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**Re-conceptualizing the Religious Habitus:  
Reflexivity and Embodied Subjectivity in Global Modernity**

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**Abstract**

The utility of the notion of the religious habitus rests on its capacity to illuminate how embodied dispositions emergent from routinized practices come to be socially and culturally significant. This has been called into question, however, by global changes that undermine the societal stability and personal habits on which it is often understood to rely, stimulating instead reflexive engagements with change. After assessing conventional conceptions of the religious habitus vulnerable to such criticism, we utilize the writings of Latour in developing a new understanding of the term. Re-conceptualizing the religious habitus as something reflexively re-made or instaured, through the cultivation of a subjectivity that locates human action, feeling and thought at the embodied intersection of worldly and other-worldly realities, we illustrate the value of this approach with reference to contemporary Pentecostalism and Islam.

**Keywords:** Habitus, reflexivity, embodiment, Pentecostalism, Islamic piety.

**Introduction**

The notion of the habitus has become increasingly prominent in studies of religion, though its utility remains subject to debate. A key concern in these discussions is the extent to which its focus on stable dispositions emergent from routinized practices

remains viable in increasingly ‘morphogenetic’ societies, i.e. those characterized by mutually-reinforcing changes within culture and structure. Focusing on the discontinuities she regards as central to contemporary biographical trajectories, for example, Archer (2012) insists that the habitus has become irrelevant to understanding the lives of individuals who have, through necessity, to engage reflexively with the rapidly changing global contexts of the present. While pre-conscious dispositions and routinized actions may have been pervasive within traditional societies characterized by social stasis, key cultural and structural features of the globe today have rendered these matters items for individual deliberation and scrutiny (Archer, 2012).<sup>1</sup>

Such arguments offer a particular challenge to Bourdieu’s (1984, 466) highly influential argument that the habitus operates ‘beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will’. Bourdieu’s suggestion that the habitus is acculturated without thought or effort, however, is not the only approach that has been questioned as a result of contemporary patterns of social change. Mauss’s (1973) introduction of the notion of the habitus into the modern study of culture and society, and Foucault’s (1986) work on identity-transforming ‘technologies of the self’, provide a greater sense of the work involved in cultivating those routinized religious body techniques central to a habitus.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, while Mauss and Foucault emphasize active processes of bodily pedagogy rather than ‘unthinking’ absorption into a habitus, they too focus upon the dominance of cultural or discursive ‘orders’ and provide us with little space to recognize the existence of individual agency (Shilling and Mellor, 2007). This is also evident in the work of those who have sought to develop their analyses.

Combining Mauss's (1973) notion of habitus with Foucault's focus on discursive formations, for example, Asad (1986, 14) interprets religious 'tradition' as a means for the collective structuring of past, present and future via embodied pedagogies that impart to individuals particular forms of knowledge and 'virtue'. Immersion within a habitus involves work, then, but is not concerned with individuals exercising personal powers of reflection in deciding upon specific courses of action. Indeed, for Asad (1993, 75-6), and those who follow him in utilizing the notion of the habitus in this way, there is no individual agency at all, only the agency of tradition embodied, for example, in Islamic theological discourses and practices (Mahmood 2005, 14).

Such accounts of the habitus provide alternatives to Bourdieu's model, but we suggest that they remain problematic analytically and are unable to account for contemporary religious life. Analytically, they assume that attempts to transmit a religious culture inevitably result in the production of a habitus suited to this task. Yet this ignores how bodily pedagogies are contingently effective depending on such factors as the skills of those responsible for passing them onto the next generation, and the positive or alienating experiences of those subject to them (Mellor and Shilling 2010a). In accounting for contemporary religious life, moreover, the failure of these alternatives to engage with individual agency limits our understanding of how religious identities emerge in contexts where multicultural diversity and rapid global social change are widely acknowledged to have stimulated reflexive scrutiny and choice (Winchester 2008; Beekers 2014).

These limitations have led some to argue for the complete abandonment of the notion of the habitus (Archer 2012, 58-9, 76), but we suggest it is possible to productively reconstruct the term. Our starting point recognizes that questions

concerning the interactions of habitus, reflexivity and embodied subjectivity must be attentive to the social and cultural complexity of the present (Lahire, 2011; Corcuff, 1999). Factors such as migration, social and occupational mobility, and the patterns of differentiation that mark contemporary life, for example, promote circumstances of change that require people to deliberate upon how they can and should live amidst such change. Relatedly, these circumstances can effectively force actors to modify their habits and orientations across multiple roles and patterns of identification and belonging; changes that Lahire (2011) and Corcuff (1999) suggest result in the emergence of ‘plural’ individual actors. They also suggest that any habitus forged within such complex conditions is likely to be as socially and culturally creative as it is reproductive, and be open to temporal change in the light of subsequent reflections made by individuals in the context of altered circumstances (Corcuff 1999, 162-3; Lahire 2011, x).

In what follows, we build on these observations by utilizing Latour’s (2011) notion of instauration to re-conceive the religious habitus as the reflexive crafting of a mode of being that locates human action, feeling and thought at the embodied intersection of worldly and other-worldly realities. This allows us, contrary to Bourdieu, to recognize that the religious habitus, as a phenomenon incorporating other-worldly orientations, can potentially reshape worldly existence. It also enables us, contrary to Asad and Mahmood, to assess how reflexive engagements with religious traditions in the changing contexts of the present has radical implications for religion. After explicating our alternative conception of the habitus in the first half of this paper, we develop it substantively through brief illustrations involving Christian Pentecostalism and Islamic Revivalism. Despite their location within contrasting traditions, theologies and bodily practices, both highlight in different ways the

importance of reflexivity to the instauration of religious identities in the current era, while also enabling us to examine the varied and contingent relationships that exist between religious orientations and wider social values.

