Habitus and Reflexivity in Tandem? Insights from Postcolonial Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the unresolved concern about the relationship between habitus and reflexivity. Using Sri Lanka, a postcolonial social-context as the research ground, the paper provides a contemporary interpretation of individuals' reflexive and habitual behaviour that displaces Bourdieu's concept of habitus as inappropriate for the representation of 21ˢᵗ century social dynamics. While Sri Lanka is often labelled a *traditional society*, where habitual, routine, pre-reflexive action is thought to be more common, studies that question this generalised view appear to be largely absent. Therefore, based on a critical realist morphogenetic perspective that renders the analytical possibility of both routine and conscious action, this paper investigates the role of habitus and reflexivity through seventy-five work and life histories gathered from Sri Lanka. The findings suggest that even the reproduction of traditional practices have increasingly become a reflexive task; thus, this work supports the position that habitus fails to provide reliable guidance to understand social-action, even within a society labelled as *traditional*.

Introduction

This paper contributes to the unresolved sociological debate on reflexivity and habitus and demonstrates that the concept of reflexivity is more viable than routinised, habitual behaviour in understanding contemporary social-action. Reflexivity is the non-routine, creative individual action that responds to social influence upon their lives, transcending existing relations between structure, culture and agency (Brock, Carrigan and Scambler, 2017). Reflexivity is held to be central for emerging global social-morphogenesis, an incipient account of contemporary social-order as a world-wide morphogenic society induced by technology, digital-science and neo-capitalist forces, which is considered as an alternative account to late-modernity (Carrigan, 2017). In this context, '[t]he role of habit – habitual, routinised or customary action', becomes increasingly irrelevant as individuals are increasingly required to generate creative and novel responses (Archer, 2012:47).

Many scholars who acknowledge the centrality of reflexivity to understanding social-action (eg Elder-Vass, 2007; Sayer, 2010), argue that habitus, a concept developed to reflect the dynamics of society particularly depicting the 20th century France by Bourdieu also remains useful and relevant. Scholars such as Sayer (2010) therefore, propose a reconciliation of the two philosophical constructs of reflexivity and habitus with some ontological adjustment to the latter. In contrast, other scholars argue, habitus itself can account for both the pre-reflexive and generative capacity of agents and reflexivity could be habituated, dismissing the pro-reflexive project altogether (eg Aarseth, Layton, and Nielsen 2016; Adkins, 2004; Krause and Kowalski, 2013; Lišková, 2010; Noble and Watkins, 2003; Silva, 2016; Sweetman, 2003; Wacquant, 2016). Such scholars that focus on the *reflexive-habitus* consider, reflexivity only stems from social relations and symbolic exchanges, such as shared identities (Adkins, 2004).

Yet, a position that over-relies on the *social*, undermines the vital dialectical role played by structure and agency. Critical realism and particularly the morphogenetic approach (MA) developed by Margaret Archer is a non-conflationary methodological approach, that recognises the usefulness of considering both structure and agency in understanding social reality. The MA, which assumes that society and the individual are interconnected through human-reflexivity, is also critical about the reflexive modernity project advanced by Beck (1992), Bauman (2004), Giddens (1991) and Lash (1994). The reflexive-modernity project argues that individuals are assumed to be complete reflexive beings operating outside life-worlds. Although there is an on-going (meta-)theoretical debate on the possibility of mapping reflexivity and habitus within a single theoretical framework, empirical studies looking at the issue, mainly those using a non-conflationary social theory, are scarce.

Moreover, while critical realism, particularly the MA has earned philosophical currency within the Western world, the postcolonial world, remains an uncharted territory for the deployment of Archer's social theory. Furthermore, the fact that the development of Bourdieu's social theory is informed by colonial and post-colonial contexts also prompts a re-examination of habitus within a contemporary post-colonial context (Puwar, 2009). As a response to these observations, this paper examines the question: 'does habitus still play a central role in the determination of social-action within a social-context that is labelled as *traditional*?'.

The remaining sections of the paper are organised as follows. First, the debates that support the proposition that habitus entails reflexivity are discussed. The *detraditionalisation-thesis* offered by reflexive modernity theory is then critically assessed to understand whether the habitus and reflexivity problem is resolved. The article then introduces the MA, which is

critical of the *detraditionalisation-thesis* and discusses its critical stance on habitus. The research design is outlined and the position that habitus and reflexivity occupy in the lives of agents is then examined, followed by a discussion of the findings and a brief conclusion.

Habitus in Tandem with Reflexivity?

Bourdieu's social analysis centres on the core concepts of *social-space*, *social-field* and *habitus*. Habitus represents how social structures and cultural forms shape individuals' orientation to the world by imparting ingrained dispositions that produce pre-adapted habitual social practices when they confront new situations (Elder-Vass, 2007). Bourdieu believed that habitus endures regardless of changes in social circumstances; for example, resulting from educational and occupational changes, and shapes the life circumstances of individuals. For Bourdieu (1997:79), an individual is not the '…producer and has no conscious mastery over [his/her] habitus'. A habitus is socially ascribed predominantly through the individual's position within a *field*; for example, class-status (Weininger, 2005). Habitus pre-formats 'all the expressive, verbal, and practical manifestations and utterances of an actor' (Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer, 2011:23) with a durable attitude towards the world. Thus, habitus is considered to possess the explanatory potential of '…how social relations are internalized and experienced as 'natural', and how social position is expressed through… accumulated cultural capital' (Noble and Watkins, 2003:520).

