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Redescribing Agency through Sport and Ritual: Considering an Alternative Approach

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REDESCRIBING AGENCY THROUGH SPORT AND RITUAL: CONSIDERING AN

TERNATIVE APPROACH

by

BETHANIE HARSH

Under the Direction of Molly Bassett

ABSTRACT

This project exposes the problems with the dominant conception of agency in secular liberal discourse. The main critique is that the dominant conception of agency tends to attribute value to certain aspects of action that are not necessarily the most telling or valuable in terms of what constitutes agency. I use Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* to aid in this critique. Her project uses the Muslim rituals performed by women of the mosque movement in Egypt to demonstrate the need for a more nuanced conception of agency in academics. I use CLR James' *Beyond a Boundary* to support the approach offered by Mahmood and demonstrate the applicability of such an approach outside of typical considerations of "ritual". In this case, the approach is applied to cricket.

INDEX WORDS: Agency, Liberal discourse, Saba Mahmood, Ritual, CLR James, Sport and academia

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TERNATIVE APPROACH

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

To my daughter

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out to critique the current discourse on human agency and the implications of it when conceiving of ethics and human action. More specifically, I use Saba Mahmood's project on agency for its discussion of specific religious ritual to expose what it can teach us about the topic of agency and how we think about it, talk about it (the language we use), and the ethical and political implications that may stem from our views on agency. I argue that Mahmood's approach is a useful alternative to the typical manner in which discourse on agency takes place. I support this claim by using CLR James' book *Beyond a Boundary* to show how Mahmood's approach can be used to interpret certain human actions like those James' book. More importantly, I show that Mahmood's approach provides a richer and more complex understanding of these actions than the common approach of the discourse. As a result, my project elaborates and complicates one typical description of religious ritual (the liberal feminist approach as described by Mahmood) by seeing how her approach works in circumstances like those in CLR James' book about cricket in colonial Trinidad, its players, and its influence on James' life as a whole.

The implications of this project aim to contribute to not only liberal feminist discourse on agency (as put forward by Mahmood), but also to show how Mahmood's observations and assertions are relevant to other topics and areas of human actions such as sport. I will explicitly discuss these implications more in the conclusion and bring in relevant discussions of what this means in discussing virtue, ethics, and what it means to act "politically".

I use Saba Mahmood's anthropological work on the women's mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt to enter into this discussion and use her assertions on this topic as the foundation for my

project. I specifically use her book *Politics of Piety* to aid in my discussion of these categories. In this project, she describes the religious rituals of women participating in the mosque movement. Based on those interactions and descriptions of the ritual, she argues that the secular liberal approach to conceiving of agency misunderstands what is *really* at work in the ritual actions of these women. Along with this, she exposes the assumptions upon which this secular liberal foundation lies and, in turn, provides ground for questioning the prescriptions that rely on such assumptions and offers suggestions for how this discussion may and should take place. I use Mahmood's suggestions in her and apply them to parts of CLR James' book *Beyond a Boundary* in order to demonstrate the usefulness of the approach to agency she develops. In turn, my work with James demonstrates how Mahmood's main points are relevant outside of religious contexts and therefore have larger implications for general human action.

I begin by laying the foundation of both Mahmood's and James' books for the rest of the discussion. I then explain how the typical or dominant approach to agency seemingly misses key aspects of, or at least useful aspects of, human action. The primary reason it misses these aspects stems from conceiving of agency solely in terms of resistance or acceptance of social norms. Mahmood builds this critique which I add to and support by using examples from James' book. Then, using some of Mahmood's suggestions along with my own, I move into a discussion of what a conception of agency *should* look like and account for. Then I point to the implications that this "new" conception of agency has for discourse on ethics and consider what it means to act "politically" in society.

Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* begins by critiquing the typical liberal feminist approach to studying or conceiving of agency.[1] She claims that the liberal feminist conception of agency

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[1] Mahmood, Saba (2005). *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

classifies an act as an act of freedom or agency if it resists a social norm or prescription. This limits the study of action to only recognizing those human actions that either resist or accept social norms. Furthermore, the implications of such a conception carry over to ethical and political prescriptions and therefore need to be reconsidered.

The liberal feminist approach, as critiqued by Mahmood, leaves little room for conceiving of actions that accept social practices or norms in any other way than viewing the actor as a socialized or oppressed actor of society. Mahmood claims that this binary categorization of action misses key aspects of human action that do not necessarily fall neatly into this liberal framework. In other words, these liberal conceptions of ritual unduly categorize the ritual of Muslim women in Egypt as representative of the extent by which women are dominated in a patriarchal and masculine society. For Mahmood, this conception of ritual overlooks or fails to leave room for the way in which these women perform ritual with personal motivations, efforts, and tendencies that tell a deeper story than typical liberal approaches would tell.[2] In addition, it overlooks their performance of these rituals as lacking ethical or political meaning in society which Mahmood shows as mistaken.

Throughout my project I reference this "secular liberal" approach and want to spend some time clarifying why I refer to it as such and what specifically is at stake when discussing it. Generally, with "liberalism" I'm referring to the current dominant discourse when it comes to academia. Liberalism and the assumptions that come along with it tread deeper than one should be comfortable with. It seems that the very spirit of academia should be to expose, question, and

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[2] The critique against Mahmood here is that by employing such value in ritual, she fails to escape the very discourse she is criticizing. The fact that a ritual needs to account for something, or arguing that it *is* meaningful (just in a different way), still subscribes to the same liberal value system and, in turn, its potential oppressive repercussions. Regardless, I value Mahmood's critique that liberal discourse *tend* toward approaching social practices in a certain way that doesn't tell the whole story. Whether it is possible to tell the whole story is irrelevant and the holes in each approach/theory need to be pointed out and filled. Mahmood provides a useful start to doing this and that is what I use her approach for.

prevent the development of universal assumptions. Mahmood specifies some of the liberal assumptions we should be uncomfortable with: the belief that all humans have an innate desire for freedom, that all humans seek to or do assert their autonomy when provided the opportunity, and that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms rather than those that may challenge them (Mahmood 5). I expand more on *why* these are false assumptions below.

Specifically, "secular" liberalism adds its own set of assumptions to the discourse. Mahmood's project connects the authority of a particular discourse to its "model of sociability" or the actions it prescribes for its subjects. For example, a secular theory or discourse may use nationalist or other political theories to inform its model of sociability while a religious one will look to religious ethics and values to inform these models of sociability. By "model of sociability" Mahmood is generally referring to how a particular discourse prescribes its subjects to carry themselves and to act both privately and publicly (Mahmood 73). Understanding the thrust of these models of sociability remains important for connecting the actions discussed by both Mahmood (religious rituals) and myself (examples from James' book) to ethics and politics. Mahmood writes:

> As theorists of the public sphere have come to recognize, regulation of such quotidian practices is of eminent political concern because they play a crucial role in shaping the civic and public sensibilities essential to the consolidation of a secular-liberal polity. The elaboration of the secular-liberal project in the Middle East has entailed a profound alteration in, and reorganization of, people's ethical and aesthetic sensibilities, life choices, and manner of public and personal conduct- not to mention a complete transformation of legal, educational, and political institutions. (Mahmood 73-74)

The secular liberal discourse does not merely affect public life, then, it also requires changes in thought and approach to personal aspects of one's life. While this may not be an explicit aim of the secular-liberal approach, it is an inevitable result as Mahmood exposes in her project and description of the experience of the mosque movement participants.

Mahmood specifically frames her work to speak to liberal feminists while I use her approach to speak to secular liberalism more generally. By "secular-liberal" approach, I mean the popular philosophical tradition which assumes that all people have innate desires for freedom and independence. Furthermore, this "secular" discourse divides human social life (or maintains that it should be divided) into separate secular and religious categories. Secular and religious practices are treated separately and given specific arenas for which they are respectively appropriate. I, like Mahmood, speak about these traditions generally rather than engaging too much with particular aspects of it. Although these philosophical traditions have different strands and contentions, they are generally founded upon a familiar and consistent principle. For the feminist liberals that Mahmood discusses she writes: "Despite the many strands and differences within feminism, what accords the feminist tradition an analytical and political coherence is the premise that where society is structured to serve male interests, the result will be either neglect, or direct suppression, of women's concerns" (Mahmood 10).[3] This is the feminist assumption that Mahmood engages with. Similarly, my project and her project both engage with the liberal assumption that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom. The problem with such an assumption is when human action that asserts this freedom by resisting particular norms or virtues is favored in discourse.

Before digging into the main theoretical issues at hand, I want to give a brief introduction into Mahmood's project on the women's mosque movement in Cairo. Mahmood uses the women's mosque movement to discuss issues of agency and politics because of the "challenges" it poses to the liberal approach. The mosque movement is part of the larger Islamic revival movement in Egypt. The Islamic revival movement, especially after September 11, 2001 was never

[3] In her footnote to this passage she points the reader to Hartsock 1983, MacKinnon 1989, and Collier and Yanagisako 1989.

popular with liberals because of its rejection of "liberal values" and lack of concern with women's freedom (Mahmood 1). Under the liberal conception of agency, women's participation in the Islamist movement is characterized as representative of women being un-awakened to their true desire to be freed from what is perceived to be an oppressive system.

Mahmood wants to challenge the inclination of liberal feminists to characterize participation in such a movement as opposing their *true* will or desires. It seems evident that the liberal conception lacks the ability to account for what's *really* going on in this movement if "modern" women continue to participate in it and the "modern" world. Mahmood maintains that oversight should be enough to motivate liberal feminists to reconceive of agency and political action, hence her critique in this work. She exposes the fact that liberal conceptions of self, moral agency and politics leave little room for conceiving of these women's actions in any way other than as oppressed or un-enlightened. After exposing this, Mahmood wants to examine and show what forms of agency are *really* at work in the actions of these women since it does not seem to be the case that they are unenlightened and oppressed individuals.

The Islamic Revival movement refers to the efforts behind an increased religious sensibility in Muslim societies represented by mosques and other public displays of religiosity such as the wearing of the veil by women and religious public literature (Mahmood 3). The women's mosque movement, specifically, offers religious lessons for women.

The women that Mahmood worked with aim to live the value of piety in every aspect of their lives: "The women I worked with described the condition of piety as the quality of "being close to God": a manner of being and acting that suffuses all of one's acts, both religious and worldly in character…The attitude with which these acts are performed is as important as their prescribed form; sincerity, humility, and feelings of virtuous fear and awe are all emotions by

which excellence and virtuosity in piety are measured and marked" (Mahmood 123). This connection between acts and the "manner of being" accompanying them is an important aspect of my project. The act itself is not the key, but considering how it is done and with what emotions are key aspects to consider that liberal feminist approach overlooks.

Mahmood began her work in 1995, a time when these religious lessons for women were prevalent in most neighborhoods. Mahmood writes: "According to the participants, the mosque movement had emerged in response to the perception that religious knowledge, as a means of organizing daily conduct had become increasingly marginalized under modern structures of secular governance" (Mahmood 4). The aim of the mosque movement is to avoid or prevent further secularization of society as it faces increased pressure to do so from secular liberal society.

Although the women's mosque movement focuses on piety, the movement does not suggest that its participants withdraw from participating in society. Rather, the movement encourages and calls for transforming all aspects of one's life especially in the social and public sphere (think of the "models of sociability" mentioned above). Mahmood highlights the transformations the women of the mosque movement have in fact made in the public sphere, especially in terms of styles of dress, appropriateness of media and entertainment, household dynamics, and terms or styles of public debate (Mahmood 4). Indeed the movement is a public one, but Mahmood's focus lies even deeper. She uses this movement to expose and complicate normative liberal assumptions like the belief that all humans have an innate desire for freedom, that all humans seek to or do assert their autonomy when provided the opportunity, and that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms rather than those that may challenge them (Mahmood 5).

Mahmood, more broadly, is making suggestions about the way that academic discourse as a whole takes place and seems to be predicated on these secular liberal assumptions and the categories that uphold them. By exposing these assumptions in this particular study, one can see parallels and overlays with other disciplines and stories such as I do with James' work.

In his book *Beyond a Boundary*, CLR James tells a story in which cricket and colonialism in West Trinidad play out. Although it may appear as an autobiography, James is clear that it is actually an "autobiographical framework" he employs in order to account for the way in which factual events interacted with the development of ideas in a sequential order. It is especially important to note that James largely wrote explicitly political literature as a known socialist but I chose to use his autobiography for the project at hand. I use *Beyond a Boundary* because it is useful in showing how a simple everyday life may turn into an explicitly "political" endeavor.

I use James' illustration of particular cricket players, their habits, and the connection he sees of them to his deeper thoughts and feelings. My discussion of James' book demonstrates first, that the secular liberal approach to agency does not attribute agency to the meaningful aspects of the events or people described by James. Second, that Mahmood's suggested approach to agency maps on onto the events and people in James' story more satisfactorily.