### **Modernity, Reflexivity and the Habitus**

Bourdieu's notion of the habitus has exerted enormous influence in sociology (e.g. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 18-20; Shilling, 1993; King 2000; Pickel 2005; Sayer 2005; Adams 2006), with his analysis of the 'religious habitus' evident increasingly in theoretical and substantive analyses of religion (e.g. Bourdieu 1991; Berlinerblau 1999; Collins, 2002; Verter 2003; Rey 2007, Mellor and Shilling 2010b; see also Lee, 2010). Despite this, it is common to engage with his writings selectively, sidestepping, for example, his socio-economic reductionist view that religion involves misrecognizing the structure of the social world as 'the natural-supernatural structure of the cosmos' (Bourdieu 1991, 14, 16, 19-22; 1977, 129; 1987, 124; 1991, 16).

In seeking to develop Bourdieu's approach, some have utilized the habitus to examine class conflict in such regions as Latin America (e.g. Maduro 1977). More commonly, analysts have ameliorated Bourdieu's assumptions about the ways in which the habitus reflects and recapitulates social structures by focusing on the variable phenomenological dimensions of lived religious orientations (e.g. Csordas 1994), or by questioning his assumptions about the passivity associated with the inculcation of a religious habitus, as well as his broader class-based analysis (Calhoun et al 1993; Martin 2000; Jenkins 2002; Engler 2003; Urban 2003; Lau 2004).<sup>3</sup>

Other approaches to the habitus have rejected Bourdieu's conception entirely, returning, via Mauss (1973), to the notion's 'Aristotelian' origins as a trained pattern of habituation able to direct an individual's feelings, desires and actions through the

development of an acquired moral character (e.g. Asad 1986, 1993; Mahmood 2005). Contrary to Bourdieu's (1984, 466) argument that dispositions within a habitus signal an 'unthinking' and involuntary internalization of norms, for example, Asad and Mahmood both note that in early Christianity and Islam the habitus was regarded as a means for inculcating virtue by overcoming unthinking habit deliberatively and forging a new mode of being oriented towards the transformative power of the divine. Such understanding is not easily contained within Bourdieu's (1987, 124; 1990, 167) suggestion that the religious habitus clothes state power with divine sanction (Stone 2001, 23; Rey 2004, 337; Brubaker 1985, 758; Calhoun et al. 1993).<sup>4</sup> Instead, Asad and Mahmood develop the term's Aristotelian foundations with reference to Foucault's (1988, 18) interest in the conscious cultivation of techniques, habits and practices designed to instill in the self or other new patterns of acting. They also usefully recognize that other-worldly directed action cannot simply be reduced to class-based patterns of normalization.

Just as Bourdieu (1993, 86) focuses on the habitus as 'durably incorporated within the body in the form of permanent dispositions', however, so too these approaches emphasize its 'permanent' effects, namely an 'unchangeable' coordination of outward behaviours and inwards dispositions rooted in moral character (Mahmood, 2005, 136). Furthermore, recognizing the work individuals undertake to build a habitus is not the same as recognizing their agency. While Bourdieu's focus on the stability of the habitus reflects the power of social class, so too the permanency of habitus for both Asad (1986: 14) and Mahmood (2005: 115) reflects the constitutive power of (Islamic) religious tradition rather than individual subjectivity or agency. As Brittain (2005: 155) suggests, 'subjectivity' for Asad certainly implies an active commitment to learn to be a virtuous Muslim, but the 'permanent' transformation of

character that arises from acquiring a Muslim habitus comes about through tradition. Or, as Mahmood (2005, 32) puts it in discussing the Islamic piety movement in Egypt, ‘The kind of agency I am exploring here does not belong to the women themselves’. Similarly, mirroring Bourdieu’s aversion to the ‘intellectualist tradition’ that holds reflexivity to be a common mode of engagement with the world (Bourdieu 1990, 68-9; 1998, 81; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 40, 131), Asad’s (1993, 15-16, 77) notion of the habitus refuses to ground issues of religious experience in questions of individual reflexivity.<sup>5</sup>

Despite developing a distinctive model predicated upon elements of Aristotle’s writings, then, Asad and Mahmood reproduce core features of Bourdieu’s analysis. Leaving aside the failure of such arguments to account for the inherent contingencies pertaining to the attempted transmission of religious culture relative to embodied outcomes, however, core features of the contemporary social and cultural environment can also be used to question the on-going utility of such a notion of habitus today, a point pursued systematically by Archer.

Archer’s (2012, 68-9) argument that ‘the habitus’ only makes sense in a ‘morphostatic’ context where the collective transmission and individual internalization of norms is supported by ‘contextual continuity’ is directed against Bourdieu. It is, however, equally applicable to Asad’s model as well as having implications for Mahmood’s work. For Archer, the mutually reinforcing patterns of cultural and structural diversification of the late modern era render problematic the idea that a theological tradition can stimulate an ‘unchangeable’ coordination of outward behaviours and inwards dispositions. It has long been recognized that routinized dispositions towards matters of ultimate importance are potentially problematized when people are confronted with alternative ways of believing and

living, and where socialization processes become more diverse and less significant compared to the capacity to respond actively to fast-changing circumstances (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Robertson 1993; Calhoun 1993: 82; Herbert, 2011). The account by Archer, and others, of morphogenetic social and cultural transformation go further, however, contrasting societies generative of contextual continuity and underpinned by low levels of structural differentiation and ‘ideational diversification’ with the ‘diversification amplifying’ mechanisms at the heart of global changes today; mechanisms that necessitate reflexive scrutiny and adaptation (Sayer 2005; Elder-Vass 2007; Archer 2010, 2012).

