives(Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder, 2002), as well as interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation.(Fox and Idriss-Miller, 2008)

In summary, habitus can be used to link the various strands of the social construction of ethnicity under an umbrella of practice. For instance, we can look at how Mahmood Mamdani's "regime of differentiation" (Mamdani, 1996) continues to be reproduced in the habitus of children today. We can also investigate how ethnicity is internalized and affects peoples "actions and attitudes." (Reay, 2004: 437) A number of questions that might be asked are; how does the past play into the practice of the present? Are structural effects visible within small-scale interactions for instance peer group relations? Like Bentley and Connolly, the aim here is to look at the micro level processes that reproduce ethnicity rather than the macro level ones which will provide an insight into how children "learn" ethnicity.

## **Conclusion**

The paper presented above begun with an understanding of the key theories underpinning the study of ethnicity in the Kenyan context, namely primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism. It then moved on to show that while constructivism as the dominant paradigm does a good job of explaining the construction of ethnic identity, an alternative way should be considered. This alternative was presented as the use of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field that enable us not only to account for shifting identities but also for the more affective and emotional dimensions of ethnicity, more so at the micro and individual level. Indeed, through the adaptation of this notion of habitus we can encompass a growing body of literature that acknowledges the constructed nature of ethnicity but takes into account its primordial appeal within a given populace. In this way it attempts to reject a reifying constructionist view of the study of ethnicity as well as the simplified ethnicity like the primordialist version. The purpose of doing such a paper was to find a way to better understand the construction of ethnic identity among young people; More so, those under the age of eighteen who are in a time of great identity creation, transformation and change. Thus, research will be conducted with young people in the Kenyan context to understand their attitudes towards their tribes using habitus and field as frames of analysis in order to better understand ethnic identity construction at their level.

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