One of the most telling parts of the book that my reader should be mindful of is when James describes one of two trademarks to his life.[4] In this part, James notes that it is interesting the way in which not only a particular person, but a stroke of a bat can heavily mark one's life.[5]

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[4] I spend a good deal of time here with direct quotations but I feel that it is the words of James' description early on in the book that speak most clearly to my point. It is in these pages and James' words that the reader experiences how moving cricket, even one play of cricket, was for James at a young age. Yes, James is describing how he felt as a spectator but it is these moments that moved him to play and what the motivations of his expectations for cricket were.

[5] I will discuss that this is especially significant because generally speaking, people think of people or events as influential or marking their lives. While a batter's swing may be conceived of in certain term as an event this is usually only thought of as a part to a larger event (a particular play in a world series game, etc), James is special (like

While secular liberal theorists may attribute this influence to social factors, I argue that James'

personal description of this batter's stroke and how/why it came to be especially meaningful

shows that these theorists do not account for all that is present in James' experience, or more

simply that they account for the *less* meaningful aspects (in terms of what constitutes agency) of

the action than Mahmood's conception of agency.

Growing up, James' house backed up to a cricket field so he was able to watch cricket

matches whenever he felt inclined. The stroke that he discusses is made by a Trinidadian man

named Arthur Jones. James writes:

> I have watched county cricket for weeks on end and seen whole Test matches without seeing one cut such as Jones used to make, and for years whenever I saw one I murmured to myself, 'Arthur Jones!' The crowd was waiting for it, I at my window was waiting, and as soon as I began to play seriously I learnt that Arthur was waiting for it too. When the ball hit down outside the off-stump (and now, I think, even when it was straight) Jones lifted himself to his height, up went his bat and he brought it down across the ball as a woodsman puts his axe to tree. (James 5)

This description of a play is more detailed than a mere re-telling of what happened: it actually

provides insight about what made a swing more meaningful than the result, which is merely

noted rather than the center of the account. The swing is described in detail because the detail of

it is itself telling/special. At the time James experienced this swing, he was unsure of why it was

so exciting for him. Mahmood points out similarly that for the women of the mosque movement,

the importance of the ritual does not lie in whether or not they performed the ritual, but *how* they

performed the ritual and what was put into it.

Later, in school as a teen, James came across a passage about a cricketer (Beldham) that

helped him understand why this experience with Jones' swing was so exciting. Here is the pas-

sage:

> It was a study for Phidias to see Beldham rise to strike; the grandeur of the attitude, the settled composure of the look, the piercing lightning of the eye, the rapid glances of the bat, were electrical. Men's hearts

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Mahmood) for finding the play itself meaningful despite the larger field (the swing was not moving because it won the world series, Jones may have even gotten 'out' on this swing but it was, or, *is* beautiful regardless.

throbbed within them, their cheeks turned pale and red. Michael Angelo should have painted him. (James 5)

For James, this passage helped capture what was going on when he experienced Arthur Jones' cut. The batter's physical positioning, attitude, and power all combined with perfect timing stimulated this moment and the feelings it evoked in the spectators[6].

For James, his experience of Jones' cut was purely enjoyable in and for itself (he mentions that literature was the same way, while it started as a chore it became enjoyable in itself). In general, James' work demonstrates what can be missed by looking at such an instance and merely accounting for the "end" or result of the play (as many discussions of sport often do). For James, Jones was, fundamentally, a natural and beautiful cutter. James does not give the reader any external story or reasoning behind his valuing of Jones' cut, other than the way it was executed and the way it made him feel. I maintain that this contrasts the way in which a secular liberal approach would account for Jones' swing or James' appreciation of it. In my next section, I give a detailed account of the binary that the secular liberal approach functions with: that of resistance or acceptance of a social norm. As a result, what becomes important is not necessarily *how* one participates in an action but rather *if* one participates in the particular action or not.

I use James' book *Beyond a Boundary* as a tool to digest Mahmood's work but also to bring her work to life outside explicitly religious contexts. I do this because it seems to be at the very heart of what she is pushing scholars to do. By applying her approach or view of certain religious rituals and what they mean for agency to seemingly non-religious human actions such

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[6] I may face some resistance when making parallels of this to Mahmood's study because this example discusses the person performing the action and its influence on others whereas Mahmood's seems strictly personal with the practitioners of the mosque movement But, I am pointing to something larger in James' book. This part is his first point being moved by cricket that motivates him to practice cricket and experience all that it invokes to his life politically.

as cricket, I am thereby assisting in her project to help blur the sometimes impenetrable categories of liberal discourse and its assumptions. James' book is especially useful because of his writing style, his story, and the context in which the story takes place.

James' book utilizes what he terms an "autobiographical framework" and begins by recounting his encounters with cricket and its local "characters" in the town of Trinidad he grew up in. James gives the reader detail about his experience with growing up close to the sport of cricket during colonial times when dark skinned Trinidadian players did not have the same options or opportunities as whites. In addition, James gives the reader insight into his experience going to school in Trinidad and the accompanying tensions of being a native Trinidadian at a colonial school trying to uphold expectations of breaking the boundaries set by racism in Trinidad at this time. James parallels this experience by describing some of the great cricket players he encountered. I use these parts of the book to demonstrate the connections James draws between the players both on and off the field. Finally, I use James' description of his time in England writing and developing his nationalist tendencies for Trinidad.

The specific aspects of James I use are his descriptive approach of his experiences as a child. In the following section I spend time explaining what I mean by his ambivalence toward certain actors or experiences in his life. My point in using these examples is relatively simple: to show that sometimes events in one's life need not have a larger or deeper meaning thrust upon them. Human action and experience can, as James point to, can be influential because of the person it partakes upon. This is not to say that the society and its institutions had nothing to do with making these events meaningful, but rather, this is not where the focus should be (as liberal discourse typically recommends).

In the second section I use James' description of cricket players to demonstrate that a great cricket player, as seen by viewers of the game or play, is not simply embodying a physical script predetermined by a coach or some other source. Rather, to get to the point of being a great player or making great plays requires training of both one's physical and mental "game". I relate this to Mahmood's observations of ritual in the mosque movement participants and their call to make certain rituals their own and manifest in their everyday demeanor, volitions, etc.

Although Mahmood is an anthropologist and James's *Beyond a Boundary*, on the surface, is meant to be a book on cricket, my project has direct implications for religious studies general- ly and the study of ritual more specifically. The suggestions made about liberal discourse in this project parallel a similar discussion taking place in ritual studies, led by Catherine Bell in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Bell's work, similar in nature to Mahmood's project, leads a critical analysis of the way ritual is studied and the sense in which it is used. She not only reveals the problems with the way ritual is typically discussed, but points to an approach for studying ritual that is "more disclosing of the strategies by which ritualized activities do what they do" (Bell 4). My project speaks directly to Bell's in the sense that I am more interested in the actual work the actions at hand *do* rather than what they may or may not represent according to certain dis- courses or traditions (like secular liberalism). In turn, all three projects (Mahmood, Bell, and mine) are revealing something about secular liberal discourse on the relevant topics at hand.[7]

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[7] Mahmood references Bell's same work for its discussion of the common distinction made between symbolic and instrumental practices, particularly when it comes to looking at what may be conceived as actions of "resistance". Like Mahmood, Bell exposes what is problematic about this approach. My project, in discussing actions in James that wouldn't typically be considered "religious" helps put the arguments made by Bell into practice. I do not ex- pand on Bell's theoretical project in mine because I feel that it is more practical to actually put it to practice and point to it, rather than talk about it. After all, isn't this exactly in the spirit of her project? (I focus on what the project *does* rather than what it represents).

2   A Critique of Conceiving of Agency Solely in terms of Resistance

In this section I form my main criticism of the way agency is typically treated in liberal discourse: agency should not solely be recognized in terms of freedom/resistance or acceptance of social norms. Liberal feminist discourses that only recognize actions of resistance as demonstrative of agency (and those of acceptance as lacking agency) miss the "big picture" or main point and fail to account for actions that are not necessarily "resistant" to society. Further, those actions that they do attribute agency to are for the wrong reasons. In this section, I'm interested in discussing Mahmood's claim that agency is not limited or necessarily characterized by resistance and will use examples from James' book to support her assertions. The next section I expand on what, then, can and does constitute agency.

I argue that a responsible characterization and approach to agency in academic discourse should account for various forms of agency characterized by different motivations (whether physical, emotional, rational, etc.) stemming from a variety of traditions, cultures, and contexts. The failure to account for these various forms of agency leads to misplaced judgments and prescriptions (a connection made explicit by Mahmood). Moreover, an academic cannot claim to be locating and studying agency if the different modes from which agency is possible are not understood or accounted for.

I use Mahmood's criticism of the liberal feminist approach to agency to help articulate why the "resistance/acceptance" approach to agency is problematic. Her main criticism of typical liberal discourse is that the liberal concept of agency fails to account for those actions that women who participate in the mosque movement in Cairo partake in. More specifically, liberal feminist discourses assume that educated or "freed" women would resist typical Muslim practices like veiling and, given the option, would oppose the patriarchal structure of Islam. However,

the women's mosque movement in Cairo is an example of the exact opposite. Women of the mosque movement are actively reviving the traditional practices of their religion.

Mahmood's project aims to show how or why what these women's actions are not merely a sign of the women being heavily indoctrinated by an outmoded structure of society, but that the practices of these women are demonstrative of a form of agency that is not accounted for (or at least mischaracterized) by liberal feminist discourse. Mahmood illuminates the shortcomings of this liberal feminist approach and therefore challenges the liberal view of what makes a particular life fulfilling and also challenges the liberal concept of what constitutes agency.

I generally agree with Mahmood's critique of secular liberal discourse and its tendency to favor particular actions that seem to represent resistance to dominant social norms. I argue that discussions of agency should account for the variety of ways in which humans perform certain actions. Secular liberal discourse came to favor acts of resistance because of liberalism's normative aims and assumptions. However, secular liberal discourse is merely one discourse and should not be the sole facilitator on deciding which acts constitute forms of agency and those that do not. Actions like those of the women of the mosque movement and those in James are good examples of why, as I explain below.

Upon first reading Mahmood, I was skeptical that Mahmood could "liberate" the term "agency" from its deep secular liberal implications. The term "agency" itself seems to have some fundamental connection to these normative concerns of secular liberalism (that one *should* express agency of some form because that is what it is to be human, etc.). It seems that regardless of her approach she will be trapped by some discussion of free will/autonomy or demonstrating that the women are "resisting" westernization. However, I support the fact that Mahmood is not trying to completely rid the discourse of discussion of freedom and resistance but rather she

is exposing the shortcomings of a discourse that *only* recognize acts of freedom or resistance as "true" manifestations of agency. It is not the case that the term "agency" itself is flawed, but its use that is. To abandon the term would mean to abandon the very issues at hand (with secular liberal discourse) that need to be addressed. The main concern in this section is the understanding that by revealing that the discourse is incomplete, it therefore needs improvement or reconsidering.

In most liberal discourses, agency is discussed in terms of freedom or free will (Mahmood 7). In other words, one is said to have agency when acting autonomously. The underlying assumption made by these discourses is that agency only *really* exists where there is freedom or when someone acts with free will against a particular social norm. Mahmood expands on this approach to agency: "Agency, in this form of analysis, is understood as the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective). Thus the humanist desire for autonomy and self-expression constitutes the substrate, the slumbering ember that can spark to flame in the form of an act of resistance when conditions permit" (Mahmood 8). In these terms, the desire for freedom appears to be innate to all humans. Mahmood explains and I agree that this desire becomes assumed and taken for granted when studying human action. One of the problems with this assumption is that it may lead directly to progressive politics which automatically blinds academics to seeing any form of being or action other than in terms of resistance or acceptance of norms. Such a limited view is irresponsible academics.

Treating freedom as a universal desire is problematic for several reasons. Consider the dense philosophical history discussing freedom and what it means to be "free" or act "freely". Even though liberalism subscribes to a particular notion of freedom (in terms of autonomous

will), it still cannot and should not be assumed to be universal for the same reason that liberalism cannot be assumed as the discourse by which all of academia should take place. Second, "freedom" in the secular liberal sense that it is typically discussed is not a universal desire and only became thought of as such relatively recently, after many years of being assumed by western liberal academics.

Mahmood expounds on why this assumption is problematic:

> This positing of women's agency as consubstantial with resistance to relations of domination, and the concomitant naturalization of freedom as a social ideal, are not simply analytical oversights on the part of feminist authors. Rather, I would argue that their assumptions reflect a deeper tension within feminism attributable to its dual character as both an *analytical* and a *politically prescriptive* project. (Mahmood 10)

In other words, the problem with this approach (approaching freedom as the end-all, be-all) remains dangerous because it is self-fulfilling: it is asserted and assumed as part of its role in prescribing political suggestions. Secular liberalism is not merely a descriptive project, rather it is descriptive and prescriptive. So, instead of simply saying "all people desire freedom", liberalism says "all people desire freedom and any institution that prevents it *should* be dismantled or resisted" and therefore favors those actions that do so and locating agency in such actions. Part of Mahmood's project exposes the assumption that all people desire freedom in the liberal sense. I agree with her argument here and add that it is not necessarily the case that all people lack the desire for freedom, but rather the mistake is made when it is assumed that all people desire freedom. Furthermore, there are many different ways of understanding human actions other than in terms of whether or not they represent freedom or a desire for freedom.