It is not just general issues about the need to engage reflexively with change that undermine conceptions of a stable religious habitus. It is also developments within the field of religion, especially in relation to religious authority (Maqsood 2013). Contrary to Asad’s focus on the unitary and unifying nature of Islamic practice, for example, the global context in which religions now operate, and the differentiated fields with which they interact, have stimulated changes in the structures and centres of religious power (Brittain, 2005: 157). Whereas in traditional societies religious edicts and interdictions could be routinized as a result of the limited character of social change and the repetitive nature of moral dilemmas, the cultural and social novelty of modernity stimulates reflexivity on the part of religious authorities, but also followers, in seeking to apply their religiosity to rapidly changing circumstances (Chaves 1994, 766). These developments have resulted in a situation whereby religious legitimacy is increasingly diverse and contested, reflecting a pluralization and horizontalization of religious authority (Edgell 2012, 258).<sup>6</sup> Such circumstances do not entail that religion is unable to flourish, but do cast doubt on whether traditional modes of religious socialization, reproduction and habitus can endure

unaffected, and increase those situations in which individuals have to choose from where to receive religious guidance.

These issues concerning the diversification of authority, coupled with arguments regarding the increasing necessity of reflexivity, have been used to question not only the contemporary relevance of the religious habitus, but also the attempts of those who have incorporated deliberation into a revised model of habitual behavior (Sweetman 2003; Mahmood, 2005; Sayer 2005; Adams 2006; Elder-Vass 2007; Fleetwood 2008). As Farrugia (2013: 292) suggests, however, it is possible to suggest that habitus and reflexivity can coexist creatively if we neither conceive of the habitus in terms of unconscious, deterministic action, nor view it as a one-off product of training that results in permanent fixity. Instead, rather than associating the habitus with the essentially conservative cultural functions outlined by the likes of Bourdieu or Asad, we can re-construe it as an embodied orientation that can be reformed by individuals in the context of their reflexive engagements with themselves amidst the shifting opportunities and constraints they face as a consequence of the dynamism of contemporary life. This capacity to reflect on oneself as subject and object within a wider environment does not entail that the mind is somehow separate from the body, but it does require us to insert a temporal element to our thinking, as past routines become subject to present deliberations that can project into the future possible versions of oneself reformed on the basis of distinctive actions and commitments (Archer, 2012; Shilling, 2012, 1-12, 20). Possessed of a ‘potential energy’ to re-shape the individual and engage creatively with the wider environment, the habitus is here subject to periodic change and is tied ineluctably neither to social reproduction nor to a single tradition (e.g. James 1900; Dewey 2002, 44).

Developing this approach, we now suggest that the idea of the religious habitus can retain significant theoretical utility in the current era if we re-conceptualize it as a means through which individuals and groups seek to actively remake, craft or, following Latour's (2011) development of the term, instaur their bodies and subjectivities via a reflexive mediation of the 'religious repertoires' available within distinct traditions (Martin 2015; Edgell 2012). Crucially, however, we also argue that these reflexive mediations possess variable and complex relations to the broader social and cultural transformations of which they are a part; relations that undermine the idea that religious traditions can be reproduced unaffected by these dynamic changes and contextual discontinuities.

### **Instaurating the Religious Habitus**

For Archer (2010, 280), the global context that recurrently throws up obstacles to 'contextual continuity' is associated closely with reflexivity because it actively fosters the 'internal conversation', i.e. an inner dialogue based upon listening and responding inwardly to thoughts and feelings about the self wherein dispositions, reactions, emotions and circumstances are scrutinized in light of an individual's aims and preferences. In contrast to orientations based on tradition, such dialogues can result in decisions to act against habits and seek change. Archer's approach has been criticized for expressing a cognitive, disembodied view of social action (Farrugia, 2013, 296), but can be interpreted more positively in the context of her sustained attention to the bodily foundations of human being (Archer, 2000). Here, the 'internal conversation' can be understood as the emergent crucible within which engagements with contexts, bodily dispositions, retrospective and prospective elements of identity, and relations within others, is enacted (Archer 2010, 2-5; Mead 1962).<sup>7</sup>

For Lahire (2011, 205, 25), indeed, the internal conversation is not reflective of cognitivist assumptions, but constitutes an outcome of the modern conditions in which individuals are increasingly ‘placed, simultaneously or successively within a plurality of social worlds that are non-homogeneous’. Even in earlier periods it would have been reductive to explain the ‘Protestant’ purely with reference to the habitus of the Protestant Ethic, since that individual might also be a man, a father, an artisan, someone educated etc. Yet this is even more so now, when actors routinely have to take an ‘external’, third-party view of their own practices, assess them in relation to others, and plan according to changing contexts (Lahire 2011, ix-xv). Here, the potential ‘hybridization’ of habitus and reflexivity can mirror a broader hybridization of multiple-traditions and multiple-modernities, wherein religious and other cultural resources are drawn upon and reinterpreted creatively, as individuals negotiate their way through the heterogeneity of the present (Eisenstadt 2000; Therborn 2003).

Set against this background, Latour’s (2011, 9) focus on the active crafting or instauration of new bodily orientations enables us to explore how such reflexive hybridizations can generate new religious ‘modes of existence’ even amongst the rapid transformations affecting the globe today. Developed from Souriau’s (1943) writings, Latour uses the term ‘instaur’ to signal a creative and re-creative shaping of dispositions, social relationships and modes of being. For Latour, this is tied to a ‘multi-realist’ recognition that individuals can ‘bring together’ and work upon ideas and materials, each possessed of their own qualities, to instaur new spheres of activity, cognition and being which can decisively shape human experience in particular ways; a multi-realism, in other words, akin to Lahire’s focus on the plural actor reflexively creating a habitus in a context of heterogeneous realities, identities and belongings.