While habitus has made a significant contribution to the studies of the embodied practices of individuals (Noble and Watkins, 2003), Bourdieu's social theory has been criticised for underplaying individuals' conscious-action (eg Archer, 2003, 2007, 2010a). However, a counter argument has been offered by some writers from a critical realist perspective,

suggesting that habitus does allow for conscious-deliberations (eg Elder-Vass, 2007; Sayer, 2010). These scholars note that actors gain contextually-internalised knowledge (*doxa*), which enables individuals to reproduce existing structures through habitual behaviour. The *Hysteresis-effect*, the gap between changed field and habitus, introduced by Bourdieu, is considered as providing insights into subjective responses of individuals on objective social influence. The relationship between consciousness and habits is thus understood as '… a dialectic of bringing behaviour to consciousness in order to alter it, and then habituating that behaviour: a dialectic of 'remembering' and 'forgetting'' (Noble and Watkins, 2003:535).

Krause and Kowalski (2013), Sweetman (2003) and Weininger (2005), propose a *reflexive-habitus,* arguing that Bourdieu's thinking is not entirely deterministic that habitus is 'durable, but not eternal' and may be altered by new experiences (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:133). Such theoretical accounts suggest, individuals situationally act either consciously or unconsciously, producing both dispositional and reflexive-responses. Therefore, Sayer (2010) argues, despite the volatile nature of the late-modern era, habitus endures throughout life-courses and is gendered and class-specific.

Yet, the concern that the generative schemes Bourdieu adopts fail to allow for complete reflexive powers to individuals remains the major criticism afforded by Bourdieu. He only allowed 'actors to apprehend their specific situation and its elements as meaningful, and to pursue—typically without reflection or calculation—a course of action which is "appropriate" to it' (Weininger, 2005:132). Hence, if Bourdieu was aware of the *gap* that exists between changed field and habitus (*hysteresis-effect)* and suggested that in such instances dispositions become dysfunctional leading to failure; why does his theory not provide any explanation of how actors respond to this discrepancy? Friedman (2016:130) notes, Bourdieu himself also felt

this confusion: 'the habitus – as an enduring matrix of sensibilities flowing from primary socialization – appears to contradict [Bourdieu's] own experience of long-range social-mobility'. The inconsistency that emerges when habitus and habitat mismatch – *habitus-clivé* – therefore 'remains a concept only fleetingly explored in his empirical work' (ibid, 2016:132). The arguments that the conceptualisation of habitus indirectly incorporates conscious thought and the recognition of 'conflict in the habitus', imply that Bourdieu has left the analysis incomplete (Aarseth et al., 2016:149; Archer, 2010b; Sweetman, 2003).

This incomplete-analysis explains why Archer is so dismissive of habitus, arguing that it is a deterministic, static and an unconscious formation that neglects emergent-powers of actors. A theory that appears to strongly contradict Bourdieu's conceptualisation of reflexivity as an unconscious formation is the *detraditionalisation-thesis* that assigns complete reflexive-powers to the individual. The subsequent section, therefore, examines if *detraditionalisation-thesis* can resolve this problem of habitual and conscious activity.

Detraditionalisation Thesis

The theory of reflexive-modernisation advanced by the works of Beck, Bauman, Giddens and Lash advocate a *detraditionalisation-thesis*, in which increasing personal-reflexivity as a causal mechanism, generates individualisation and detachment from traditions transforming the *social* within late-modernity. Increasing uncertainty, rapid change, intensifying individualisation and proliferation of risk make habitual-action obsolete, forcing individuals to increasingly rely on personal-reflexivity, as agency becomes progressively powerful over structure (Beck, 1992; Lash, 1994). Rather than understanding social reality as guided by traditional action, individuals are freed from socially-ascribed roles of identity and social

positions, such as gender roles, towards more reflexively accomplished identities (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2004).

However, a major criticism against the *detraditionalization-thesis* relates to its lack of clarity in 'how' these individuals use their reflexive-powers and for 'what' purpose they are used. Archer's social theory upholds this criticism and denies complete freedom for a single element – structure or agency. Thus, conceptualisation of an individual who is '…being progressively 'freed' or unleashed from structure' is problematic (Adkins, 2004:192). Yet, although supporting the idea of the demise of routine-action, Archer (2003, 2007) departs from the *detradionalisation-thesis* for reflexivity as an essential element to understand social-action has not been fully analysed. Particularly, Archer (2007) sees Bourdieu's theory of transcending objectivity and subjectivity through *habitus* as sharing commonalities with Giddens. This is because presenting a conflated view of structure and agency debars the opportunity for internal-conversations. Nevertheless, reflexivity cannot always operate purely cognitively based on freedom and choice, but rather 'it can be examined as the causally powerful relationship between deliberation and action in people's social lives' (Archer, 2007:37; Heelas, 1996). In representing a 'radical break' from tradition, the *detraditionalisation-thesis* appears less sensitive to how traditions weave into the fabric of post-traditional society. Instead, Archer's social theory situates conscious reflexive activity as having dialectical relations with the social world. Thus, reflexivity entails a more cautious and more thorough scrutiny than envisioned by *detraditionalisation* scholars. This is discussed in the next section.