Mahmood explains that the dual characteristic of feminism (as analytical *and* politically prescriptive) drives feminist projects not only to maintain freedom as the normative aim but also to scrutinize anything that appears to obstruct or limit women's freedom. Treating freedom as the goal or aim of prescriptive projects forces all analysis to be viewed in terms of whether it

does in fact constitute a free act or not. If it does not, the prescription is easy: get rid of it or op-

pose it. Those actors who fail to do so are said to be socialized or oppressed and have yet to real-

ize their autonomous will or true desires.

Applying this method to the actions of the participants of the mosque movement is prob-

lematic because their acts seem to simply accept certain traditional religious norms that threaten

or obstruct their freedom to act as in modern society. It seems that Mahmood's project calls fe-

minists to first focus on their descriptive project and then let the political prescriptions arise on

their own. I agree with this assertion and aim to show how such a project may take place (Mah-

mood's project is also an example). James' book, for example, demonstrates how the approach

offered by Mahmood helps to locate agency in very particular aspects of the characters and

events in James' story. The new "story" offered by Mahmood's approach is much richer than

categorizing cricket as an institutionalized norm by which members of society become socia-

lized. Mahmood herself employs the approach of observing then prescribing: she shows how

women in Cairo embody agency. Only after understanding this do the prescriptions arise or na-

turally manifest themselves.[8] I will discuss these "prescriptions" in later sections but one pre-

scriptive result is Mahmood's criticism of feminist discourse.

Looking at the topic of agency in academic discourse, there are some projects that seem

to get *closer* to the mark in terms of what should be considered. One of those approaches is the

poststructural approach. There are several poststructural approaches to the topic of agency.

Here, I focus on those who criticize the liberal notion of autonomy (and the way it has become

naturalized in discourses on gender) (Mahmood 13). While there are different strands of

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[8] This is related to her discussion of what it means to act "politically" which I discuss in the next section. The main point is that even though the acts of these women are not "political" in the way that nationalists would prescribe or call for, they are political in the way that they successfully transform society or at least bring the women into the social sphere. Think back to the "models of sociability" discussed in the introduction.

poststructuralism, the most relevant to this project attempt to "redefine autonomy so as to capture the emotional, embodied, and socially embedded character of people, particularly of women" (Mahmood 13). Other poststructuralists aim at challenging the way rational thought is given so much credence in finding the "autonomous self" showing how exclusive this approach is to other bodily functions. I will spend more time on the specifics of these poststructuralists in the next section; they are useful primarily for understanding the complexity behind what makes up a person or personhood. The poststructuralists expose the "autonomous self" and the false assumptions it relies on, allowing the academic greater flexibility in understanding what, in fact does, make up human agency.

Mahmood argues, and I agree, that while these poststructuralists also criticize the treatment of the autonomous will as the normative liberated self, they still seem to characterize agency in relation to whether a social norm is subverted to or resignified. As a result, agency still fails to escape being represented in terms of resistance or acceptance. For this reason, Mahmood wants to push poststructuralists a bit further: "In other words, I will argue that the normative political subject of poststructuralist feminist theory often remains a liberatory one, whose agency is conceptualized on the binary model of subordination and subversion" (Mahmood 14). The main issue with this model is that those human actions that are not necessarily ones of repression or resistance remain to be misconceived of and miscategorized. This is why Mahmood calls for the notion of agency to be separated from progressive politics. In examples from James, I show how to conceive of agency, one need not be quick to apply a larger conclusion or draw normative political prescription from it.

The first step in getting away from a liberatory notion of agency is to realize that the desire for freedom from, or subversion of, norms is not an innate desire and only became viewed as

such relatively recently (Mahmood 14). One may then ask how human action should be studied or treated. This is where I find Mahmood's project particularly useful. Mahmood writes:

> Put simply, my point is this: if the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific…then the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity…In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms. (Mahmood 15)

Here, Mahmood is pointing out that the call to contextualize human action points to the very fact that contextualization is meaningful simply because the subject and findings are different with each endeavor. Human action isn't necessarily meaningful because it is resistant to tradition or custom unless you strictly analyze it from a lens that only recognizes those actions. Actions may be meaningful because they stem from or are result of any number of situations or modes (bodily, emotional, rational, etc.), and whether they are resistant to or accept particular norms is irrelevant (or at least not the most important aspect of the action). I draw on these observations when looking at James' work.

I argue that by recognizing the transparency of the assumptions made by liberal discourses academics, specifically feminists, should be pushed to be more responsible in their discourse and the way that human actions are categorized or treated. One of the goals of feminists is to explain what is going on in society (the descriptive part), too often this part fails when actions are miscategorized or overseen because they don't fall into the limited categories offered by the authors.

2.1 Support from James' *Beyond a Boundary* on critiquing the liberal notion of agency

I want to use certain parts of James' book to show why a liberatory notion of agency attributes agency to the wrong aspects of James' story, or at least miscategorizes them. This provides greater and broader support for Mahmood's assertions regarding agency and liberal discourses that I laid out above. In addition, the examples in James bring the conversation to broader topics of human action. In this section, I begin by showing how the liberal approach to agency does not fit (or mistreats) these parts of his life. My point is simply that this exposes a weakness in liberal discourse that demonstrates the need to come up with a more nuanced approach and categorization of agency.

James' book is an interesting place to go for examples on this topic. On the surface, he appears to be the perfect embodiment of showing that a resistance/acceptance conception of agency *can* account for one's life story. After all, he grew up in colonial Trinidad but became a nationalist figure for independence. However, James actually lays out his story in very different terms. I will begin by describing key parts of James' book that do not fall into the category of resistance or liberation. In the next section, I explain (in congruence with the terms Mahmood uses) how these parts of James' story help us construct a new way of approaching agency.

I find the first half of James' book particularly useful for the category of agency because of the unique approach he takes to describing his upbringing, the way he felt about it at the time, and how it played (or failed to) into his future. This "upbringing" I refer to focuses on the people in his life, where he lived, and his understanding of the way things were. These are all things that seem like they should be considered as part of one's "agency". I am drawn to what seems to be naturalness or honest approach to what some may call his autobiography. James does not force himself to make sense of certain peculiarities that puzzled him; he finds those peculiarities

meaningful as such. He describes someone or an event and comments on it with something along the lines of "this always puzzled me" or "I always really enjoyed this" but he doesn't force the next step of stating why it was so or what this experience directly lead to. This ambivalence seems to point to something interesting about human action prior to it being interpreted outside persons.

In contrast to this ambivalence by James, secular liberal scholars seem very anxious to decide whether a particular action or occurrence is a form of resistance or acceptance. If not, then liberal discourse is quick to attribute an action to the larger social institutions or norms in place. I find examples in James that fit neither of these categories. His ambivalence to certain events exposes two things: first, that one should not necessarily feel forced to apply broader external meaning to an event, and second, that the secular liberal model is lacking and needs to have a more nuanced account of agency in order to account for the "special" feature of events like these in James' story.

There are two primary examples of this "ambivalence" I reference in James' book. At different times, he demonstrates ambivalence toward his own agency and at other times he demonstrates ambivalence toward the agency of others. First, I'll discuss an example of his ambivalence toward his own agency.

James' young obsession with reading and his description of it is particularly interesting. James describes his obsession just as it was: his mother was an avid novel reader (probably from her days in the convent); he read whatever she put down, his father (a teacher) bought him the classics and the occasional magazine with a cricketing story in it. This is where his obsession gets interesting: "When we moved into Port of Spain, the capital, I read two daily papers and on Sundays the green *Sporting Chronicle* and the red *Sporting Opinion*. I made clippings and filed

them. It served no purpose whatever, I had never seen nor heard of anyone doing the like. I

spoke to no one about it and no one spoke to me" (James 17). This candid reflection on his habit

of collecting particular cricket stories is what draws me to James. He gives the reader the raw

experience of his obsession without cause or justification. Once again, I believe this to demon-

strate some aspect of human action that should not be left out of considering agency. This obses-

sion in its "raw" form seems to reveal a crucial aspect of his life. He continues:

> Side by side with this obsession was another-Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. My mother had an old copy with a
> red cover. I had read it when I was about eight, and of all the books that passed through that house this one
> became my Homer and my bible. I read it through from the first page to the last, then started again, read to
> the end and started again. Whenever I finished a new book I turned to my *Vanity Fair*. For years I had no
> notion that it was a classical novel. I read it because I wanted to. So there I was, way out in the West In-
> dies, before I was ten, playing games and running races like other little boys, but almost in secret devoting
> my immense energies to the accumulation of facts and statistics about Grace and Ranjitsinhji, and reading
> *Vanity Fair* on the average once every three months. What drew me to it? I don't know, a phrase which
> will appear often in this book. (James 17)

I find a few aspects of this excerpt useful for my project. First, the way James describes his ob-

session with *Vanity Fair* without providing rationale for the obsession. He simply states it, and

lets it sit there, keeping the reader ready for an explanation as to what drove this obsession or

what it represented (this hunger to know is probably representative of the need to categorize cer-

tain things in certain ways in liberal academia). Second, the fact that he is content in not know-

ing the answer to a lot of the questions he seems to know will come natural to people. This is the

ambivalence I am referring to characteristic of James' story.

I find this aspect of the passage useful for my project because of the way that it denies (or

at the very least questions) recognition of something larger (a social institution or power) at work

here. This is not to say that it is an action that lacks agency; there are plenty of elements at work

here that possibly "drove" James' obsession. Those elements are not necessarily larger than

himself and his desire to read. Sure, it is valuable that he had access to books to discover this ob-

session which is reliant on a number of political/social conditions, but these do not have the same

effect on other people. After the fact, it may be easy for one to claim that what he read may or may not set him up for what comes later, but James never mentions this. Instances or descriptions like this seems to locate the meaningful aspect of action in more mundane or natural parts of action than an external interpretation that invokes how these feelings/actions relate to larger social institutions. I simply want to show that this obsession, a very real and bold part of James' life, is not necessarily an example or embodiment of resistance or acceptance of a norm. It seems unsatisfactory however, for this obsession of his to be overlooked as an example of agency. This exposes one way in which the secular liberal account of agency is lacking.

Another aspect of James' upbringing that demonstrates that the secular liberal conception of agency needs reconstruction is his "dual personality" at his university. James was the youngest, at that point, to be admitted to Queens' Royal College and with that came expectations of great achievements. Once at the university his two obsessions (cricket and literature) were also met with distinctive personalities: "Two people lived in me: one, the rebel against all family and school discipline and order; the other, a Puritan who would have cut off a finger sooner than do anything contrary to the ethics of the game" (James 28). James could not folly on the cricket field, but was on a fast track to losing his scholarship in the classroom.

First, I will expand on the strict code of cricket James upheld. At the university, James was brought up in the English public-school code. This is one aspect that James realized after-the-fact but for my purposes only makes it more interesting. Although the code was meant to be practiced in and out of the classroom, James recognizes that it had little success in the classroom (James 25). Only on the cricket field did he and his classmates really embody this code. There were boys from all different economic backgrounds and ethnicities who came together, not in the classroom, but on the cricket field:

> Yet rapidly we learned to obey the umpire's decision without question, however irrational it was. We learned to play with the team, which meant subordinating your personal inclinations, and even interests, to the good of the whole. We kept a stiff upper lip in that we did not complain about ill-fortune. We did not denounce failures, but 'Well tried' or 'Hard luck' came easily to our lips. We were generous to opponents and congratulated them on victories, even when we knew they did not deserve it. (James 25)

The secular liberal approach to agency may explain this phenomenon as a simple example of acceptance of certain social norms and traditions thrust upon the boys from an early age. It would serve as an example that the boys were not enacting *true* agency on the cricket field, just the norms and practices of the tradition they are being socialized into. James would be considered as not fully realizing his autonomous will.

However, James' portrayal of the dichotomy between the classroom and the cricket field shows something very different than this secular liberal conception. While he may not deny that he did, in fact, come to embody these norms and practices, it is not representative of him lacking agency. The juxtaposition of the cricket field and classroom in James' life is big enough to show that what happened on the cricket field (how he came to embody a particular moral code) is a key part of James' life that should not be rendered insubstantial (or as representative of his "immature" relation to his autonomous will) because it may appear as an "acceptance" of norms rather than a resistance to them. In fact, cricket seems to be the greatest player in the forming of James' agency and therefore should not be discounted simply because it may be categorized as a form of non-resistance on James' part.

In regard to cricket at the university (and it falling outside the classroom), James writes: "To all this I took as a young duck to water. The organizing of boys into elevens, the selection of teams, the keeping of scores, all that I had been doing at second-hand with Grace and Ranjitsinhji and Trumper I now practiced in real life with real people" (James 26). I will discuss this connection to cricket in greater detail in the later sections but I find it important here to under-

stand that from a young age, even before this, James felt connected to cricket and was fascinated even by watching it and hearing about the players from his parents.