Unpacking these notions of instauration and multi-realism, Latour (2011, 2013) draws on Souriau's (1943, 44) illustration of a sculptor: a craftsperson who does not create something from nothing, but forges or instaurs from the potentialities of clay or wood a vision that combines the intrinsic properties of the material with an idea of what it could become. The sculptor does not create the emergent sculpture unilaterally, and neither is it a 'social' construction. Instead, it results from the conjunction of multiple elements, with the sculptor also being shaped through her activity in terms of the development of skills, muscle tensions and the experience gained from the work (e.g. O'Connor, 2007). Both sculptor and material are instaured in this process of working and being worked on. Other examples could be drawn from the 'instauration of music' in which the evocation of sounds from objects led to the development of instruments and the composition of music possessed of the capacity to result in 'moments of intensity' that transport the individual to places and experiences irreducible to the properties of sound-waves (Gumbrecht 2004: 97). Each of these instaurations draws on multiple elements of the environment to create new ways of being or dwelling in the world that are more than their constituent parts (Latour 2011, 307).

This mode of analysis can also be applied to religion. Contrary to those views of the habitus that ignore the contemporary problematization of authority, homogeneity and contextual continuity through their focus on the maintenance or 'retrieval' of a 'traditional' habitus (Hirschkind 2001, 623; Mahmood 2005, 117), the notion of instauring a religious habitus alerts us to more creative patter of interaction. If, for Souriau, both sculptor and clay/wood are instaured in a process of working and being worked on, so too we might say that religious traditions both shape and are shaped by the internal conversations of individuals and the reflexive development and

management of embodied dispositions and orientations. In this context, instaurating a religious habitus can be understood as crafting a mode of being that locates human action, feeling and thought at the embodied intersection of worldly and other-worldly realities with the aim of imparting a particular directionality to life. This directionality can, of course, have highly variable relations with broader social contexts: worldly elements and other-worldly traditions can re-shape each other, while different repertoires encoded within contrasting religious ‘traditions’ signal variable degrees of potential for interacting creatively with broader social and cultural opportunities and challenges.

This understanding of the habitus enables us, we suggest, to gain analytical purchase on the development of religious forms that thrive rather than suffer in the context of the changing global circumstances of the present; something we now illustrate with regard to Christian Pentecostalism and the Islamic piety movement. These are two of the most resilient and globally ‘vital’ contemporary forms of religion (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987; Sherkat 2001; Cox 2001; Westerlund 2009; Thomas 2010). Associated respectively with intentional attempts to cultivate routines congruent with bodily openness, and disciplined virtue and piety, they provide us with contrasting examples of how forms of religious habitus can be instaurated, even though each might initially appear to confirm other ways of conceptualizing the religious habitus.

### **Instaurating the born-again subject**

Despite its limitations, Bourdieu’s account of the religious habitus as a legitimating reflection of social forms initially appears to hold promise as a means of accounting for what some have viewed as the thoroughgoing accommodation to capitalism

evident in the rapid spread of Christian Pentecostalism (Bruce and Voas 2007, 13; Ellingson 2010, 263). Utilizing Walter Benjamin's (1996, 288-291) suggestion that capitalism has become the 'unassailable global religion', Maddox (2012, 155), for example, locates Pentecostalism within a broader, secular sacred re-enchantment of the world, rather than a revival of a religious form that might challenge it. Such an argument suggests that cultivated dispositions involving hard work, sobriety and integrity represent no more than an ideological appropriation and celebration of qualities and embodied techniques central to contemporary capitalism (Bruce and Voas 2007; Maddox 2012).

Nonetheless, just as Weber's (1991) and Troeltsch's (1976) discussions of Puritanism's elective 'affinity' with modern capitalism suggested a mutually constitutive relationship between religious culture and economic conditions, other analysts have accepted that Pentecostalism promotes habits and practices uniquely well adapted to contemporary global conditions, but resist viewing it as 'a mere reflex of the modern'. Instead, they argue that Pentecostalism continues to exert an independent effect on capitalism's development (Coleman 2000, 3; Droogers 2001, 54; Robbins 2004, 137; Martin 2005, 141); a causality that might be said to rest on its implication in crafting a mode of being that locates human action, feeling and thought at an embodied intersection of worldly and other-worldly realities where traffic flows both ways.

This intersection is evident in Poloma's (2003) study of Christian revivalism in the 1990s, and recent analyses of the cultivation of Pentecostal orientations in 'mega-churches' as a means of utilizing commercialized places of worship to facilitate distance from prevailing mores and practices (Ellingson 2010; Maddox 2012). It is also apparent in research identifying the astonishing growth of Pentecostalism in

South Korea as an important factor in that country's modernization (Baldacchino 2012, 368; Freston 2001, 61; Buswell Jr and Lee 2006, 1); a factor that overcame the economically regressive effects of Confucianism (Hong 1973, 111; Lee 1982, 5; Lie 1998 78-9). Here, the beliefs and practices of Protestantism (including hard work, honesty and clean living) are causally significant factors in modernization and capitalism: the deliberative instauration of specific religious orientations becomes the means through which individuals infuse worldly economic activity with other-worldly significance (Baldacchino 2012, 373-7).<sup>8</sup> Taken together, these studies suggest that Pentecostalism has been utilized by individuals to manage reflexively a plurality of needs and desires across religious and economic spheres of activity, and that the Pentecostal habitus is thus far from being either an unthinking internalization of an economically determined class consciousness or the outcome of pedagogical submission to an authoritative tradition.

