

Article

# The Qur'an: An Oral Transmitted Tradition Forming Muslims Habitus

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the relationship between religious practices and the forming of moral dispositions in light of the Qur'an. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus, this paper explains the way religious practices mentioned in the Qur'an can form moral dispositions for Muslims. The question that this research aims to answer is whether being a Muslim has anything to do with how he/she is expected to behave in society. It also investigates how central the Qur'an is in Muslims' lives. Moreover, it discusses how and why Muslims act the way they do and what guides their practices and actions. This paper aims to clarify the ethical, moral and spiritual consequences of embodying religious practices. For example, practices like prayer and charity may give Muslims moral direction and help them be good citizens.

**Keywords:** habitus; Islamicate; Qur'an; recitation; listening

## 1. Introduction

This article investigates the relationship between religious practice and moral dispositions using Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Religion can serve many functions for society. "Religion provides detailed rules and 'interdictions' about how life should and should not be lived" (Day 2020, p. 15). In relation to religion, sociologists are interested in why people practice religion (Day 2020). Sociology is defined as "the study of human interactions and societies" (Buzelin 2022, p. 186). It examines the norms produced by societies and how they govern agents' actions (Buzelin 2022). Different sociological approaches develop certain theoretical frameworks to explain the social world. Bourdieu developed his theory around the concepts of field and habitus. In fact, "the notion of habitus has become increasingly prominent in studies of religion" (Mellor and Shilling 2014, p. 275). This study looks to understand how the habitus of Qur'an reciters has an impact on their moral selfhood. Such a habitus affects the way he/she deals with others, whether Muslims or non-Muslims. This article aims to uncover the experiences and practices that define the Qur'an reciters' habitus and how it influences their relationship-building and the way they function in their societies.

"Islamicate" is another relevant term to the topic discussed. Marshall Hodgson (1977, p. 57) argues that the term "Islamic" is usually used to describe two different conceptions: "religion" and "the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion". Hodgson (1977, p. 57) adds that not all the societies and cultures that are described as "Islamic" are necessarily "Islamic" in the religious sense of the word. For example, "Islamic art" does not describe art that "expresses Islam as a faith" (Hodgson 1977, p. 57). In order to avoid the confusion, Hodgson introduced the term "Islamicate" to distinguish these two senses of the word Islam. Hodgson (1977, p. 59) used the term "Islamicate" to refer to "to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims". Thus, this term does not refer to Islam itself. He explains that the double adjective ending found in the term "Italianate" has the same connotation as in Islamicate; it does not refer to Italy itself



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but to ideas and things associated with Italian style (Hodgson 1977, p. 59). Thus the term “Islamicate” segregates “such cultural developments from the domain of Islamic religion” (Dressler et al. 2019, p. 12).

With this definition in mind, this article tackles reciting the Qur’an from various perspectives. This article uses the term Islamicate in order to examine the impact of the Qur’an on the lives and societies of Muslims. This concept is of an interest to this article because it “introduces a conceptual distinction between religious and non-religious aspects of Islam” and “alludes to practices of distinction within societies and cultures where Islam was the dominant religion” (Dressler et al. 2019, p. 12). Hodgson’s concept of the Islamicate is illustrated in the different ways Muslims experience the Qur’an. It is believed that “certain structural differentiations have occurred within Islamicate contexts” (Dressler et al. 2019, p. 18). Thus, this study is related to the conceptual distinctions among Qur’an readers within an Islamicate context.

It is important to define the concept of habitus in order to understand how it affects Muslims’ perceptions and practices. Habitus is developed by the agent’s past and present circumstances. It helps in shaping the agents’ practices as it comprises “a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices” (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 53). The habitus is a set of dispositions that are characterized as being “inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable” (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 12). They are inculcated in the sense that they are gradually acquired throughout the individual’s life (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 12). Dispositions are also structured, as agents from similar backgrounds may have “relatively homogeneous” habitus, as dispositions are affected by their social conditions (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 12). Structured inculcated dispositions are also durable as they “endure through the life history of the individual” (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 13). They are also generative and transposable as they generate perceptions and actions that may be practised in different fields (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 13).