On the flip side, he was a rebel against the code in the classroom: "The striking thing was that inside the classrooms the code had little success. Sneaking was taboo, but we lied and cheated without any sense of shame. I know I did" (James 25). Here, James admits that the public school code he was supposed to be socialized into failed in the classroom. This is an instant that secular liberals would easily categorize as a form of agency because it appears to be an example of resistance against a larger social institution or tradition.

I contend that this "rebelliousness" should not be treated strictly in terms of resistance either. James demonstrates that this aspect of his university experience is representative of their experience as a group of "heterogeneous jumble of Trinidad battered and jostled and shaken down into some sort of order" (even though it was not successful in the classroom) (James 25). This is relevant in that even though it may be "resistant" to certain norms, it is not that way because of some sort of autonomous will at work and the more interesting or accurate account comes out when one considers the emotional reasoning behind James' behavior in school. He describes his attitude toward the classroom almost as having no use for it. He read everything that was intended for him to read but on his own clock and with his own agenda. He found that he actually knew more about or had a deeper understanding of the work than the boys who did what "they were supposed to".

James seems to be pointing to some intrinsic aspect of him that drove this rebelliousness, perhaps a unique "spirit" or personality trait not necessarily related to an autonomous will. It seems that he had little patience or time for the formalities of school and preferred to read his

favorite literature (not necessarily "recreational") on his own terms rather than the university's. Once again, a weakness in the secular liberal approach is exposed.

These examples show weaknesses in the secular liberal approach to agency. By strictly conceiving of agency in terms of resistance/acceptance many nuances of human action and life are misconceptualized. As Mahmood hints at, a conception of agency should be as complex as human life that it is aiming to describe.

This critique of the liberal approach to agency (only using terms of resistance/acceptance leads to missing key aspects of human life) also helps understand some of the main concerns I originally had with Mahmood's project. First, as I mentioned in my introduction, it worried me that Mahmood wants to hang onto the term "agency" to describe what is going on in the women's mosque movement. I thought that the safer approach would be to get rid of the terms that appear to be locked up in liberal notions of freedom, autonomy, and resistance. However, by using other examples like those in James' book to show that the current approach to agency is simply lacking, or incomplete, it becomes clear that agency isn't *necessarily* bound up in these secular liberal terms and therefore can successfully be thought of and used without these accompanying entrenchments in secular liberal assumptions.

I specifically want to respond to and critique the tendency of secular liberal discourse to categorize agency in strict terms of resisting social norms and institutions. If agency remains to be favor those actions which resist or act out against social norms, most actions will be categorized as examples of the power that dominant society has over its subjects' actions which reinforce the society's norms and institutions. Similarly, Mahmood wants to cut the cord between agency and the larger assumptions of secular liberalism it is typically tied up with. The institution of secular liberalism and its accompanying values and prescriptions have been assumed for

so long and tread so deep that terms of agency in feminist discourse are just one effect of secular liberalism that needs to be exposed.

I also was not convinced that Mahmood could successfully use secular liberal terms of resistance/acceptance to show that agency is neither of these. Hasn't the liberal approach "worked" for so long because most human action can be conceived of in these terms? To truly get away from them it seems that she would be required to get rid of the terms which lie so deep in the discourse. However, my main point must be rearticulated here. It is not the case that actions *never* represent forms of resistance or acceptance. Rather, I argue that *only* conceiving of agency in terms of resistance or acceptance does not provide a *complete* toolbox for understanding the complexity of human action. Furthermore, the categories implicit in the liberal discourse as it stands are treated with strict boundaries and little room for flexibility. The examples I reference above from James should expose the fact that a system with rigid boundaries and a strict approach to human agency will fail in its attempt to describe what human features are *truly* at work. The point remains somewhat simple: resistance and acceptance are not the only accurate descriptions of agency. To treat them as such would be to miss a much more interesting story that James is telling. This, in itself, shows the need for a more nuanced conception of agency.

3   CONSIDERING OTHER APPROACHES TO AGENCY

Now that I established that agency should not be strictly conceived of in terms of resistance and acceptance I want to consider what describing agency *should* consider. In the previous section I discussed the problems with the dominant secular liberal approach to agency and how it fails to account for what I believe to be embodiments of agency. In this section I discuss how one may approach the discussion and consideration of agency. I use Mahmood's project to set the foundation for this conversation and then use examples from James' work to show how Mahmood's suggestions are helpful.

I begin by laying out some approaches to topics of agency that help point to what I find will be a useful conception of agency. Mahmood gives good and relevant summaries of these approaches that I also use. The main approaches are Michel Foucault's theory of "subjectivation" and Judith Butler's points regarding language and performative actions.

Rather than being conceived of in terms of resistance or acceptance, agency should be discussed in terms of how someone embodies certain norms with particular human capacities. The easiest way to think of this "embodiment" is in terms of subject formation (Mahmood 13). I will expand on what this means and then discuss why I find this suggestion helpful.

The main point is that agency can be demonstrated in the "multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms" (Mahmood 15). In this view, norms are not seen as the oppressive entity to be acted against but a means for embodying one's agency through several different approaches and connections to the norms.

For example, consider the women of the mosque movement that were the focus of Mahmood's study. The mosque movement women live their lives aimed at realizing piety. The practices of these women, such as daily prayer and veiling, serve as great examples of what the vari-

ous ways a norm can be embodied because some of their actions are grounded in Islamic ortho-doxy, others in norms of liberal discourse, some from familial authority, and others in state insti-tutions (Mahmood 15). The practices of these women are neither a reinscription of traditional roles (they have been reconfigured for these women) nor can they be understood strictly in terms of gender equality or resistance to male authority which are the tools that a liberal approach pro-vides us for understanding such acts.

Discussing Butler and Foucault's work is helpful here. I use Mahmood's treatment of Fou-cault to help understand his contribution to understanding what makes up "subject formation" which is clearly connected to the agency I want to be part of the discourse. I use Mahmood's treatment of Judith Butler's work to understand the complexity of performative actions. The ri-tuals performed by the women of the mosque movement and the careful techniques of the play-ers in James' book both have aspects that Butler's "performativity" speaks to.

Foucault's fundamental critique that is relevant here is of the way that power is typically un-derstood: as a static entity thrust upon a pre-existing and static subject. He suggests that it is more accurate to understand power as a relationship that creates a subject and its identity dynam-ically.[9] This requires the realization that people and their "identities" are formulated with every action, relationship, and encounter. One's "agency" is not predetermined nor does it necessarily determine the form that their agency may take, but is simultaneously formed by these actions.

Especially useful here is Foucault's discussion of *subjectivation*. Subjectivation can be thought of as the process by which someone comes to be "who they are". Mahmood summarizes subjectivation: "the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent. Stated otherwise, one may

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[9] Foucault, Michel. 1972 *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Trans. R. Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books & Foucault, Mechel. 1980. Truth and Power. In *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*, ed. And trans, C. Gordon, 109—33. New York: Pantheon Books.

argue that the set of capacities inhering in a subject-that is, the abilities that define her modes of agency-are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the products of those operations" (Mahmood 17). This may sound a bit like the "chicken or the egg" dilemma in terms of agency and power relations. The secular liberal approach to agency seems to assume that humans are, or possess, a fixed identity (or at least an autonomous will) that moves around separate from its surroundings and capable of deciding what and how to interact with and be affected by. Foucault's theory of subjectivation problematizes this approach to agency and relationships by revealing that humans are nothing but those relations and interactions that come to make them "who they are".

In terms of agency then and the conception of agency I want to encourage because it seems to map onto the events in James' book as well views events or actions as forms of subjectivation. So, in each action, one is simultaneously recreating him or herself as a subject. Therefore there is no fixed outcome of the particular event, rather the main things at play are the aspects of himself or herself put into the action. This is where Judith Butler's concept of the "performative" is helpful.

Given this understanding of subject formation, one can see that agency is formed by and executed not only in relations of subordination but rather from and by a myriad of relations. This leads to Mahmood's discussion of Judith Butler. Butler is useful for understanding what then, or how power relations constitute the subject. Rather than focusing on the autonomy of the individual (an entity separate from the social) as most feminists do, Butler begins to examine the conditions that sustain this "contemporary individuality" (Mahmood 18).

Butler specifically focuses on challenging the sex/gender dichotomy that most of feminist debate is based on.[10] Her main argument is that the dichotomy is based upon the assumption that there is a pre-representational sexed body prior to the cultural inscription of gender. In other words, because of the way that gender is deeply practiced and inscribed in norms, gender is necessarily tied up with sex in some form. She takes this criticism a step further by claiming that gender discourse also fails to be strictly representational because it is tied up with what it is referring to. More simply, it seems to be impossible to genuinely speak about gender without invoking all of its baggage with it.

Because of this, Butler focuses on language as a system that produces subjects. This is helpful for my project because of its role in developing what it means for an action to be "performative". I use the "performative" aspect of actions to point to the approach one should have with the actions relevant to agency. Her discussion draws upon the notion of performativity as discussed by Derrida and J.L. Austin. The main point here is that the performative has a reiterative power that allows it to appear as an interior part of the subject and "further consolidate the heterosexual imperative" (Mahmood 19). In other words, when a person performs a norm, they simultaneously portray that norm (along with everything the norm signifies or represents) as an innate part of them and serve as proof of the heterosexual imperative the norms constitute. Mahmood writes: "In contrast to a long tradition of feminist scholarship that treated norms as an external social imposition that constrain the individual, Butler forces us to rethink this external-internal opposition by arguing that social norms are the necessary ground through which the subject is realized and comes to enact her agency" (Mahmood 19). Butler helps challenge the conception of norms that treats them as an external entity which a subject can choose to resist or ac-

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[10] For more on this see: Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex."* New York: Routledge and 1997. *Excitable Speech: A politics of the performative.* New York: Routledge.

cept. The fact remains that this "subject" is already part and a result of the culture these norms constitute and therefore to view every action as either an example of it being resisted or accepted is misplaced.

Butler's suggestions regarding language are also useful for what they expose about the "performative" aspect of actions. Academics are required to partake in a discourse in which language and certain words come to invoke certain meanings and deeper invocations. This was my original concern with Mahmood's decision to seemingly try and reinvent or reconceive of the term "agency" which is muddled up in a history of uses she wants to avoid. However, the focus of her project and my project needs to remain in focus: to provide a broader conception of these terms that exposes the rigid boundaries assumed by liberal discourse.

Butler's theory of the subject as bound up with norms and relationships informs her conception of agency. The stability of norms is reliant on their iteration and the more they are iterated, the more stable they are and likely to be reiterated. Mainly, there are countless reasons that a norm may be iterated other than to stabilize it. Once again, the structure or even existence of the norm is not the primary concern here (this is in opposition to most liberal feminist treatment of norms). Rather, the main point is that the performative aspect of norms or language will obviously be bound up with larger institutions but that is not necessarily what makes them meaningful, nor is the fact of whether the act is an instance of resistance or acceptance. Mahmood helps summarize this point: "To the degree that the stability of social norms is a function of their repeated enactment, agency for Butler is grounded in the essential openness of each iteration and the possibility that it may fail or be reappropriated or resignified for purposes other than the consolidation of norms" (Mahmood 19). Just as each enactment can fail, so can any social forma-

tion or norm, but this remains fairly uninteresting compared to understanding the particular rela-tionships at work in each person's performance of a norm.

While Butler's critique is very useful for exposing the relationship of norms and their ite-rability and deep ties to larger institutions, it needs to be pushed further by abandoning the strict discussion in terms of destabilizing norms. Norms are more complex than what a binary (resis-tance/acceptance) conception can account for. This pushes Mahmood's main argument: that agency should refer to and take into consideration the complexity of norms and the various ways people can relate to and perform them, rather than merely discussing norms in terms of doing or undoing them. Mahmood pushes us to think about and consider the variety of ways norms are "lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated" (Mahmood 23). Recognizing this "variety of forms" pushes a new approach to conceiving of agency that I find helpful in con-ceiving of James' story.

I want to spend some time clarifying why I use the terms "subjectivation" and "performa-tive" as developed by Foucault and Butler, respectively. It seems that the payoff for using tech-nical terms like these stems from the context in which they were developed. First, subjectivation as part of Foucault's discourse is rooted in the same spirit as Mahmood's project: to push or question the typical assumptions of liberal discourse. The term "subjectivation" itself then is tied up with all the questions that Mahmood also wants to pose. Similarly, the term "performative," used by Butler is tied up with her challenges to liberal discourse and the dichotomies it is based on.

The fact that these terms are technical forces the reader to engage with the discourse in which they were originally used. This fact seems to be the case and point for each of these au-thors: that you cannot (even in academia) claim to use a term without invoking the surrounding

discourse or presumptions of those discourses. By using these terms, the reader cannot simply rely on his or her readily available toolbox of vocabulary to understand what the author is referring to. Instead, the reader is forced to re-conceive of his or her toolbox in order to understand what is at stake and being referenced. If Foucault, Butler, and Mahmood only invoked non-technical terms that seem easier to grasp, they would be forced to participate in the very discourse they are trying to rebuild. At some point, technical terms seem necessary to point to the new direction the discourse should be taken.