More generally, those global transformations with which Pentecostalism has been associated seem to interact productively with what have historically been three central features of the Christian cultural 'repertoire': i) a focus on individuals being drawn out of their societies (by opening their bodies and minds to a transcendent, other-worldly sphere) (Martin 2005), ii) the development of a relationally-defined but unique sense of personhood (arising from the experience of communion with God) (Zizioulas 2004), and iii) acquiring the capacity to reflect upon, interrogate and deploy the individual conscience (in engaging morally with, and identifying religious potential within, secular society) (Seligman 1992, 135).

This Christian location of the individual at the intersection of the worldly and other-worldly has long required the faithful to consciously cultivate techniques and habits designed to 'open' their bodies to spiritual forces. Baptism in early

Christianity, for example, required initiates to embark on a lengthy program of self-directed preparation and education prior to being received into the church (Brown 1988). Nevertheless, it assumed new visibility with the modern Pentecostal focus on conversion (Poloma 2003; Meyer 2010). Klaver and van de Kamp (2011), for example, examine the Pentecostal opening of the body as a conversational creation of a ‘born-again subject’, centred on the bodily dynamics of becoming and remaining a convert, involving techniques of prayer, pure living, and a reflexive interrogation of the self across every aspect of life as believers prepare their bodies to be receptive to the Holy Spirit. Physical images and objects are used in this preparation by churches and individuals as ‘sensational forms’ in attempts to nurture and modulate religiously their emotions, feelings and thoughts (Meyer 2010). Possession, having been self-consciously sought after, is manifest variously by individuals speaking in tongues, fainting, and finding themselves unable to control tears, laughter or fits (Poloma 2003). There is much reflexively scrutinized attention directed towards the embodied presence of God in Pentecostalism, much deliberative concern ‘with the stuff of the physical’ in terms of divine and demonic forces, and a recognition that ‘all born-again believers are able and entitled to embody the Holy Spirit’ in this active instauration of a Christian habitus (Meyer 2010, 753).

This focus on opening the body to other-worldly forces is not a wholly reflexive process: deliberative attempts to prepare the body to receive spiritual forces are engaged in as a means to being ‘taken over’ and inhabited viscerally, mind and body, by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the reflexive preparation of the body is important and does not accord with a simple routinization of previously inculcated dispositions towards religion. Furthermore, while Christianity’s investments in other-worldly communion have not been accompanied by investments of comparable

religious worth in earthly, secular matters (as reflected for Martin [2005, 142] in the New Testament's relative neglect of law, war and politics), this is not the same as suggesting that these religious orientations simply legitimate social realities. Indeed, the Pentecostal immersion within a mode of existence thoroughly distinct from other spheres, yet possessed of the capacity to impart directionality to life and exhibit a range of broader cultural affinities, is suggestive of Latour's association of instauration with multi-realism, since the conversational creation of 'born-again' subjects both draws them out of the world then takes them back in, albeit in a changed form.

### **Instauring religious 'tradition'**

If the current global strength of Pentecostalism might initially appear to support aspects of Bourdieu's notion of habitus, the upsurge in Islamic belief and practice has been addressed within the 'Aristotelian' view of the habitus developed by Asad and Mahmood. Reflecting the ways in which Islam's cultural repertoire tends to focus on the commitment to a 'total society' (Black 1993, 59; Volpi and Turner 2007), this view of the habitus rejects what it sees as a 'secular' association of agency with the reflexive judgement of individuals in favour of attentiveness to the patterns of discipline, monitoring and regulation through which the body is made to conform to Islamic tradition. The religious habitus here becomes the product of a legal-moral tradition in which all worldly behaviour is judged through religious categories (Mahmood 2005, 14, 47, 139; Asad 1993, 212).

Operating with a relatively homogeneous notion of 'tradition' and associated assumptions about socio-cultural stability (Brittain 2013), this view of the religious habitus emphasizes the continuing importance of early childhood socialization and the

development of ‘traditional’ routinized identities amongst Muslim communities (Salvatore 2006). It has been noted that early socialization is particularly important in societies characterized by the monopolistic exercise of control over access to the sacred (Weber 1964, 152-3; Bourdieu 1990, 55), and such control is arguably evidenced by Kühle’s (2012: 120) suggestion that while religion has, for many in the West, become a choice, ‘research on Muslim minorities in Western societies consistently claims that for individuals with a Muslim background identities cannot be freely chosen’ (Cesari 2004, 2007; Peek 2005; Schmidt 2002; Spielhaus 2010; Voas and Fleischmann 2012). Recent census data, revealing exceptionally high degrees of inter-generational religious continuity among Muslim minorities in Europe, can also be used to support such conclusions (Scourfield et al 2012, 99; Kühle 2012, 122).

Despite such examples, however, young Muslims are not immune to the everyday encounters with incongruity, heterogeneity and complexity that, particularly in multi-cultural societies, can result in them modifying or changing their habitus. It has also been noted that many young European Muslims celebrate their religious identities as reflexive choices, in marking them off as distinctive within their host societies, even if there are strong external constraints on them (Jenkins 2000, 23; Kühle 2012; 121-3). Similarly, given that monopolistic control over access to the sacred is becoming rare even in Muslim-majority societies, as well elsewhere, maintaining the socialization and routinization of ‘traditional’ forms of religious habitus is likely to face significant challenges (Kühle 2012, 126). Jafari and Goulding’s (2013) study of globalization, reflexivity and the project of the self in Iran is notable in this regard: despite extensive religious surveillance and the regulation of information sources, young Muslims engage with their religion reflexively, comparatively and cross-culturally. They distance themselves from the Islam of their

parents and grandparents, adopting a constructively critical approach to developing their own religious outlook and set of practices: here, pluralism, global change and the need for reflexive adjustment is recognized and celebrated (Jafari and Goulding 2013, 72-4).