The Morphogenetic Approach and Agential Reflexivity

Focusing on the central sociological problem of *structure* and *agency*, Margaret Archer (2003, 2007, 2012) offers her social theory, the MA, in place of conflationary theorising, for example, of the work of Giddens et al., and Bourdieu, that grant epiphenomenal status to either *individual* or *society*. Archer's emphasis that individuals consciously engage with the *social* through internal-conversations, rather than engaging habitually, makes reflexivity indispensable in any sociological inquiry. Thus, in the investigation of the relevance of habitus within contemporary society. The MA confers a stratified ontological status on both structure and agency and considers these different elements as different types of emergent entity consisting of specific kinds of emergent-powers. Archer argues (2010a:273) that 'the influences of the social order upon agency should not be located fully within agents or entirely outside them'. Central to Archer's social theory, is that reflexivity is the way the relationship between individual subjectivities and structural and cultural objectivities is understood. Structure and agency are considered as *analytically distinct* phenomena and agential-reflexivity is held as the medium through which their interplay can be observed. Structural and cultural powers are causally efficacious on individual action and, in turn, individuals reflexively monitor themselves against their social circumstances that reproduce or transform the social order (the *double-morphogenesis)* (Archer, 2007). Thus, through a process of conscious reflexive deliberations, individuals engage in self-talk about themselves – their situations, behaviour, values and aspirations, in articulating life-strategies, confronting life-trajectories and satisfying ultimate-life-concerns (Elder-Vass, 2007). Archer offers a novel perspective on how people's everyday reflexivity can be incorporated into understanding social phenomena, enabling the empirical examination of the way individuals respond to social forces. Archer also emphasises that every society depends upon the practice of reflexivity by its members, which makes agential-reflexivity indispensable to the study of social phenomena within Western sociology.

Archer (2003, 2007, 2012) identifies four modes of reflexivity - communicative (CR), autonomous (AR), meta (MR) and fractured (FR) reflexivity - each entailing a unique patterning of life-courses. These reflexive modalities are the predominant ways in which actors respond to the social impact. While fractured-reflexives are identified as having under-developed reflexivity, demonstrated by the lack of a clear patterning of life-courses, communicative, autonomous and meta-reflexives each exhibit a distinctive patterning of life-journeys, demonstrating a tendency to effect social-immobility, upward social mobility and lateral- or volatile social-mobility respectively. Archer emphasises, however, that there is much variety involved in life-courses, even among practitioners of the same reflexive mode, from evasion, through compliance, to strategic manipulation of subversion. These modalities, therefore, are not deterministic and may change over time, and agents may also practice *provisional-reflexive-modalities*, based on individual experiences and circumstances [Reference-withheld].

Archer's assumption that individuals reflexively anticipate, adapt and respond to novel situations, rather than reacting habitually is at odds with Bourdieu's social theory that stresses the centrality of habitual action. Archer's focus on the criticality of reflexivity in contemporary life, therefore, downplays both routine-action and tacit forms of knowing, which are embraced by Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1990) concept of habitus. Archer (2012:47) holds that, whilst habitus 'has had an extremely long run in social theory', reflexivity occupies a new position within the contemporary landscape of sociology that considers non-routine and creative action by actors as a response to changing social circumstances. Further, Archer argues that habitus is no longer relevant within a contemporary society that witnesses the breaking down of traditional cultures and increasing morphogenetic conditions resulting from economic and cultural globalisation, displacing the contexts within which habitus has any relevance (Archer,

2012). The section that follows, therefore, explains the methods used to examine how reflexivity and habitus work in contemporary individuals' everyday life.

The Study

Research Context – Sri Lanka

The first human habitation in Sri Lanka is believed to have been heralded by the arrival of *King Vijaya* in 543-B.C. from India, which led to the institution of *kingship* being established in the country (Wriggins, 1960). Traditionally, social-relations were centred around feudal caste-based family structures classifying people according to the services rendered to the King (*rajakariya)* which continued until the *Kandyan-kingdom[i]* was absorbed into the British Empire in 1815 (Jayewardena, 2010). Colonisation that began in the early 15th century and continued over 450-years until the mid-20th century, has been a major historical force that destabilised the traditional social-fabric of Sri Lanka [Reference-Withheld]. However, as Wickramasinghe (2006:6) notes, 'colonisation touched Ceylon and its people in an uneven fashion' creating further social-divisions within an already complex society. The *low-country* (South-Eastern region of Sri Lanka) was the earliest to experience the colonial occupation by the Portuguese (1505–1658), followed by the Dutch (1658-1676), while the *up-country* (the *Kandyan-kingdom*) monarchy continued independently, under the local kings until 1815. The rise and fall of the *Kandyan-Kingdom* enabled establishing an enduring caste structure which generated privileged and underprivileged segments in society (Jayewardena, 2007). *Kandyans* differentiated themselves as superior from the other segments of the population mainly based on their kings' historical resistance to the Portuguese and the Dutch colonists, generating an innate sense of caste-superiority within its people, despite having their own internal caste

hierarchy (Yalman, 1967). *Low-country* Sri Lankans also have a caste-hierarchy – different to that of the *up-country* – but similarly based on occupations inherent in the region, such as fishing, toddy-tapping, and cinnamon peeling (Jayawardena, 2007).