Now that I have discussed both terms as used by their authors, I want to focus on Mahmood's use of them and how the terms are related because I will then show how they help in conceiving of James' story. Simply stated, the term "subjectivation" as developed by Foucault refers to the way in which one comes to be the subject that he or she *is*. As I explained above in terms of iteration, this is a dynamic process that is constantly in flux. There is no definite or pre-set aspect of a person such as the autonomous will; rather a person at every moment and in every instance or interaction is contributing to subject formation in this process of subjectivation. "Subjectivation" resists the liberal tendency to conceive of subjects as fixed entities. "Performative", as developed by Butler, refers to the way in which one performs or invokes (or does not perform/invoke) social norms. This conception of norms pushes against the typical liberal tendency to conceive of norms as an institution thrust upon its subject to either accept or deny. This performative aspect of norms is useful, not because of what it says about norms being invoked or not but rather because thinking of norms as being performed allows one to begin to understand the variety of ways people may come to relate to norms.

These two terms are related in how they both can be connected to agency to understand it deeper than the liberal discourse suggests. Mahmood utilizes certain aspects of both these terms

to develop her project on conceiving of agency. For Mahmood, both of these technical terms help point to how she wants to conceive of agency. Like Foucault and Butler, Mahmood wants to push against liberal assumptions about agency and these terms help to avoid the discourse she is wary of. Illuminating the relationship between "subjectivation" and "performative" helps to point to what she is trying to do. The two are most obviously related in the sense that a performative action is part of one's subjectivation. In other words, by performing or not performing certain norms one is simultaneously forming themselves as a subject. Below, I use examples from Mahmood's work in Cairo to show how she sees these terms at work. Both seems to be present in what the women of the mosque movement say about Muslim rituals like daily prayer, fasting during Ramadan, and veiling for women. These women are called not simply to partake in such rituals but rather, to make them their own and a part of their everyday being and personality. It is not enough to merely wear a veil, one is called to let the wearing of the veil be part of your personhood and aid in the modest approach one is called to have in all interactions. In doing so, the practitioner is simultaneously performing a norm (both physically and "mentally") and in doing so contributing to her subject formation. With each practice of this, it becomes more natural or inundated in her being or subject.

Mahmood's project focuses on specifically "religious" examples (Muslim rituals) to demonstrate the ways in which the terms "subjectivation" and "performative" help capture what is going on in the women's mosque movement. The key points Mahmood wants to demonstrate are the many ways in which "norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated" (Mahmood 23). She writes: "As I will argue below, this in turn requires that we explore the relationship between the immanent form a normative act takes, the model of subjectivity it presupposes (specific articulations of volition, emotion, reason, and bodily expression), and

the kinds of authority upon which such an act relies" (Mahmood 23). In simpler terms, agency can be made up of or consists at least in part of, how people relate to norms. The modes or ways that one can relate to norms are seemingly endless and this is what drives the call for a more complex system for conceiving of agency. Sure, norms may be resisted or accepted but the more interesting story comes from exploring *how* they are either resisted or accepted. In each act then, some model of subjectivity is at work and thereby being recreated. The focus on virtues in the mosque movement helps to articulate these points, I will now discuss how.

The virtue of female modesty is a key one in the mosque movement. Generally, participants agree that modesty should be sought after. The focus of discussion is how modesty should be enacted and more specifically, whether the donning of the veil is required. Discussing this debate, modesty may be considered the "norm" and the veil to be the bodily "form" it may take. The question lies in whether the "veiled body" is the necessary performative action by which one acquires modesty. Modesty is part of the subjectivation desired by the participants: the aim of one's participation in certain performative actions for a particular subject formation. For those who do not believe the veil to be a necessary component for practicing modesty, they maintain there are other effective forms the embodiment of modesty may take that will still result in the same subjectivation. This is significant because each view necessarily has a different conception of the ways in which norms are practiced.

This observation leads Mahmood to the conclusion that the binary logic (acceptance/resistance) of noting whether norms are done or undone fails to account for particulars in subjectivation and performativity. Mahmood wants to be able to understand persons in terms of their political anatomy which is layered and complex. To understand the complexity of subject formation Mahmood encourages the reader to look at both the moral ethical actions practiced and

further, to understand how these actions contribute to various subject formations (Mahmood 24). In other words, just as there are a variety of ways a norm can be practiced, there are just as many (if not more) subjects formed from those actions.

Generally, I agree with Mahmood that the more interesting and accurate way to talk about and think about agency is by looking at the various ways people inhabit norms. Later, by using examples from James, I demonstrate that it seems to be commonplace in life that what makes a person a person or "subject" (in the sense of "subjectivation") are the particular details about their experience with norms or social values, how they interact with them, what they mean to them (or don't mean to them), etc. The strict favoring of discussing whether the norms are resisted or conceded to attribute the action to perhaps only one or few modes of connectivity to the norm rather than the whole picture. Further, this unfavorable approach further indoctrinates ways of thinking that lead to political prescriptions that are seemingly based on false observations regarding said norms. Prior to going into examples from James, I want to discuss the relation that discourse on agency has to first, ethics and second, politics. Placing agency in terms of action and how one acts has clear parallels to both of these topics and therefore needs to be explored.

3.1   What does this mean for acting "ethically"?

These points regarding action and subject formation raise questions that are rooted in traditional ethical discourse: are only certain subjects capable of being "ethical subjects", is an act only said to be "ethical" under strict performative guidelines? As Foucault and Butler's work was used above to help in the discussion of how people relate to norms, so Kant and Aristotle will be used here to aid in discussing ethics. First, I lay out what seems to be the dominant Kantian approach to ethics that, in this light, seems to have shortcomings.

The Kantian approach to ethics focuses primarily on certain rules for action. Rarely then, are the specifics of a particular action considered. The Kantian approach favors reason over habits, virtue, and things like character formation.[11] This is problematic for several reasons, one of which Mahmood makes explicit: "One consequence of this Kantian conception of ethics is the relative lack of attention paid to the manifest form ethical practices take, and a general demotion of conduct, social demeanor, and etiquettes in our analyses of moral systems" (Mahmood 26). For Kant, an act can only be said to be moral if it is the result of rational thought perhaps *against* one's intuitions or feelings. In this form, ethics becomes more like following a rule: "you are to do *x* in *y* circumstances" rather than an action that is a result of one's *agency* (although surely that would make up *part* of the rational process).

Mahmood suggests, and I support this argument, that the Aristotelian approach to ethics is more helpful than the Kantian approach in conceiving of the complex and variety of forms human agency typically takes. The Aristotelian tradition recognizes that morality is "realized through, and manifest in, outward behavioral forms" (Mahmood 25). These "behavioral forms" can include or stem from any variety of human inclinations, feelings, habits, or volitions. It is

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[11] For more on this critique of humanist ethics generally and Kant specifically see Minson, Jeffrey. 1993. *Questions of Conduct: Sexual harassment, citizenship, government.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

obvious why this approach would be better suited for conceiving of actions that don't fall neatly into the binary of resistance/acceptance, especially those religious practices Mahmood studied. Human actions generally, and how they relate to norms specifically, do not treat every action in terms of a rule (although this could be attributed to actions from the outside), and to assume so misses a much richer understanding of social human relations. Religious practices seem to need a model of agency that accounts for the connection between outward bodily practices and beliefs so the appealing nature of the Aristotelian approach should seem obvious.

Still, Mahmood wants to push the Aristotelian approach further and for good reason. She uses yet another Foucauldian approach to help do this.[12] This conception of ethics she points to may be referred to as a "positive conception of ethics" (as coined by Claire Colebrook). This approach to ethics considers the practices, bodies, and selves involved in certain actions. So, instead of being focused on whether a particular action can be universalized or what one's end goal may be, the focus is on "ethics as always local and particular, pertaining to a specific set of procedures, techniques, and discourses through which highly specific ethical-moral subjects come to be formed" (Mahmood 28). This approach pushes one to engage with the subject on every level, rather than merely observing his or her action in terms of a rule.

This approach has larger implications for the meaning of ethics that carries over into the actions that Mahmood observes in the participants in the mosque movement. First, this approach takes what it means to act "ethically" beyond whether or not one abides by a particular rule. In this approach, ethics is no longer adherence to a rule but enacted by a performative action to achieve a certain subjectivation. While this may seem to be an over-generalized conception, it

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[12] See Foucault, Michel. 1997. On the genealogy of ethics: An overview of work in progress. In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*: Vol. 1 of *Essential Woks of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. P. Rabinow, trans. R Hurley et al. New York: New Press.

makes room for understanding greater intricacies of action. In other words, ethics is the mode by which a person is able to be active in their subjectivation (through performative actions).

The key here is that this conception of ethics does not require a person to be an autonomous and/or voluntaristic being as the liberal approach does. It may be the case that the person is, but it is not required and there is room for someone to act ethically even if his or her actions are rooted in tradition or culture and the institutions that make them up. Regarding this, Mahmood explains:

> For Foucault, the relationship between moral codes and modes of subjectivation is not over determined, however, in the sense that the subject simply complies with moral codes (or resists them). Rather, Foucault's framework assumes that there are many different ways of forming a relationship with a moral code, each of which establishes a particular relationship between capacities of the self (will, reason, desire, action, and so on) and a particular norm. (Mahmood28-29)

So, the way in which one interacts with a moral code has potential for greater complexity than simply whether he or she complies with or resists them. Sure, this requires greater analysis of a particular action and the subject involved, but there really is no other way to understand what *really* is at work with a particular action if this analysis is not performed. To understand the ethical subject formed by a certain action, one must understand all of the players at work in that particular action. Mahmood continues the above excerpt:

> The precise embodied form that obedience to a moral code takes is not a contingent but a *necessary* element of ethical analysis in that it is a means to describing the specific constitution of the ethical subject. In other words, it is only through an analysis of the specific shape and character of ethical practices that one can apprehend the kind of ethical subject that is formed. These practices are technical practices for Foucault and include corporeal and body techniques, spiritual exercises, and ways of conducting oneself- all of which are "positive" in the sense that they are manifest in, and immanent to, everyday life. (Mahmood 29)

This more positive conception of ethics distinguishes between acting in such a way that follows a rule versus inhabiting a norm. I want to spend some more time considering what is really being distinguished here and why one seems to be more favorable than the other when conceiving of agency. Clarifying this will help to understand why this approach is useful for conceiving of Mahmood's experience with the mosque movement and James' story.

When ethics is examined in terms of whether or not a particular rule is enacted, the very person acting is pretty much taken out of the picture. I say this because whether or not the subject follows a rule has little to do with *who* they are and why they did it. It could be anyone at any time obeying or resisting a rule and it will not be more or less significant *who* is doing the acting. This seems to be fundamentally against the very spirit of ethical studies. This approach fails to account for not only the person doing the acting and their mindset/character while performing, but also the type of person formed as a result of the action.

On the other hand, the "positive" approach to ethics focuses on the way norms are *inhabited* by a person. In other words, the performative aspect of the action is considered rather than merely the result of the action. Since the performative can take many different forms, the academic is forced to consider what specific mode this took and further, the role it plays in the subjectivation of the actor. It is for this very reason that this approach to ethics is more applicable to a conception of agency than the Kantian approach to ethics.

Specifically looking at the mosque movement, it becomes clear that while all of the participants have similar teleological beliefs/aims, they embody different practices (or the same practices with different volitions or emotions attached to them) for achieving this aim. This is what makes the mosque movement unique, there is no centralized authority prescribing *how* one must practice or embody these moral codes. Rather, individuals are expected and pushed to realize their divine plan in their own way. They are encouraged especially to realize this through bodily practices, or what we can refer to as performative actions of the body. Mahmood writes: "For the mosque participants, it is the various movements of the body that comprise the material substance of the ethical domain. There exists an elaborate system of techniques by which the body's actions and capacities can be examined and worked upon, both individually and collectively"

(Mahmood 31). The complexities of a particular action can be understood only once one considers all of the volitions that go into it. It seems then that there are infinite possibilities for creative attachment and practicing of norms, the limits of which may only be created by the participants.

I'll now consider the example of Muslim women donning the veil in relation to the norm of modesty in terms of these various approaches to ethics. The Kantian conception of ethics may observe the donning of the veil by mosque participants as an example of the way in which these religious practitioners follow the prescriptions of their religion. Those who do not wear the veil, the Kantian approach would argue, *chose* not to follow that prescription of her religion. The academic may choose to expand on the reasoning behind the *choice* of the practitioner but the focus will remain on the *why* rather than the *how* of the practitioner coming to embody this performative practice or not.

More than this being an extremely limited perspective on the practice, it lacks the ability to recognize the pieces that made such a result. Furthermore, it would appear under this Kantian approach that the donning or failure to don the veil is representative of the participant's dedication or subservience to her religion. However, as the other approaches to ethics show, just because someone does not don the veil does not mean she rejects or is less dedicated to her religion (or her modesty) than someone who does wear the veil. Now, I'll consider the same practice but under a more Foucauldian approach, which Mahmood also employed and I find more useful.