The respondents in Jafari and Goulding's study articulate an inclusive and liberal model of Islam, alongside a notably positive view of secular features of global modernity. Nonetheless, forms of Islam that take a very different view of such phenomena arguably reflect analogous patterns of reflexivity. Mahmood's (2005) study of the Islamic piety movement in Egypt invites us to juxtapose reflexive Christian cultivations of an 'open body' to an Islamic insistence that followers 'close' their bodies to all but fixed patterns of externally prescribed ritual behaviour designed to instill habitual obedience to externally imposed religious law (Asad 1993, 56-7; Falk, 1994). Nonetheless, despite Mahmood's (2005, 32) assertion to the contrary, this study can also be said to provide an excellent illustration of how individual reflexivity can actually scrutinize and deepen religious orientations and dispositions through a focus on this-worldly behaviour guided by a deliberative focus on religious principles.<sup>9</sup>

The Muslim women studied by Mahmood (2005, 137) are presented to us as contemporary embodiments of the 'Aristotelian legacy' in their cultivation of Islamic 'virtue' through their dress, demeanour and determination to ensure exterior actions and interior self conform to Islamic norms. While this normalizing of the body towards a model of Islamic piety did not involve traditional socialization or the unthinking, autonomic responses evident in Bourdieu's conception of the habitus, but a deliberative and intentional disciplining process (Mahmood 2005, 123, 157), it is not

clear that it demonstrates what Asad and Mahmood judge to be the agential potency of Islamic tradition either. Here, we can note two things.

First, we can contrast Mahmood's (2005, 14) eagerness to detach the notion of agency from 'the goals of progressive politics' to Jafari and Goulding's (2013: 78) account of a young Iranian teacher's frustration and sense of entrapment in the face of the religious injunction that she cannot use a bicycle because of her gender. Mahmood's position is abstract and philosophical, but the young teacher's experience of agency curtailed emerges from the reflexive juxtaposition of her everyday reality to her knowledge of other social and cultural contexts, Muslim and non-Muslim, where such restrictions on her actions would seem ridiculous. This teacher's emergent, reflexively shaped experience of her agency therefore enables her to envisage a Muslim habitus at odds with the one into which she was socialised.

Second, the Egyptian women Mahmood studies may aspire to immerse themselves in the totalizing Islamic 'tradition' she envisages, but their everyday realities arguably exhibit heterogeneity and pressures to be 'plural actors' insofar as their 'piety' is crafted in defiance of what they see as the 'secular' or 'Western' weakening of community, family and tradition within Egyptian society and culture (Mahmood 2005, 44). In fact, Mahmood discusses how they sought to cope with people 'who constantly placed them in situations that were far from optimal for the realization of piety in day-to-day life', and with 'the internal struggle they had to engage in within themselves in a world that constantly beckoned them to behave in impious ways' (Mahmood 2005, 156). This crafting of a habitus then, while ostensibly 'conservative', is arguably a reflexive response to contextual discontinuity, an attempt to instaur a religious habitus that is distinct from yet aspires to impart a specific directionality to social life more broadly. As such, while its 'closing' of the body to

anything apart from Islamic norms could not be more different to Pentecostalism's 'opening' of it to the Holy Spirit, it has a similarly reflexive, multi-realist and crafted religious character.

If the reflexive elements of Muslim modes of piety are implicit in Mahmood's study, they are addressed directly in Gökariksel's (2009) exploration of the heterogeneity of experiences of the religious and secular amongst Muslim women in Turkey, Göle's (1996, 2010) account of women's adoption of the Islamic headscarf in contexts such as France, Turkey and the Middle East, and Maqsood's (2013) study of religious consumption in urban Lahore. These note how increased literacy and the circulation of information have led young Muslims to discuss and reflect upon their religious beliefs, and report how their familiarity with doctrinal debates has meant they do not have to rely on traditional religious elites for guidance, but increasingly 'learn and make decisions about their individual practices by themselves'. In each case, the personally and socially transformative nature of religious habits is emphasized. In each case, the development of this habitus occurred in a reflexive, evaluative and potentially transformative engagement with secular culture.

In Latour's (2011) terms, these forms involve neither an absorption of the social by the religious nor an absorption of the religious by the social, but a bringing together of distinctive phenomena, possessed of contrasting principles, that results in the emergence of something genuinely new, and certainly not 'traditional' in any simple sense. Muslim women's adoption of the veil, for example, is increasingly a symbol of 'tradition' reflexively constructed in opposition to the secular: in countries such as Malaysia, the veil is a contemporary development (Turner 2010, 19). Similarly, in countries such as France, its adoption is a reflexive process, articulating an ambivalent attitude towards the prevailing culture, where it is perceived as an

‘iconic’ representation of the threat of Islam to secular modernity, ‘a symbolic colonization of the public space, which is supposed to be free of religion’ (Salvatore 2006, 1017).

If the veiling of women’s bodies is more ambiguously ‘traditional’ than it might seem, however, it might also be said that, like Christian Pentecostalism, the relationship of the Islamic piety movement to contemporary capitalism is not free of ambiguity either. Turner (2010, 19) notes the increasing religious consumerism and individualism evident within a rapidly developing global Muslim market for services relating to pilgrimage, dress, education, holidays and food, suggesting a more thoroughgoing reflexive reconstruction of tradition than its apparent anti-secularism implies (Speck 2013). The degree of reflexivity evident in these contexts is such that Göle (2010: 264) associates it with the ‘post-Durkheimian’ nature of contemporary culture (Taylor 2007), noting that it is ‘personally pious’ and ‘publicly visible’ but more ‘voluntary and mental’ than traditional forms of Muslim habitus. Indeed, with regard to Europe and Muslim-majority societies across the globe, a strong emphasis on the re-formation of Islam is notable across a range of studies, covering increasing pluralism, greater reflexivity and choice by individuals, and changing patterns of social organization (Babès 1997; Roy 1998; Saint-Blancat 1997; Tietze 2001; Maqsood 2013).