Colonisation has generated lasting effects on the lives of Sri Lankans. The civil service system that the colonial governments operated through, was a powerful force that transformed the lifestyle and conventional kinship-based gendered patriarchal relations (Risseeuw, 1992). This prolonged period of colonisation led to the growth of towns, influx of migrant Indian plantation workers, growth of mobile labour force, increased use of money and the emergence of markets and long-distance trade that broke the insular and isolated nature of locals (Wickramasinghe, 2006). According to Risseeuw (1992), the colonisation marked its own brand of capitalism within Sri Lanka, introducing new land ownership regulations and avenues for social-mobility, offering both men and women new resources and opportunities. The introduction of the wage labour system was new to self-sufficient Sri Lankans; for example, '… employment of a fellow villager for a cash wage [was] incompatible with the norms of kinship' (Brow, 1996:10). This wage labour system, however, has been instrumental in generating a new social-class structure mainly based on economic and occupational standing consisting people of *low* and *high* origin of all ethnicities and castes (Jayawardena, 2007).

'Sri Lanka today looks back on a 2,500-year past, but the important point is not that its past is so ancient, but that it is so present' (Kemper, 1991:2). Many previously underprivileged citizens gained a higher economic standing, benefitting from the opportunities manifested within colonial developments (Jayewardena, 2007). Presently, the strict caste-divisions have lessened, eroding the traditional marriage barrier. Yet, caste consciousness has not completely disappeared and there continues a sense of caste superiority among *Kandyans*, making the

present social-fabric more complex and contributing to the perpetuation of caste-based social inequality (Jayewardena, 2007).

Sri Lanka is now a multi-cultural society with approximately 21-million people, hosting a myriad of religions and ethnicities with the majority being Buddhist-Sinhalese [Reference-withheld]. Perera (1996) notes that the post-independent period added greater complexity to the social-fabric of Sri Lanka. Under-development of economy as Perera argues, has tampered the agrarian social-system dropping fertility rates, owing to difficulties of maintaining large families amid high-unemployment levels. Land reforms introduced during 1970-77 limiting the possession of land also affected changes to conventional agrarian-relations. Perera further notes that, since 1977, Sri Lanka has attempted a free-market model which has generated wider socio-economic discrepancy despite its perceived benefits. This has led to social-disintegration. While Sri Lanka still retains its traditional social elements it has embraced modernity particularly in terms of the wide acceptance of women's education and employment (Gamburd, 2000).

The social-stratification of contemporary Sri Lanka is complex with 'multiple cross-cutting hierarchies' of class, caste, education, occupation, economic-standing, gender, race, ethnicity, geographical origin and religion (Gamburd, 2000:77). Enduring caste-identities insidiously correlate with the political system of the country, maintaining the traditional power-structures that manifest through class-differentiation (Perera, 1996). Perera notes, that the youth rebels of 1971 and 1989 destroying thousands of lives are examples of this uneven nature of capitalist developments that creates ever-growing social-divisions of class. In conjunction with the nationalist project, as De Alwis (1996:90) argues, contemporary Sri Lanka, therefore, is a context of '… ambiguity, and tension, a battle ground upon which notions of sexuality,

morality, purity and race, sparred and parried'. Although Sri Lanka's story of transformation in terms of wealth, poverty, employment or education are explained and documented, how the nature of intimate social-relations and networks transitioned has not drawn adequate scholarly attention (Risseeuw, 1992).

Participants and Data Analysis

Seventy-five participants, both individuals with formal employment and those excluded from the labour-market, took part in the study. Participants were sourced through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling techniques. The participants predominantly represent mainstream occupations but traditional caste-based occupation-holders, such as *kariya-korala* (administrator at the Temple-of-the-Tooth[ii], performed by a higher-caste individual) and traditional-drummers (performed by lower-caste individuals) are also included. The participants also contain a cross section of people in terms of age (ranging from 19 to 84), gender (27 women and 48 men), ethnicity (Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher), religion (Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Catholic/Christian), class and caste, and geographic location. All the participants were pseudonymised.

Participants who represent *up-country* traditional-work were sourced from *Kandy* and *Matale* – two central regions of *up-country* monarchy where caste-specific traditions are still continued including service men at the Temple-of-the-Tooth in Kandy. This group also includes individuals from *Dambulla* Temple (*Matale*), which is a highly regarded Buddhist religious-centre, still operating through a fading feudal-village-system providing caste-specific rituals. In ensuring the representation of the *low-country* caste structure, participants were sourced from the Southern coastal area between *Galle* and *Matara*. The participants who represent

mainstream occupations were recruited from the capital-city Colombo where the majority of middle-class occupations are concentrated. The interviews were mainly held in participants' workplaces including the Temple-of-the-Tooth premises, while some caste-specific occupants were interviewed at their households.

The data was obtained through life-history interviews, which afforded the use of in-depth qualitative interview technique to explore the subtleties of reflexivity embedded in the biographies. The interviews focused on both personal-life and work histories and the participants were encouraged to discuss their thoughts and experiences freely. An interview-guide was used containing broad themes concerning reflexivity, habitus, work, social-stratification, inequality and personal background. Interviews were conducted in either Sinhala or English. The Tamil and Muslim participants could speak at least one of the two languages. The interviews, which lasted between 25 and 100 minutes, were tape-recorded, translated (where they were in the Sinhala language) and transcribed verbatim. NVivo was used to code the interview-transcripts.