Mahmood points out that the donning of the veil does not necessarily speak to the individual's relationship with her religion. In fact, someone who does not wear the veil may do so after a long interaction with her religious discourse, other practices, and interaction with her fellow practitioners. Note however, that this is still not necessarily favoring rationality over practice as the Kantian tradition does. In regard to this critique Mahmood asserts: "Even though I focus on

the practices of the mosque participants, this does not mean that their activities and the opera-

tions that they perform on themselves are products of their independent wills; rather, my argu-

ment is that these activities are the products of authoritative discursive traditions whose logic and

power far exceeds the consciousness of the subjects they enable" (Mahmood 32). Moreover, she

is primarily focused on the virtue of modesty and embodying it to form herself as a modest sub-

ject than she is with the veil itself. The veil is a contingent part to modesty and her religion ra-

ther than a necessary one. If she finds a bodily practice that is more suitable for forming herself

as a modest subject, she is encouraged to practice it. In order to demonstrate how intricate the

considerations are for the donning of the veil for the mosque participants, I will now focus on

Mahmood's observation of the mosque participants in regard to considering the donning of the

veil.

Recall that a primary concern for practitioners of the mosque movement is the "folklorization

of Islam". In other words, they are concerned with the tendency for their religious practices to

become mere customs in the wake of living in a modern society. Mahmood conducted fieldwork

at six different mosques in Cairo and discusses the major differences found among at least three

of them. The Umar mosque is located in an upper-middle-income neighborhood of Cairo. The

women who are practitioners of the mosque movement here, attend weekly religious lessons giv-

en by a woman teacher: Hajja Faiza. At this particular mosque, Mahmood notes the striking va-

riety in dress among the women attending. While some wear tailored ankle-length skirts, tucked

in blouses and chiffon scarves around their heads, others wear dark colored long coats with thick

scarves covering their head and neck. The other popular veil is the *khimar*, which covers the

head and extends over the torso. Still others don't cover their heads and are dressed in jeans and

short tops and wear make-up. Very few, if any, wear the *niqab* which is the most conservative

form of veil that covers the face (Mahmood 41).

They Ayesha mosque differs from the Umar mosque in both location and audience. It is in a

large and very poor neighborhood of Cairo where most residents receive welfare assistance. The

lessons here are less formal, "For example, women attendees often interrupt the teacher to ask

questions or to put forward alternative opinions they have heard elsewhere. There is constant

banter back and forth between the da'iya (religious teacher) and her audience" (Mahmood 42).

 About one third of the women at this mosque wear crumpled ankle-length gowns or the con-

servative *niqab* rarely seen in the Umar mosque while the majority wears printed headscarves or

a loose black gown and thin black headscarf tightly wrapped around the head (Mahmood 42).

The third mosque that stands in contrast to both of these is the Nafisa mosque. This mosque

is in a prominent suburb of Cairo and has the largest number of females attending of any mosque

in Cairo. At this mosque, the vast majority wear the conservative *niqab*.

The striking contrast between these three mosques accentuates the question: "what is it that

informs each of these women's dress?" The answer to this, Mahmood demonstrates, is not sim-

ple and can only be answered by looking at a variety of approaches to religious discourse availa-

ble to these women.   Regarding the women of the Nafisa mosque, Mahmood writes: "Women

who wear the niqab understand their practice to accord with a strict interpretation of Islamic

edicts on female modesty, and often see themselves as more virtuous than women who wear the

khimar or the hijab" (other forms of the veil), (Mahmood 43). So, what then, are the other wom-

en's thoughts on modesty?

The answer to this must be considered in light of the fact that the primary motivation for the

mosque movement is to revive Muslim religious practices independent of the changes in Cairo's

rapidly changing society. The participants aim to have their daily practices serve Islamic principles. This may seem like an obvious aspect of most religions, however it is especially telling for the mosque movement practitioners in Cairo because of the changes taking place in their society. The women's mosque movement may be considered a response to the feeling that their religious practices became marginalized in the "westernization" or "modernization" of their society.

The participants are resistant to letting their religion become simply an abstract system of beliefs that are merely practiced as a custom rather than as the religious practices meant to inform and fill their everyday lives. Consider the difference between wearing a veil because you grew up wearing one and your family wears it, in contrast to understanding and embodying the religious purposes behind wearing the veil. Mahmood wants to resist the tendency to characterize these motivations as mere examples of asserting cultural identity or religious distinctiveness, and I agree with her argument here. Rather, as Mahmood demonstrates, an alternative reading is more informative of the mosque participant's motivations. The alternative reading, suggested by Mahmood, recognizes the main concern of the mosque participants: that their religion gets cheapened when it is treated as the practicing of abstract values unrelated to everyday "practical" life (Mahmood 45). The aim of projects attempting to understand the agency at work as suggested here and by Mahmood, is to focus on the way these otherwise seeming "abstract" practices are actually practical and affect everyday interactions: "The daiyat and the mosque attendees want to ameliorate this situation (the tendency for their practices to be characterized as abstract) through the cultivation of those bodily aptitudes, virtues, habits, and desires that serve to ground Islamic principles within the practices of everyday living" (Mahmood 45, parentheses mine). The participants use the mosque lessons as training for these daily religious practices.

Hajja Faiza, the teacher from the Umar mosque understands this problem to lie in the fact that the religious practices of the mosque movement members have been separated from the sacred religious texts from which they originate. Note that this does not locate the problem with educating the practitioners on basic performance of religious practices, because most of them practice them. However, the problem is that the majority and remainder of their everyday lives remain separated from their religious beliefs. Hajja Faiza emphasizes practice in her lessons in order to address how one is to make Muslim moral precepts a part of one's everyday life. The sacred texts are used to form the practical rules for everyday life.

The mosque teachers are partaking in a discourse that has been a part of the Islamic juridical tradition, for some time: that discourse which distinguishes between those acts of worship and those that relate to living in society. Even more telling about these mosque teachers is that despite how difficult it may seem to embody the Islamic practices in a modern society, they are not calling practitioners to separate or withdraw themselves from society. Rather, Mahmood writes: "Indeed, the form of piety women like Hajja Faiza advocate brings religious obligations and rituals to bear upon worldly issues in new ways, thereby according the old Islamic adage 'all of life is worship' a new valence" (Mahmood 47). Note that this approach to everyday life isn't a direct hit at the political order in Cairo but if its practitioners follow the way of life they are advocating, the sociopolitical institutions and ethos will necessarily be affected. In other words, it is not necessarily teaching *against* the secular order of the society, but rather, helping to revive in each participant the daily practices they should aim to embody. With this, they call for institutions to allow this sort of "religious education" and encourage Islamic awareness in various social institutions. I discuss this "political" aspect in more detail below.

The point remains that for the mosque participants, their aim for practices is to realize Islamic virtues *in their lives*, not simply to develop the appearance of an Islamic identity. Many of the practices of Islam are meant to serve the development of shaping a certain ethical identity but in modern society, as it is pushing in Cairo, they tend to serve more as markers of identity. In regard to the veil specifically, any failure to understand "how the practice of veiling is an integral part of an entire manner of existence through which one learns to cultivate the virtue of modesty in all aspects of one's life" misses the driving force behind veiling (Mahmood 51). Compare this opinion of mosque participants to the opinion of Adil Hussein, the late general secretary of the Islamist Labor Party: he values the veil as a symbol of Islamist identity and a marker of their society (Mahmood 52). Note the distinction between the focus of mosque participants on developing piety via the veil and Adil Hussein on valuing it as a signifier of their society's identity. I use the different approaches to show that within veiling alone there are many different *forms* agency can take. The debates within the mosque movement about what is necessary or not to practice veiling demonstrate the various forms of agency in the one practice. It is not necessarily a matter of whether one veils or not but *how* they veil and the accompanying theoretical (or lack thereof) beliefs. I should note here that I don't assert that certain forms are representative of whether a participant has more or less agency, but that they both probably do, just in different forms.

Underlying this important distinction are implications regarding agency and what it means or what form agency takes for the mosque participants. While portrayal of a certain identity in society is important, it is not sufficient for understanding what makes up a participant's agency. Rather, the internal approaches (or attachments) to a particular practice and the affect or role it

plays in their lives overall are what need to be considered in understanding the participants'

agency.

3.2   What does this mean for acting "politically"?

The distinction between the approaches of the mosque participants to Muslim practices versus the approach of political figures (like Adil Hussein) in Egypt raises questions about what it means to act "politically", how agency is related to acting "politically", and how particular practices may or may not be "political". Mahmood reveals this tension in the mosque movement in Cairo: "Islamist political figures and publications often criticize mosque participants for promoting a form of religiosity that is devoid of any sociopolitical consequences, especially for the task of restructuring the state" (Mahmood 52). These Islamists want religious rituals to help create a certain polity rather than keep Muslim worship separate from other social institutions. Mosque participants are critical of this approach because it tends to treat their religious practices as cultural customs rather than as the mode by which one may realize a pious life.

Considering what I laid out above, the tendency for the religious practices of the mosque movement to be treated as inconsequential in terms of sociopolitical changes seems to stem from the liberal conception of ethics and politics. Recall the discussion of Aristotelian versus Kantian ethics from above. Kantian ethics is so focused on norms, values, and principles that it fails to take into consideration the specific form of moral actions (Mahmood 119). Under this discourse, the religious practices of the mosque movement are discussed in terms of doctrinal and legal arguments rather than the various pedagogical aspects accessed (Mahmood 119). Mahmood calls the discourse to push more toward the "positive ethics" I lay out above. Recall that this approach doesn't focus on whether one follows a moral code or not but rather the relationships the actor invests into the practice, or how one interacts with a particular norm and the various elements that make the person up (body, reason, emotion, volition, etc.) (Mahmood 120). This approach

provides a unique ability to see specific work that people perform in their effort to realize a certain personhood or mode of being (agency).

Mahmood's main contribution here, which I find particularly interesting and useful, is the connection she draws between analyzing performative bodily practices in this way in order to better understand politics and the relationship between social authority and individual freedom. This connection is also present in James' book and I draw the parallels by using Mahmood's suggestion of "positive ethics" where there is a less obvious distinction between the individual and the social. Before I do this, I want to show how Mahmood makes this connection between politics and bodily practices. She points out that for every different or varied approach to each performative behavior there *may* be equally varied conceptions of individual/collective freedom and the organization of political life (personal and public) that go along with these but the important aspect remains to be *how* one makes this connection (Mahmood 122). The important part switches from understanding the individual separate from the social to understanding how these two are related and interact in performative actions.

Mahmood claims that the debates regarding what is and is not required of Muslims demonstrate what is at stake in these practices. Each view can be thought of as representing more than simply whether or not a particular practice needs to be performed. Rather, each view also carries implicit connections to freedom and social authority, hence the connection to what it means to act politically. While most liberals may claim that these various religious beliefs stem from or are a result of the society in which the participants live, Mahmood claims that this approach relies on keeping the categories of the individual and the social separate. However, as performative action and its relation to subjectivation shows, the relationship between the individual and the social is not as simple as the liberal approach treats it.

The various ritual practices encouraged in the mosque movement are meant to aid in the realization of a pious self in the mosque participant. When performing a certain practice there are various emotions and dispositions the participant can and should invoke to aid in the effectiveness of the ritual in realizing this pious self. The mosque participants do not distinguish between formal or conventional behavior, and routine informal or mundane activity (Mahmood 127).

Typically, in many academic circles, ritual is treated as a "special" form of human action not as one of many mundane or pragmatic activities. The main point here is that separating ritual from pragmatic actions (and the individual and social) is to strip it of its purpose for mosque participants: to form pious dispositions (Mahmood 128).

In regard to invoking emotion in ritual, the main goal the participants keep in mind regarding this is to make "prescribed behavior (such as certain religious practices) natural to one's disposition, and one's virtuosity lay in being able to spontaneously enact its most conventional aspects in a ritual context as much as in ordinary life, thereby making an a priori separation between individual feelings and socially prescribed behavior unfeasible" (Mahmood 131). In this sense, the "ritual" begins to appear as effortless and natural as any other practice in one's life, thereby complicating the typical divide anthropologists place between ritual action and conventional action. I will demonstrate the same "effortlessness" in the cricket players that James discusses.

Let me now consider the connections between the performative acts of the women in the mosque movement to what it means to the mosque participants to act "politically". My main points here stem from the reasoning behind avoiding the separation of the individual and the social. I do not mean to say that to act socially is to act politically but that one may act "politically" in the same way they may be considered to act "socially". In the following paragraphs I discuss why the discussion of "politics" is relevant here: mainly because for nationalists in Egypt,

acting politically is what is most important. However, as I reveal, sometimes the actions that have the greatest "political" thrust or influence, are those that don't seem to be explicitly "political". For the women of the mosque movement, they seem satisfied "politically" to be able to perform their ritual practices in the way that they do in order to transform themselves and perhaps in a combined effort, their society away from the modern push they receive on a daily basis. Similarly, the cricket players in James' book may not have been acting "politically" in the sense that nationalists would think valuable, but as James' own story comes to fruition it is evident that cricket is indeed transformative in the same sense that an explicitly "political" action may be.