In this context, although Beekers’s (2014) recent account of the ‘pedagogies of piety’ characteristic of young Dutch Christians and Muslims does not deal directly with the issue of ‘habitus’, it might be said to signal the importance of it in the way we have suggested. Thus, the theologies, bodily rituals and sensorial practices that shape the religious subjectivities of these Christians and Muslims are neither the product of unconscious socialization nor the inculcation of individuals into monolithic

traditions, but the reflexive crafting of a habitus amidst pluralism, diversity, and a range of tensions and potential conflicts. It is an instauration marked by self-reflection, the pursuit of inner conviction, and often a struggle by these young people to move beyond the ‘unreflective religion they were raised with’ (Beekers 2014, 92).

## **Conclusion**

The utility of the notion of the religious habitus rests on its capacity to illuminate how embodied dispositions emergent from routinized practices come to be socially and culturally significant. Its viability has been called into question, however, by patterns of rapid global change that problematize the social stability or ‘contextual continuity’ on which it is often understood to rely, and that foreground the central social and cultural significance of agential powers of reflexive assessment and adaptation rather than the dispositional orientations associated with the habitus. In this context, Bourdieu’s conception of the habitus has faced criticism for its tendency to equate religion with ‘unthinking’ social reproduction, and for its inability to account for those conditions in the modern world that necessitate the increased use of reflexivity and deliberation.

The main alternative to Bourdieu’s model, and one that has become increasingly popular, involves an ‘Aristotelian’ focus on the habitus as the cultivation of virtue through training and traditional pedagogy. Despite its distinctiveness, however, this conception is predicated upon assumptions of a similarly ‘morphostatic’ social and cultural milieu that arguably allows even less room for acknowledging the importance of individual reflexivity. As such, it offers a similarly unsatisfactory basis upon which to engage with religion in the context of ‘morphogenetic’ global change (Archer 2012).

Despite these criticisms, we have argued that ‘the habitus’ can remain relevant to making sense of religion across the globe today if reconceived as something reflexively crafted or instaured. Attentive to issues of contextual discontinuity and the pluralization and horizontalization of religious authority, we have emphasized how the active and conscious development of religious identities often involves the reflexively chosen cultivation of routinized habits. This view entails recognizing that the habitus does not operate in a way that is chronically hidden from consciousness (as suggested by Bourdieu), or via an internalization of tradition impervious to the reflexive capacities of the embodied subject (as indicated by Asad and Mahmood). On the contrary, it instaurs a mode of existence wherein, as pragmatists such as Dewey (1980; 2002) noted, reflexivity, deliberation and dispositional orientations operate as related modes through which individuals negotiate their environment on the basis of their religious priorities. Here, rather than being associated with unthinking routines socialized into individuals without their conscious awareness, dispositions can be understood as self-directed ‘intentional responsive activities’ oriented toward the achievement of particular goals (Siegfried 1996, 96). In such cases, the reflexive instauration of a particular religious habitus unifies the embodied subject with the world and cosmos in particular ways, constituting modes of connection that enable a certain command to be achieved over the self and the environment (Dewey 1969; 2002, 15, 26).

In developing this analysis, we have acknowledged certain convergences in, as well as differences between, the construction of Christian and Islamic forms of habitus. Contrary to Mahmood’s own conception of the habitus, we suggested that the Egyptian women at the centre of her study were not only engaged in a reflexively articulated scrutiny of how they could re-make and purify their bodies and minds in a

manner that sought to advance their conformity to Islamic tradition, but were also reflexively utilizing that tradition to critique what they construed as ‘secular’ elements of the surrounding culture. In this context, while we noted that the pedagogical ‘closing’ of the body to anything apart from Islamic norms could not be more different to Pentecostalism’s ‘opening’ of it to the Holy Spirit, we identified a similarly reflexive, multi-realist and crafted religious character. The Islamic tradition’s focus on bringing its ‘regulative sensibility’ to all spheres of life marks it out, of course, as very different to the religious ‘calling out’ of the world central to the ‘elective affinity’ between Pentecostalism and global capitalism. Nonetheless, the common reflexive engagement with the secular, combined with the increasing prevalence of patterns of reflexive consumption even in Muslim-majority societies, suggests patterns of instauration that are less divergent as they might initially appear.

In summary, conceiving of the religious habitus as a series of reflexively informed acts involving the instauring of orientations towards the transcendent offers a distinctive basis upon which to assess its on-going significance today. It allows us to avoid any sense that religion is acquired and maintained merely through unthinking processes of acculturation or socialization that function to reproduce and legitimate social structures, or that it operates as a means for assimilation into ‘authoritative discursive traditions whose logic and power far exceeds the consciousness of the subjects they enable’ (Mahmood 2005, 32). In contrast, our view of the religious habitus can illuminate the on-going significance of embodied dispositions emergent from routinized practices by locating them at the centre of a reflexive engagement with the bodily intersection of worldly and other-worldly realities inherent to religious life today. This engagement is characterised by the bringing together of a variety of traditions, ideas, artifacts and beliefs that can be reflected upon and combined with

greater or lesser amounts of flexibility, depending upon the contexts and diverse religious repertoires with which individuals and communities can interact.