A combination of thematic and constant comparative analysis was adopted to analyse the data in order to accommodate both the themes generated by participants' own narratives and the emerging themes (Boeije, 2002). Identifying the reflexive orientation of each participant was a primary concern of the data analysis, administered using pre-designed criteria based on Archer's (2003, 2007, 2012) work on reflexive modalities. The biographies enabled an understanding of how individuals subjectively mediate objective social influence, through reflexive-life-projects satisfying ultimate-life-concerns and the role (if any), their dispositions play in daily-life. The analysis identified the 75 participants as 17 CRs, 35 ARs and 20 MRs. Three biographies conformed to the characteristics of fractured-reflexivity, mostly who

answered questions with monosyllabic-responses who failed to provide sufficient substance for further analysis. The following three sections therefore examine the three dominant reflexive modalities through which individuals claim uniquely patterned life-journeys, to understand the role reflexivity and habitus play in their lives.

Communicative Reflexivity and Social Immobility

Seventeen participants were identified as communicative-reflexives, including all those engaged in caste-specific occupations, except for one participant – meta-reflexive *Sumanadasa* (56-male, traditional-drummer). This subgroup conforms to Archer's finding that CRs are actively committed to effect *contextual-continuity*, for example they persevere to sustain familial-obligations;

> Both my parents' lineages performed *kariya-korala* (administrator at the Temple-of-the-Tooth) duty… The central focus of our family-environment was about this duty to the Temple-of-the-Tooth… I used to go to the Temple-of-the-Tooth ever since I could walk, and I've been doing everything to satisfy my father's expectations… (Bandara, 37-male, Kariya-Korala).

Similar to *Bandara*, all caste-specific occupation holders' central life-focus, centres on the concern that traditions are continued which Archer (2007) recognises as social-reproduction through contextual-continuity - the key feature that sets CRs apart from other reflexives. Yet, effecting social-immobility appears more challenging today than participants' ancestors would have ever imagined. Such ancestors predominantly occupied stable socio-occupational conditions with few distractions. For example, becoming involved in the familial duty, that has

lost social-recognition involving a high opportunity-cost, demands greater reflexive-engagement for the participants:

> Initially, I thought of doing a government job like my brother... My father didn't force but said 'stay here with me… to continue this family tradition'. So that's what I ultimately did (Bandara, 37-male, Kariya-Korala).

Bandara cannot, as his ancestors would have done, operate pre-reflexively but is having to exert greater levels of reflexive-action to sustain familial-duties. The privileges of social and cultural capital afforded by *Bandara's* higher-caste family, no longer exist. The social order that prevailed for his ancestors was systematically eroded by the mechanisms of modernity. The caste-system and associated *rajakariya* is no longer the priority in society. The influence of the feudal caste-system therefore, has faded, diminishing the status and recognition for his familial-trade. Thus, to *stay-put*, CRs appear to strategically create *micro-worlds* (Archer, 2007); for example, *Bandara* has developed a greater focus on the value of his occupation:

> When I look at my life, I've a superior satisfaction in thinking that I could perform this duty to the Lord Buddha at least once in my lifetime… No words to describe this happiness. I've been very fortunate to inherit this duty… (Bandara, 37-male, Kariya-Korala).

The stable social-spaces that exposed the ancestors of the present CRs to enduring class or caste-specific social-relations, practices and material-circumstances, are no longer available. Therefore, sustaining traditional practices including religious and cultural rituals is no more a

routinised endeavour operating within a stable social-outlet. The excerpt below further demonstrates these reflexive-struggles of CRs to ensure traditions:

> The problem in this system of *rajakariya* is, there isn't enough money coming in to live a normal life… So, people give up on the *rajakariya* nowadays… If you compare someone of my age, and what they've achieved materially, building a nice house etc., I can't do that… (Bandara, 37-male, Kariya-Korala).

Not only do the contemporary CRs face constant day-to-day struggles in sustaining traditions, but also the future of these duties appears uncertain. Attracting and conditioning the younger generation to continue these duties is no longer a routine act but increasingly involves *reflexive-strategies*, of autonomous-reflexivity – a case of practicing *a provisional-reflexive-modality* [Reference-withheld]. The following extract from *Millawana's* biography, demonstrates how his concern about transferring the traditional-duties to future generation makes him employ a range of reflexive-strategies. He has started a *kalayathanaya* (a small-scale arts institute) to train newcomers, particularly targeting his grandchildren and relatives, but he doubts the future of their duties:

> It's difficult to continue *rajakariya* now. We don't get the same privileges like in the past… Unlike then, *lamai* (children) cannot be easily persuaded to follow this art now. We can't say who will take on these duties in future although *rajakariya* must be continued (Millawana, 58-male, traditional-drummer).

The uncertainty, the CRs experience regarding contextual-continuity, renders the need for reflexive-engagement, making habitual-action increasingly irrelevant. In a rapidly changing

social-context, the younger generation seem to move away looking for lucrative occupations and Westernised-ways of living, refusing to conform to involuntary customary-obligations. The younger members seem to feel ashamed of, and reluctant to absorb the social-identities inherent to their castes:

> Now it is different, they carry the instrument (the drum) hidden in a bag, they take it out only when performing. Once it's over, they quickly hide it to disguise what they do. Our generation is not like that, we wrap the instruments with a *piruwata* (clean-white-cotton-cloth), respect and worship the instrument. Now, youngsters are ashamed of this work (Kamaladasa, 58-male, traditional-drummer).