The Egyptian nationalist view, as expressed by Mona Hilmi, argues that the aim of ritual should be to form or develop a self-aware and critical citizen. This differs and contrasts the aim of ritual for the women of the mosque movement who aim ritual toward developing a faithful and pious personhood. Since the aim of these two views is different, so is their reliance on ritual. Hilmi's conception of ritual gives it only contingent importance in achieving this goal of awakened citizenry. Also, she encourages the participant to be able to decipher between an inner meaning and outward performances to express that inner meaning (Mahmood 133). Mosque movement participants, on the other hand, view ritual as the *only* way one can come to achieve their goal of practicing a pious disposition. Mahmood writes: "As such, outward bodily gestures and acts (such as salat or wearing the veil) are indispensable aspects of the pious self in two senses: first in the sense that the self can acquire its particular form only through the performance of the precise bodily enactments; and second in the sense that the prescribed bodily forms are necessary attributes of the self" (Mahmood 133). The point here is the differing views on interiority and exteriority.

It seems that the conception of the relationship between a subject's "exterior" and "interior" is related to one's views on what it means to act "politically". For example, the mosque movement's conception of the relationship between interiority and exteriority parallels the protestant view that these bodily performances can serve as markers of one's sincerity in their beliefs and that the performances help transform one's soul toward the desired being (Mahmood 135). Note that the transformative power stems from interior of the person which is only made "real" by the exterior. This view stems from Aristotelian ethics and its conception of *habitus,* which I will expand on in a moment. Note however, that this contrasts the nationalist view (and liberal view) that places the emphasis on the exterior: how one acts in relation to a norm, its explicitly political affect, and its result rather than accounting for the interior aspects which are seemingly just as meaningful. I'll now spend some time expanding on this notion of *habitus* that informs the conception of action and practice that Mahmood recognizes in the mosque participants.

Habitus in this Aristotelian sense refers to the conception that the external or performative acts (in this case veiling or prayer) create and are in direct correlation to one's inner dispositions. In other words, *habitus* refers to a specific process by which a moral character is developed and secured (Mahmood 135). *Habitus* is beneficial in constructing a more useful conception of agency because it helps blur the line between interiority and exteriority. The blurring of these categories requires observers and academics to consider the "interior" aspect of one's actions rather than the exterior and its social justifications. This latter approach is a closer representative of Pierre Bourdieu's approach to *habitus* which seems to be less useful than the Aristotelian conception of *habitus.*[13]

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[13] For understanding Bourdieu's approach see: Bourdieu, Pierre (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Trans. R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aristotle's approach to *habitus* focuses on acquiring a particular moral personhood or ethical being through focused practice and with a certain degree of intentionality. One learns and comes to embody the desired personhood or ethical statehood through careful and consistent practice in which one coordinates their inner and outer dispositions toward this particular goal (Mahmood 136). In this view, one does not acquire moral statehood by simply performing an ethical action. Rather, one comes to this moral statehood through consistent practice of ethical actions performed with the appropriate disposition. Mahmood writes: "What is noteworthy is that *habitus* in this tradition of moral cultivation implies a quality that is acquired through human industry, assiduous practice, and discipline, such that it becomes a permanent feature of a person's character" (Mahmood 136). This view of *habitus* is shared among Islamist thinkers.

The problems with Bourdieu's conception of *habitus* are similar to the problems with the secular liberal approach to agency: too much credit is given to the larger social institutions in which one lives and acts, rather than the way in which someone's particular life events *form* agency. Bourdieu examines *habitus* as the way in which social conditions come to play out in one's actions. This approach gives less credit or consideration to one's own active creation of their *habitus* through "interior" functionalities. Bourdieu's approach is less concerned with the way in which one learns *habitus* and more with the "unconscious power of *habitus* through which objective social conditions become naturalized and reproduced" (Mahmood 138). The Aristotelian approach on the other hand, parallels more directly with what is encouraged of the mosque participants in their daily practices such as veiling. This notion of *habitus* helps one understand why the mosque participants for one aren't concerned with acting as "awakened citizens" like nationalists encourage, and second how they view their careful actions as being transformative in a way that should not be viewed as any less significant than explicitly "political"

actions which seem to only consider the exterior of a person's action rather than the seemingly more meaningful "interior".

I hope that the parallels of these views on *habitus* to sport are somewhat obvious but I will now spend some time elucidating those parallels and why the Aristotelian version is also more useful wen thinking about the cricket players in James' book. I also use James' work to help understand the way in which this more nuanced conception of agency can be understood or is useful.

3.3   How James helps conceive of agency

First, I want to use James' discussion of certain cricket players to demonstrate this intrinsic

link between interiority and exteriority when discussing the influential aspects of one's character.

Recall that my main point here is to challenge the typically rigid boundaries set between these

categories of personhood. The methodological implications and hypotheticals run deep and are

complex but I merely want to demonstrate that the exterior aspect of a subject should not and

cannot be considered in itself and by itself. The interior aspect or everything that one brings to

the table with a particular performative action is equally important when considering the subject

that is formed and part of that action.

In most common descriptions of athletes, the athlete's physical prowess and personality are

typically considered and treated as separate entities. If an athlete is known to be a stand up citi-

zen it is considered a plus, but this is not typically treated as a requirement for the former aspect

(physical talent) of the athlete.   This is representative of the liberal tendency to keep interiority

and exteriority as distinct categories.[14]

James' description of these players, like Mahmood's description of the women in the mosque

movement, challenges the line drawn between the two categories and demonstrates link between

interiority and exteriority in human beings. To James, those who had physical prowess but were

abominable characters, were not significant players. He recalls a young man named Matthew

from his early childhood who seemed to have potential to be a great player but his career was cut

short as it seems due to his sub-par attitude and demeanor: "Matthew's career did not last long.

He would not practice regularly, he would not pay his subscription to the club…I remember

Raze, the Indian, watching him practice one day and shaking his head with deep regret: how

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[14] Recall the critique made by Mahmood that interiority and exteriority of a practitioner cannot be treated as distinct categories. She discusses this on page 134 of her text and I discuss it beginning on page 51 of this paper.

could a man who could bat like that so waste his talent" (James 4). Later, I will discuss how this relates to the concept of *habitus* and how it is evident that Matthew did not have the "interior" make up required to form habitus in a technical practice. James, early on, sees that to be a great cricket player one must step up to the task both mentally and physically. This resonates with the feelings of the participants of the mosque movement toward people who practice veiling or prayer without the mental or interior make up required to make such practices meaningful or effective.

To understand why these excerpts describing the unique cricket players James interacted with, one must keep in mind the careful practice required to form *habitus.* Recognizing this, the detail behind James' descriptions becomes invaluable and almost difficult to comprehend its complexity. Next, one must link this *habitus* to the interiority of the person: to practice true *habitus* requires so much of a person it must stem from the interior as well as the exterior. James sets these players apart from "you and me" because it is assumed that most people do not take such careful practice in their lives, this is what separates the great player from the recreational player. In terms of the mosque movement, it is what separates those who are genuinely working toward a pious disposition and life from those who practice rituals without such careful and mindful practice.

I will use James' description of George Headley and Constantine to demonstrate the importance of the "mental" part of the game. Let this "mental" aspect be representative of one aspect of the "interior" of the player. George Headley, according to James, is one of the greatest batsmen he has ever seen. George also serves as a good example because while James views him as a "natural" cricketer (opposed to a crafted/learned one), I still see evidence of great concentration

and effort by George to be this great cricketer. Even those who seem to have "natural" talent require concentration and practice to become great.

James describes George as having three great abilities in the cricket game: he saw the ball early, was quick on his feet, and was quick with his feet. James writes: "Any single one of these three qualities makes a fine batsman, and courage and confidence are the natural result of having all three" (James 140). James describes the one time that George found himself in an unfavorable position while batting and George's response is that he vowed to never let himself be found in that position again. This assertion by George is telling because it demonstrates that he is able to control a situation like this by *deciding* to not let himself be found in that situation. He controls the physical aspect of his game with interior mechanics. James asserts that one quality of any great practitioner is that any registered experience, like this one for James, becomes a permanent part of them (James 144). This example reinforces the reason that the liberal resistance/acceptance binary fails.

This is not meant to portray that once George simply decided to not be caught in such a poor position again, it happened. Rather, it represents the dedication he had toward making this reality: putting every aspect of his body and disposition toward achieving this. James notes the way in which George was able to concentrate on any given task: "And I have met very few men who can concentrate on anything as George concentrated on batting...these qualities were not remote from those which made George the batsman he was" (James 147). This seems to parallel exactly what the women of the mosque movement aim for in their practices. A form of concentration that consumes their whole being: interior and exterior.

Now I want to use James' description of Constantine to highlight aspects of Mahmood's work that are present in James' work. Constantine is considered by James to be one of the great-

est cricket players during that time. James' description of Constantine spends a great deal of time expanding on not only Constantine's skills on the cricket field but also his personality. What does this imply? James recognizes that there is something significant about a cricket player and his personality characteristics. His story would not be complete without consideration of Constantine's character. This is an example of blurring the categories of interiority and exteriority that Mahmood is a proponent of. I use examples of James' discussion of the player both on the field and off the field to show that his approach to describing a person also blurs the categories of interiority and exteriority. It is not necessarily the case that play on the field is representative of interiority or exteriority but rather that the player on the field is not a complete picture.

I will now highlight what specifically, James mentions in terms of Constantine's personality. I use this term "personality" vaguely in the sense that it is tricky to use most words in a context that is meant to question standard conceptions of language and its use in academic discourse. With that consideration, James points out that Constantine, despite being a West Indian black man of lower middle class during the colonial time, he "felt himself as good as anyone else" (James 104). Even more significant is the reason behind this characteristic: that because of his father's prominence he was taught and raised by some of the best cricketers on the island who would not let him see or believe otherwise. This demonstrates that it is not just social class or institutions that influence or form one's being, but rather, more specific and complex players are at work in creating a person, their actions, and emotional approach to actions.

James recognizes a key contrast in Constantine's life that shaped his character: the contrast between "his first-class status as a cricketer and his third-class status as a man" (James 106). Constantine became a great cricket player and James attributes this, in part, to the spark that was

lit by his experience off the cricket field. The main point is that Constantine felt a stranger in his own country which drove him to eventually settle abroad. He couldn't even be secured a job in the West Indies while away playing for the country.

In this example we see how social institutions come to play a part in larger actions. Could Constantine's settling abroad be representative of a resistance to the social circumstances? Sure, but it seems more simply that he *needed* to leave in order to survive and make a life. Even more ironic is his absorption with cricket, also a sport of the colonizers causing such circumstances. He did not come to reject the sport but rather needed it to provide life outside of the West Indies. More telling for our purposes here is that through the performative aspects of cricket he was able to form not only a great cricket player, but one that is politically minded and passionate about his experience in the West Indies.

Eventually, James went to visit Constantine in England in order to gather material for a cricket book. James reflects on these interactions: "We didn't know it but we were making history. This transcendence of our relations as cricketers was to initiate the West Indian renaissance not only in cricket, but in politics, in history and in writing" (James 110-111). This excerpt on his approach to the interactions with Constantine is significant because it demonstrates that without realizing it, the two of them were acting "politically" by simply recording their experiences with a sport they both felt passionately about. This point is relevant because similarly, the women of the mosque movement believe themselves to be acting politically even though they are not acting in the way that the nationalists think they should be acting.

Cricket is a useful "non-religious" example that proves to be as complex as any art or trade or craft that requires *habitus*. As discussed above in regard to Mahmood's project, *habitus* is relevant in this project because it points to what is required of a subject to form *habitus*. The form-

ing of *habitus* in a certain practice is relevant because it points to how deep these practices run

for many practitioners of the ritual or in James' book, sport. It is this depth of the practices that

gives the practices transformative power in the subject which make its ties to agency clearer.

James' book exposes this complexity and what is required of a great player. This is useful for

providing a "non-religious" example for which to apply this greater conception of agency.

James exposes the complexity of cricket by discussing the minutia of the game in detail and

what goes into them at several different points of the book. He frequently notes how rare it is to

find someone who *really* understands what is going on in the game and appreciate the art of it.

He describes talking cricket with such a person as a profound experience it is to meet such a per-

son. The following excerpt demonstrates the multi-layered aspect of cricket that James unders-

tood and appreciated:

> I never had enough of talking to St. Hill about his late-cut. In so far as it was explicable, his secret was that he never timed that ball from the pitch, as I have seen great batsmen do and get out. He did not lie back and lash across, as George Cox used to do. He didn't hammer the bat into the ground as Frank Worrell does (one of the great strokes of our time). He took up position early, watched the ball well on its way and then launched his wrists into the stroke...So far he was all grace, all elegance, always there long in advance. But there was primitive hidden in him. If a fast bowler blocked his leg-glance-it was no use putting short-legs for he kept the ball down, *always*- or sometimes for no visible reason, all this suavity disappeared. He stretched his left foot down the wicket and, with a sweep that seemed to begin from first-slip and encompassed the whole horizon, smashed the ball hard and low to square-leg. Sweep is not the correct word. It was a swing, begun when the ball was almost within reach, and carried out with a violence that seemed aimed at the ball personally, to hit it out of sight or break it into bits. (James 84-85)

This excerpt is useful for two reasons. First, it points to the minutia of cricket that makes it an

appropriate topic for relating to something like ritual. It is a useful example because most "out-

siders" to a particular sport do not understand the basic functioning of the sport let alone appre-

ciate, as James does, the detail of what is required by players to make such a play. The same

goes for ritual as described by Mahmood about the mosque participants. An "outsider", of

course, cannot *really* appreciate or understand the genuine religious beliefs behind certain rituals

but Mahmood's work provides enough description to show that it is not a mere scripted act but

one that requires practice and particularity in performing it. The same is shown here by James. I know very little about cricket but recognize how technical of a sport it is and this connects to the amount of practice required of its practitioners to be able to make such plays.