The embodied orientation towards belief, thought, feeling and action emergent from this process is not, of course, fixed for all time. Instead, it constitutes a crystallization of factors that can themselves be reflected upon at a future point in the context of subsequent experiences of change; experiences that can result in the gradual or abrupt realization that additional work needs to be effected on the self, new avenues need to be explored, in order to function effectively amidst the cultural discontinuities characteristic of the current era (Dewey, 2002; Shilling, 2008). It is this model of the habitus, we suggest, that can provide us with a useful means for developing further the study of religious identities, cultures and transformations today, and their diverse relationships to societies across the globe.

## Notes

1. What is at question here is not the viability of forms of habitus relative to processes of 'reflexive modernization', wherein individualism becomes more prominent as religious traditions (and socio-cultural structures more broadly) dissolve into 'liquidity', but their viability in a context where mutually reinforcing cultural and socio-structural changes continually confront individuals with novel circumstances, necessitating highly reflexive internal conversations about alternative courses of action (Archer 2012, 1-5; see Giddens 1991; Beck 1992).
  
2. Bourdieu's (1999) *The Weight of the World* maps empirically the self-consciousness and internal struggles experienced by his respondents, but these

features are never incorporated analytically in the form of causal mechanisms into the heart of his core theoretical framework.

3. Bourdieu (1987, 1991) developed the concept of field through a creative engagement with Weber's sociology of religion. Fields, in religion or elsewhere in society, constitute a set of organizing principles, maintained by social groups and their representatives (with priests and prophets key to the religious field), that identify, delineate and bestow value upon particular categories of social practices. Forms of habitus are developed, deployed and recognized as possessing value within these fields, while struggles internal to fields provide Bourdieu's framework with a degree of dynamism (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Nevertheless, while Bourdieu asserts the facts of change in his analysis, the close fit that exists in his theoretical formulations between habitus and field render problematic the existence of motivations for struggle and other mechanisms that would actually accomplish this.

4. It was Aristotle's (2000) notion of hexis, referring to an acquired moral character able to direct an individual's feelings, desires and actions as a result of habituation, that was first translated into Latin as 'habitus'. Aquinas's later utilization of it in Christian theology conceived it in similar terms and thus, contrary to Bourdieu's later account, as a medium for overcoming 'unthinking habit' by placing 'one's activity under more control than it might otherwise be', ensuring that deliberative choices for the good become dispositions towards the good (Davies 2003, 124-5). This utilization was mirrored in medieval Islamic thought, from the eleventh century, by such figures as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, al-Miskawayh, Ibn Rush and Ibn Khaldun, who explored

the importance of regularised habits in Muslim life (Mahmood 2005). For Muslim writers, the malaka approximated to the habitus in building within the individual a faith affirming quality and character, deriving from scrutiny, disciplined practices and the emotions and experiences that follow from these (Lapidus 1984, 55-6; Mahmood 2005, 137).

5. Bourdieu's general conception of the habitus also recognizes reflexivity as the particular dispositions developed within the scientific and academic fields, but these are procedural requirements limited to those operating within these occupational milieu (Adams, 2006).

6. The roots of these changes are deeply embedded. In the Christian West, for example, there were from the early modern era challenges to the ecclesiastical authority of the Catholic Church from the growth of Protestant sects as individuals could, at least in principle, choose between competing paths to religious truth. Nevertheless, recent issues regarding the proliferation and credibility of religious authority have moved centre stage at a time when political changes, new technologies and modes of intervening in and extending the life and reproductive capacities of human bodies have flourished like never before. In the case of Islam, for example, Turner et al (2009: 14) suggest that contemporary social media have created a situation in which 'almost any local teacher or mullah can issue a fatwa to guide a local community by setting himself up with his own blog (see also Herbert, 2011).

7. Archer's (1995, 285; 2012) validation of reflexivity does not suggest there is a single, neutral mode of engaging in contemplative deliberation about one's priorities

and place in the world. In order to place her analysis on firm foundations, however, she builds on Kant's presumption that there exists a continuity of consciousness among humans, whereby the embodied self is aware of being the same person over time and exists as a locus wherein experience is registered and becomes a focus for expectations. Not all philosophers share this position, but neither is it hostile to the recognition of cultural or religious differences between people. Mauss's (1985, 3) anthropological investigations into the widely contrasting conceptions of personhood formed cross-culturally over time, for example, were underpinned by the insistence that humans have always had an awareness of possessing an embodied existence and self that was irreducible to the community or tribe of which they were members. As Archer (1995) explains, such awareness is in fact a precondition of being able to fulfill roles in even the most traditional collectivity, but also underpins the reflexivity that has become an essential element to surviving and prospering within a contemporary milieu characterized by fast-paced change.

8. Such arguments are reinforced by analyses of the spread of Pentecostalism in Africa in which a focus on individuals scrutinizing their lives and cultivating habits of success, righteousness, and the avoidance of secular entertainments has been conjoined to the building of religious communities that have mediated the production and circulation of wealth (e.g. Maxwell 1998; Haynes, 2012). Similar points have also been made for Pentecostalism in milieu as different as the United States, Sweden and Brazil; providing evidence for the existence of a Protestant habitus wherein individuals are drawn out of society into a transcendence-oriented, moral community, but also one in which body, economy and religion become intimately related, since

the disciplined body becomes a moral exemplar for society at large (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; 2000; Coleman 2000; Martin 2005; Haynes 2012).

9. The piety movement forms part of the larger Islamic Revival or Islamic Awakening that has pervaded the Muslim world since the 1970s. Those active in it seek to inform their actions and society ‘with a regulative sensibility that takes its cue from the Islamic theological corpus rather than from modern secular ethics’ (Mahmood 2005, 2, 42-3, 47). This is not a matter of following traditional habits, but of ‘honing one’s rational and emotional capacities so as to approximate the exemplary model of the pious self’ based upon the conduct of the Prophet and his Companions (Mahmood 2005, 31).

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