This reluctance of the younger-generation from traditional lineages to comply with inherited-obligations, provides a clear demonstration of the extent of the reflexive challenge that CRs, like *Kamaladasa* face in sustaining contextual-continuity. Commonly, the biographies of the CRs are characterised by a life-long commitment to an occupation that enables *staying-put*, which, in most cases in this study, befell the particular agent as a birth-ascribed obligation. Those CRs who are *outwith* traditional-occupations, for example *Yahampath* (36-male, Banking-Executive), *Duncan* (37-male, Business-Partner) and *Udesh* (37-male, Development Assistant–Postal-Department) also demonstrate the adoption of *provisional-reflexive-modes*, particularly autonomous-reflexivity to *stay-put*, by gaining education and experience required to acquire middle-class occupations within their natal-contexts. Archer (2007) suggests that these temporary high-reflexive acts are attempts by CRs to *return* to the base if required to remain established within natal-contexts. Contemporary CRs experience increasing difficulty in sustaining traditional practices as they sense their dispositional capability is increasingly irrelevant having to rely on reflexivity to avoid novel social/occupational situations. Even the

most rural CRs seem to 'encounter external obstacles defeating their habitual routines and exceeding their habitual repertoires' (Archer, 2010a:273).

Autonomous Reflexivity and Upward Social Mobility

Thirty-five participants were identified as autonomous-reflexives. Conforming to Archer's findings, a central characteristic of ARs was upward social mobility accomplished through *work* and they demonstrate a high degree of reflexivity. The biography of *Charu*, an accomplished banking professional, shows how this centrality of *work* is conceived very early in life by ARs:

> …[A]ll I knew was, I was in love with [a bank] since I was schooling. I just wanted to join that bank. That was my pure objective in life (Charu, 30-female, Senior Manager-Private Sector Bank).

Through education and occupation, complemented by intersecting *social-bonuses* of inherited social and cultural capital available within her middle-class natal-context, *Charu* has managed to challenge traditional gender ideologies and gain autonomy in life to some degree. *Charu* therefore, was able to make own decisions, for example marrying the man she loved as well as choosing a career. She is not ready to settle-down and have children yet, and presently she is undertaking her MBA, holding ambitions for further occupational success. *Charu's* life-journey is an example of an autonomous-reflexive's strategy to navigate normative constraints. Yet, for rural Sri Lankan women, unlike for *Charu*, liberation seems more distant as the patriarchal social-system is more strongly present in their daily life [Reference-withheld].

Rural ARs tend to effect contextual-discontinuity in moving between education and work to the industrialised capital-city, Colombo. This move to an urban centre subjects migrant ARs to experience *incongruity* between concerns, contexts and dispositions, where pre-reflexive behaviour becomes redundant. *Jayasiri* is a perfect example of a migrant AR who moved to the city for education and when interviewed, held a middle-class professional-occupation far away from his natal-context. Within this new social-setting, *Jayasiri* experiences *contextual-incongruity* both in terms of his personal and occupational lives. With parents who are landless labourers, *Jayasiri* claims rural under-privileged social-standing. Yet, his reflexive resources have been instrumental in achieving a great-deal of success, even though upward social mobility has activated a range of constraints. For example, his village-identity and dispositions are inadequate to operate within this urban social-context:

…[T]he fact that I come from the village… I feel*,* is an obstacle, combined with the [English] language problem. For example, our [company] accounts are in the privileged banking section, it's a very different place, those people are a different class. I'm not used to wear a tie, dress so formally, wear polished shoes, ironed clothes etc… I don't have a posh [English] accent… [T]hey keep asking about my background, where I come from, my school… etc. What I'm trying to say here is that me being a *godaya* (a villager), for I'm not from the *Royal College…* for not having educated overseas… etc… work against me. Succeeding further isn't going to be easy [Jayasiri, 38-male, Manager-Finance/Administration].

Yet, *Jayasiri* is not prepared to abandon his dream of *upward social mobility*. He is conscious about the (reflexive) strategies he might employ to further his occupational prospects. He also seems to effect *generational upward mobility*, through his children, who already study in the

English-medium at private international schools, which is an example of what Archer (2007) considers AR's *strategic-sensitivity*. Like *Jayasiri*, the other ARs also depend largely upon reflexivity in both managing personal and occupational trajectories attaining further progress. These rural ARs find entry to the labour-market is extremely challenging, particularly because the *gate-keepers* of this labour-market are the privileged middle-class actors. This example from *Yasantha's* biography, another migrant AR, further illustrates their reflexive attempts to mediate constraints stemming from incompatible dispositions:

> [W]hen you live in this society, you need be like them… otherwise, they call you '*godaya'* (villager)… I hadn't used '*hendi, geroppu'* (spoons and forks) until I came to Colombo. I didn't know how to use them… Honestly, I hadn't had a meal at *Hilton [hotel]* or any other big hotel ever. So, when I'm in such situations, I imitate the others… There's a big gap between my background and the level I've managed to get into today. Sometimes, it's a big challenge, I know I must learn new things every-day (Yasantha, 36-male, Finance-Manager).

The above discussion suggests, the occupational and social-contexts that the majority of the ARs occupy do not provide the stability required to develop a congruent habitus, so the ARs are having to produce innovative and creative reflexive-responses constantly to face unpredictable social conditions. The biographies of ARs, therefore suggest that habitual action no longer provides required guidance to operate; instead, their reflexivity must fill this gap.