Second, of all the different aspects of cricket I mention that James gives in this book; excerpts like this are the fundamental level of what makes up the game that has such a large impact on its participants and the culture surrounding it. To an outsider it may merely look like the swinging of a bat. But to James, he sees this description. Similarly, an outsider may simply see a woman wearing a veil but for her, she is performing a technical practice that requires a lot of her to do it correctly.

Finally, I want to consider how James' book relates to the relevant discussion of norms and how people relate to them. In the previous section I discuss the tension James experienced as a school boy in the classroom with his attitude and approach to cricket. He and the rest of the boys at school with him struggled together to find a unified code in cricket. They were simultaneously participating in and creating their own code. In what way are they creating their own code? James' personal interaction with it is just one relation to it. For every participant there is probably a different story or relation to it. This is exactly the point though: cricket playing provides the outlet for practicing this norm or code that one makes his own in the particular way he connects and interacts with it through *habitus*. Simultaneously, his subject is being formed which is what he brings to ethical and political instances.

For James, as I mention in his interaction with Constantine, became politically minded without even realizing it. He concedes that cricket is the main player in creating his political identity. He references others who agree; "In an article welcoming the West Indies team of 1957 E.W. Swanton has written in the *Daily Telegraph* that in the West Indies the cricket ethic has

shaped not only cricketers but social life as a whole. It is an understatement. There is a whole generation of us, and perhaps two generations, who have been formed by it not only in social attitudes but in our most intimate personal lives, in fact there more than anywhere else" (James 41). This shows how deep cricket ran in the society that James grew up in. It references the connection between those practices that people participate in and how they can come to form and influence society. It is not that the mosque movement Mahmood studied is some sort of revolutionary approach aiming to make people's everyday practices seem like political ones so that nationalists and liberals can see it as more palatable. Rather, it is necessarily the case that those practices humans participate in have deeper connections to society and its norms. The field and particular practices are the practitioners' entry into how to make the interaction their own. In turn, the practice remains dynamic as new subjects come to interact and form and re-form the sport or practice.

4   CONCLUSION

This project aims to expose that the liberal conception of agency and the rigid categories and assumptions that accompany it lead to approaching agency in terms of whether or not someone has or practices agency in the form of resistance to norms, rather than focusing on *how* agency is practiced. The concept of agency in academia needs to be reconceived because most of the liberal assumptions about agency (such as that every human has an autonomous will) is where most liberal prescriptions for ethical and political prescriptions stem from.

To understand that not all acts of agency necessarily stem from an autonomous will, one may consider common human social practices such as religious rituals or sport. It seems that participation in either or both of those should be accounted for in terms of agency as *most* humans or cultures seem to participate in some form of either.

The typical liberal conception of agency however, usually locates *true* agency in acts of resistance to social norms and practices rather than participation in them. Mahmood's book helps to point out how this liberal approach is especially problematic when trying to conceive of the women participants in the mosque movement in Egypt. She provides insight into how much effort and work these women put into religious practices such as veiling and prayer. This "effort" is not simply physical, but all-encompassing in the sense that it requires all aspects of their being in order for it to aid in achieving the aim of a pious disposition.

It is helpful here to think of *habitus* and the way that one becomes practiced at gearing their entire being toward a particular aim or goal. As James explains in his book, this approach is also relevant for cricket. The great cricket players that James gets to know and describes in the book

not only have spectacular skill when it comes to cricket playing, but also have a noteworthy demeanor off the field. This observation is useful for calling into question the liberal tendency to treat the categories of interiority and exteriority (how one's internal volitions, beliefs, emotions, etc. relate to surface or bodily actions) as separate entities. Both Mahmood and James show that these two categories need to be considered in combination with one another because they are not necessarily separate and any tendency to portray them as separate is misguided.

I use James to help elucidate the points in Mahmood's project that I find helpful for conceiving of agency not only in religious or feminist discourse, but in regard to other forms of human actions such as sport. The actions of the players in James' book in typical liberal discourse are considered outside the realm of ritual, but understanding ritual the way the mosque participants do helps to see how these actions may be and should be characterized (or at least examined) as rituals. In the other direction, using examples from James shows that rituals are not strictly religious in form but have the political thrust that Mahmood points to.

The analysis of ritual in order to understand the agency at work must consider the emotions and dispositions at work when a person performs a particular act. This forces the academic to consider not only the act itself, but also what emotions one experiences/invokes while practicing these rituals. The players that James describes show the relationship between them as a cricket player and them off the field as inseparable categories. It is not necessarily the case that there is a set relationship between the way one acts off the field or approaches a play with certain dispositions to how they actually play, but the main point is that without considering both, part of the picture or story is missed.

This greater conception of agency aims to blur categories of what constitutes ritual and ritual's relation to agency and in turn, expose many of its accompanying implications such as what it means to act ethically and politically.

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6   APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sport in Academia: What's Missing?

Here I provide an excerpt from an unfinished project where I aim to use Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* and James' *Beyond a Boundary* to make specific arguments about the discourse of sport in academia. This excerpt specifically outlines the critique I want to make about the discussion of sport in academia rather than its correlation to what I say about agency. I hope that the critique provided here may at least parallel some of the critiques I make about the discourse on agency.

Theories regarding the study of sport in academia have taken many different forms. Some of these forms are more useful and interesting than others. Generally, they all seek to answer the question "what does sport *really* do for society or how does it *really* play out in society?" In this section I will mention a few of the different theories of sociologists and historians (which often overlap and are by no means comprehensive), explain how each has different strengths and weaknesses, and how my study relates to each.

There are three theories that I want to focus on. First, I focus on the theory that asserts sport is a tool used by society for socializing its subjects. According to this theory, sport helps to instill particular character traits in its participants that are useful in ordering society. One may hear parents discuss enrolling their child in particular sports to teach them discipline, or commitment and responsibility. Some people encourage participation in sports to boost one's confidence which is a key ingredient to be a successful member in a capitalistic society. This is representative of a theory of sport serving a particular social function.[15]

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[15] James Frey refers to this theory as the "structural-functionalist" theory of sport. He writes: "these and subsequent works focused on socialization of youth through sport, sport as a vehicle for assimilation, sport as a social system,

Several psychologists and sociologists have dedicated their studies to analyzing how children utilize play/games/sport to help assimilate with society.[16] Generally, they debate the motivations behind children partaking in certain activities and actions. These motivations range from anything like the desire to fulfill one's gender roles to acting for rewards that come with obeying of rules (which are in place to socialize agents).

Norman Denzin articulates a critique of these approaches similar to the critique that I want to make of sport theories in general. Denzin claims that these studies often decontextualize the actual play or game they are analyzing: "In their de-contextualization of games and play, contemporary theorists have failed to grasp the fundamental fact that all instances of play and games involve the interactions (which may not be face-to-face) of one or more persons who are orienting their cognitive, physical, and symbolic behaviors toward themselves, one another, or animate and inanimate objects" (Denzin 462). While my study is not concerned with the specifics of this critiques, I do argue that decontextualization is a primary fault of these theories. Focusing too much on what may constitute external motivations for play or games, often results in overlooking the sport itself. I do not argue that there are no external motivations in sport, but that to limit sport to this results in deep decontextualization and overgeneralization.

This theory is beneficial for understanding some of the secondary features of sport or the usefulness sport may have in maintaining a cohesive society. In other words, by practicing a sport, one does not merely get better at that sport, but perhaps also gets better at being a functional member of society and fosters those valued characteristics of society (as this theory points

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the relationship of sport to other institutions, and the integrating functions of sport for participants, observers, and social organizations" (504).

[16] For the purposes of remaining on topic I do not spend time delineating between the differences between play/games/sport. For discussion on this and references to more studies see Denzin, Norman K, "Play, Games, and Interaction: the Contexts of Childhood Socialization" in *The Sociological Quarterly* vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 458-478.

out to us).[17] This theory recognizes the way in which sport may assimilate particular subjects who would otherwise be/feel marginalized (note that this approach seems fundamental to the argument made by those who argue that it is a repressive capitalistic institution…because it socializes). This may be why one often hears of parents of "troubled" children being encouraged to get their children involved with sports. Sport is "the way in" to a particular society for some people because of the way that it provides grounds for working together with other members of society or conflict solving with a teammate, etc.

However, this very strength points to a fault of this theory: it may overplay the role of sport in society and mask the potentially repressive forms that sport takes. Some may argue that if a particular society is repressive in nature, then it should change. If a particular social institution (i.e. sport) helps to recreate the repressive nature of society, perhaps it should be avoided and a theory regarding sport should account for this. In addition, this theory of sport fails to account for other essential aspects of sport. While it may be the case that in particular circumstances sport may result in the socialization of some individuals, this is not necessarily what sport is *really* about. It is this fault I see prevalent in all three theories of sport that I want to address in my project.

The second theory I find unsatisfactory asserts that sport reinforces particular inequalities of society. Some refer to this as "conflict theory", accounting for the fact that sport may actually reinforce conflict in society rather than make it more functional and peaceful as suggested by the previous theory. This theory seems to stem from a Marxian or anti-capitalistic framework: sport

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[17] Note that I agree with this to a certain extent: that there are secondary features to practicing sport and furthermore that those features often play out in society. However, I disagree that the practice of sport serves the function of socialization. By looking at the mundane features of sport that I suggest, one may see that sport can actually serve to create a socially critical being (this is not my argument but my project is at least open to accounting for such a story).

is scrutinized for contributing to the creation of mindless subjects who are tricked into being seemingly "happy" in their role in society.[18]

The main strength of this theory is that it keeps the first theory in check, so to speak. It alerts us to the potential problems with sport if the first theory is accurate. In other words, this theory shows the downfall to sport when it acts as an institution of socialization. The weakness is that it leaves little room for seeing the beneficial quality of sport. Surely, the answer to the question "what does sport *really* do in society?" should be well rounded and include, if there are any, the beneficial parts of sport. Both of these approaches focus on sport as a generalized practice. In other words, both of the approaches look at general practices that seem to be relevant to most social institutions like organized meetings and practice with official matches or games. The arguments made by either of these approaches can be made about most social institutions (i.e. education). The weakness of this is that it fails to account for what makes sport unique and therefore meaningful for most of its participants (i.e. the way that it uses the human body) and the societies in which it takes place.

This leads to the next approach to sport I want to discuss: sport as a corporation heavily influenced by the media's portrayal. Some theorists argue that sport, especially contemporary sport, is merely another commodified good that is perpetuated and motivated by money and media. This approach parallels the criticism I want to discuss further: that nutrition has only become a significant aspect of sport in the last few decades and is merely an attempt to make money. These theorists use the development of science and technology to point to this phenomenon.

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[18] Allen Guttman gives several examples of work in this field. He mentions John Hargreaves and Richard Gruneau as examples of authors who have emphasized class relationships and inequalities in British and North American sport. Their work was critiqued by other scholars for being apologetic to capitalism and reacted by asserting that sports are the "mirror image of-rather than the emancipatory alternative to- the repressive, exploitive, achievement-oriented world of work" (Guttman 374).

These theorists attempt to show that the Olympics, college athletics, and professional sports are all driven by factors outside the motivation to play.[19] The motivation to play is driven primarily by money and media.

One advantage to studying sport in this way is that it examines a possible way that technology and money have affected sport. Also, it points to the way in which the public may interact with sport if people themselves are not participants (which is, in part, an answer to the question at hand). However, the downfall to this theory is that, once again, it fails to look at what these changes provide for sport itself and, moreover, what motivates these changes. It seems that by viewing any technological advances in sport purely as a sign of commodification of sport fails to recognize the use of such technology: why does that athlete purchase it, and does it serve a practical use beyond this? It is important to look at the changes these things have brought from within the sport not merely how "outsiders" or viewer perspective has changed. I think that all three of these dominant theories regarding sport, although useful, still fail to account for particular aspects of sport that seem to be essential to its practice. I will show this by borrowing Saba Mahmood's approach to ritual and applying it to sport with James as an example of a work that begins such an approach.

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[19] Frey/Eitzen write: "This type of sport is hardly voluntary; rules are formal, generalizable, and enforced by formal regulatory bodies; the outcome is serious for individuals and organizations not actually participating…and winning (the outcome) is more important than participation (the process). (509).