Meta-reflexivity and Lateral Social Mobility

Twenty participants were identified as meta-reflexives. Following Archer's observations, this subgroup is unique with ultimate-life-concerns focused on *value-commitments* with highly developed reflexivity. The biography of meta-reflexive *Padma*, a 40-year-old single woman, living in a rural village and managing her life by lending money to villagers, presents a clear example of the increasing displacement of habitus. In consciously committing to her values, *Padma* has contradicted patriarchal social-normativity within her rural-setting. A woman being single is at odds with the social-norm of a *good woman*, who is expected to marry and have children [Reference-withheld]. Further violating rural social-norms, *Padma* chose to leave for the Middle-East to work as a housemaid in gaining independence in her life, and to overcome poverty, thus further tampering with her social identity as a *good woman (Lynch, 2007)*. As a result, the man she was to marry has abandoned her. Yet, *Padma* does not regret the life she has accomplished, in which there is no husband to rule. Her biography is an example of MRs' value-committed unique approach to life, which demands reflexive-action rather than habitual-behaviour:

I don't want money, if I did, I wouldn't have come back [from the Middle-East]. I don't like money. I've enough freedom to do as I like, I don't misuse it… I'm not scared, I live on. If the path I tread on is right, why should I be scared? No-one can ask me why I don't get married or tell me how to live. I'm very independent, not a burden to others… (Padma, 40-female, Money-Lender).

Accomplishing and sustaining a life committed to a self-inflicted value-ideology by MRs is clearly not a product of dispositions but of reflexivity (Archer, 2010b). In attaining their value-oriented modus-vivendi, MRs reflexively anticipate and mediate a vast range of constraints throughout their life-courses, which also involve attempts of emancipation from oppressive

conditions [Reference-withheld]. MRs' actions therefore, lead to social-transformation that could even extend through generations. For example, rather than accepting his birth-ascribed low-caste status, unlike his fellow villagers, *Sumandasa* has dedicated his life to resist oppression through a range of reflexive life-strategies that also include re-creating a counter-identity:

> The officials block all the governmental-aid given for farming because of our caste-difference. They blocked water to our fields. Realising this loss, we formed a farming-society, and made two lakes. We still manage them… that lifted the living standards of our people. I was the farming-society president for twenty years continuously… Also we formed a thrift-society, I'm the Treasurer… I joined the cultural centre… to teach dancing… Was active in the school-development-society too. I demonstrated good leadership… Do a lot of social-service in the village. Did all these because I feared my children would face the same problems I experienced. I'm a powerful member in the temple too, have done a lot of work, so I can speak with the monk or so-called big people (higher-caste) in the village face-to-face fearlessly (Sumanadasa, 56-male, Traditional-Drummer).

By establishing a social identity that is counter to his *berava* caste-identity, which 'falls in the lower ranks of the local caste hierarchy' (Gamburd, 2000:14), *Sumanadasa* appears to contradict Sweetman's (2003:528) claim that 'identity is less susceptible to reflexive intervention'. *Sumanadasa's* biography provides an example that supports Archer's (2012) claim that MRs are outwardly oriented towards *social-transformation*. *Sumanadasa's* emancipatory endeavours continue. For example, he educates his four daughters at a school far from his village, in order to disguise their caste identity and avoid harassment. *Sumanadasa*

has to some extent achieved a life-long reflexive-commitment to overcome discrimination. His eldest daughter is attending University. He is hopeful that she will gain *proper* employment without being restricted to low grade caste-occupations:

> The negative influence from the village on our caste-difference continues. I'm determined to educate my children. My daughters also had to face that problem at the village school, which I didn't let growing too serious, I sent them away to study. I didn't allow villagers even to speak to my children (Sumanadasa, 56-male, Traditional-Drummer).

Similarly, the biographies of all the MRs indicated that they increasingly reject, challenge and contradict traditional-action. They are aware of the social price to be paid in violating traditions to safe-guard value-commitments (Archer, 2003). The kind of *modi-vivendi* the MRs strive for is clearly not achievable through habitual behaviour. Thus, habitus is displaced for failing to provide adequate guidance in their lives.

Concluding Discussion

Based on data gathered from Sri Lanka, this paper makes a novel sociological contribution that displaces Bourdieu's concept of habitus as obsolete to understanding 21st century social dynamics. As a response to gradual changes experienced through inevitable social forces, such as colonisation, industrialisation and modernisation, many rural Sri Lankans found the need to move to the few available urban-centres for higher-education and work. However, a segment of the rural population still maintains a conscious but difficult decision to remain and sustain traditional-occupations. These findings suggest that rural migrants are having to juggle between the expectations of modernity and tradition, which can only be realised through the

repertoires of *reflexivity* and not through the reservoirs of *hysteresis*. Yet, this dominance of reflexivity should not be confused with the *detraditionalisation* theorists' claim that individuals become complete reflexive beings, totally freed from structure in the late-modernity. Instead, reflexive modalities provide useful guidance to aid understanding of the differentiated stances that individuals consciously adopt in responding to social influences.

The centrality of reflexivity in the lives of Sri Lankans can be understood in *two* ways. *Firstly*, reflexivity plays a dominant role in social-reproduction (particularly for CRs). Conforming to Archer's perspective on reflexivity and habitus (2010a, 2010b), the current study shows that even the maintenance of contextual-continuity has become a reflexive task. Individuals who are bound by caste-obligations, struggle to sustain their customary social-contexts that have been gradually exposed to modernity. The changing perceptions and the disinclination of younger generations to absorb caste-based identities threaten the intentions of social-immobility. Those CRs who are not bound by caste-obligations also find contextual-continuity a highly reflexive task. The life trajectories of both cohorts of CRs support Archer's (2010a) contention that inherited social and cultural capital is less significant in accomplishing their intentions of social-reproduction. These CRs demonstrate the practice of *provisional-reflexive-modes* that involve high levels of reflexive-engagement. Furthermore, *work* is a life-strategy for many CRs to *stay-put*, which is also an increasingly reflexive task where habitus *cannot* provide all the guidance required to operate. While the actions of communicative-reflexivity generate social-reproduction, this very act entails a high degree of reflexive commitment.

Secondly, the centrality of reflexivity can be understood through those who effected *contextual-discontinuity* and upward or volatile social mobility who include both ARs and MRs. The ARs claim life-journeys focused on upward social mobility, mainly accomplished through

occupational success. They demonstrate high levels of reflexive-engagement in gaining the qualifications and experience required to progress in their careers. The frequent contextual-discontinuity subjects ARs to experience contextual-incongruity within novel occupational and social-settings. The migrant ARs find the cultural and social capital that they enjoyed within their natal-contexts no longer provides the currency required to live and succeed. Instead, the migrant ARs rely on high levels of reflexivity, which include attempts to erase old identities and gain new ones. This finding contradicts the position of scholars, such as Lišková (2010) and Sweetman (2003), who suggest habitus is less receptive to identity work. While the *misfit* between contexts, concerns and dispositions generates numerous constraints, the migrant AR's upward mobility intentions and occupational aspirations do not seem to diminish. Instead, the migrant ARs draw heavily upon reflexive-resources to confront constraining emergent powers that are activated by their own actions. The outcome of practicing autonomous-reflexivity is clearly *social-transformation*, which is only possible through reflexivity.

MRs in this *second* sub-group are, for the most part, committed to a life-style that requires greater levels of reflexivity in preserving and sustaining self-inflicted value-ideologies, which is obviously not an outcome of a *reflexive-habitus*. The life-journeys of MRs are much more than 'a *dialectic* of *remembering* and *forgetting*' as suggested by Noble and Watkins (2003). Realising a desired modus-vivendi is predominantly a matter of reflexivity and not a habitual act. The MRs in this study were also observed to practice a *provisional-reflexive-mode* of autonomous-reflexivity; for example in attaining occupational positions they thought would provide outlets for sustaining value-commitments. The inherent *critical* and *subversive* stance towards the world around them, suggests that MRs generate extraordinary levels of reflexive-action. Through constant social-critique they generate creative and innovative reflexive-

strategies and solutions within both social and occupational spheres, leading to social-transformation and -reorientation (Archer, 2007*).*

This analysis of the three dominant reflexive modalities, thus, reveals that members of this society are increasingly expected to be reflexive rather than operating habitually. The *field* in which contemporary Sri Lankan agents operate is far more dynamic than the one that their ancestors once occupied, displacing the opportunities of habituation those dynasties experienced. Even those individuals who (in)voluntarily absorb the traditional way of life find it increasingly difficult to operate habitually. Therefore, habitus is becoming increasingly irrelevant in explaining social-action even within the most rural social-contexts. The explanations of the incongruity between dispositions and changed (and changing) contexts, cannot be simply limited to a *reflexive-habitus*. While many biographies provide evidence for conscious attempts to gain new identities, even sustaining birth-ascribed identities now appears to be reflexively challenging. Hence, Sweetman's (2003:533) argument that 'Bourdieu's concept of habitus… suggests that identities may be less amenable to reflexive intervention' is untenable. Instead, this paper demonstrates that even the aim of a precise replication of a particular social-context, which is mostly the aim for all CRs, is an extremely reflexive-activity. Thus, Bourdieu's assumption that habitus and field act as depositories of past practices appears less important in the case of contemporary Sri Lankans.

By using perhaps, the largest empirical study conducted so far on habitus and reflexivity, this paper, thus, answers the question as to whether habitus still plays a central role in the determination of social-action within a social-context (Sri Lanka), labelled as *traditional*. Sri Lankan society is rapidly shifting, absorbing the globalised changes occurring in its wider environment and this 'swift change renders habitual guidelines to action of decreasing

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relevance or positively misleading' (Archer, 2010a:284). Contextual-discontinuity activates a range of constraints for migrant agents crossing over to new occupational and social-contexts generating incongruity between *old* habitus and *new* habitat. Dispositions are no longer able to guide these agents through new challenges, in the absence of stable contexts to produce a new habitus. Therefore, this paper proposes that any discussion of postcolonial contexts such as Sri Lanka, must incorporate agential-reflexivity and avoid over-emphasis on *the social*.

This study reassigns the missing voice to the *subaltern* and argues that they are active reflexive beings who do not operate in a pre-reflexive rule-like manner nor do they live anymore in societies that are isolated from modernity. Even the exact reproduction of a previously existing social-context, increasingly demands high-levels of reflexive-engagement (Archer, 2012). Thus, based on a morphogenetic position, this study dismisses habitus for failing to be a reliable approach to understand 21st century social dynamics.

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[i] Kingdom of *Kandy* (Central and Eastern regions of the country) remained an independent monarchy founded in 15th century and continued until early 19th century, which was annexed to the British Empire in 1815.

[ii] The Temple-of the-Tooth, locally known as *Dalada Maligawa*, was the last palace of the *Kandyan-kingdom*, where a Tooth-Relic of the Lord Buddha is kept to-date and considered as the most superior Buddhist temple in the country. The feudal services offered to the kings are continued by the families living in feudal villages belonging to different castes, as a symbol of devotion to the Tooth-Relic.