This study is important for several reasons. First, understanding the role of religious practice, contained in the Qur’an, in forming moral dispositions reveals that reciting the Qur’an for Muslims is not just a habitual act but an act of piety that helps Muslims be closer to God. Schubel (2023, p. 2) emphasizes “Islam as a religion is rooted in an implicit understanding that there is unique and intimate relationship between God and human beings” (Schubel 2023, p. 2). Moreover, understanding the habitus of Qur’an reciters provides an insight into the relationship between religious practice and the moral self. In other words, certain religious practices of Muslims may affect their religious ideas, beliefs and the way they interact with others in their societies. Umashankar (2020, p. 235) states:

The Qur’an as the Word of God, embodying the Divine. This leads to the discussion of how Muslims engage with the Qur’an; how the Qur’an is understood as a liminal text, bridging the created with the creator, and how this affects material engagement with the Qur’an. This allows, at the outset, for the Qur’an to be embedded in the lived practices of Islam.

Given the sacred and central position of the Qur’an in the lives of Muslims across the World, Muslims take reciting its verses as an act of piety. In fact “oral activities, such as listening to/reciting Qur’an, are a central characteristic of Arab-Islamic civilization throughout its history” (Ismail 2023, p. 114). This way in which Muslims engage with the Qur’an needs to be highlighted. Reciting the Qur’an whether in daily prayers or as a form of worship helps Muslims to develop moral dispositions that helps them live in harmony with others. (Osborne 2021, p. 200) states “orality is a key feature of the Qur’anic text”. This common assertion about the Qur’an is related to the key role of Qur’an as an oral tradition in the process of its compilation and canonization. Thus, Qur’an recitation is considered an important aspect in the lives of Muslims and is the focus of this socio-linguistic study.

## 2. The Qur'an

Islamically considered, the Qur'an is the word of God, transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad over the course of twenty-three years, divided into 114 chapters (*sūwar* sing. *surah*), consisting of many verses ranging from only 3 to 286 (Wheeler 2021, p. 3). The Qur'an chapters are organized according to their length except for the first chapter, *al-Fatiha* (the Opening), a seven-verse chapter (Saeed 2008). Muslims believe that the Prophet received the Qur'an from the angel Gabriel who transmitted the word of God to him (Mattson 2013). The Prophet recited and proclaimed the Qur'an to early Muslims who committed it to writings that were collated into the holy book (Wagner 2010). The number of verses differs in chapters, and the verses are also of uneven length.

Each chapter in the Qur'an is given a certain name. Some chapters are designated with names according to the first word of its first verse (Wheeler 2021). Some chapters are named after the first verse. These chapters often begin with unconnected letters. These letters are also known as "*fawatih*" meaning "openers" because they are the opening verses of their chapters (al-Zarkashi 2006). Each of these openers, whose meanings are indefinite, consist of a number of disconnected letters pronounced separately one by one. Moreover, some chapters' names may describe their contents. For example, Chapter Mary. Some believe that the order of the Qur'an chapters was fixed by the Prophet according to what he received from revelation (Wheeler 2021). Others, however, believe that they were ordered by the Prophet's followers after his death (Wheeler 2021).

The Qur'an is an influential book for Muslims because it is the primary source for their belief. The Qur'an is considered the "alpha and omega" of Islam because of its deep significance to Muslims (Shah 2012). It is one of the most read book in the world (Abdul-Raof 2001). The Qur'an, in fact, is at the centre of Muslims faith as they believe that its words are divine (Wagner 2010). Moreover, for Muslim scholars and theologian, the Qur'an is held as a miracle too. The key to its miraculous nature is the "grammatical, morphological, semantic, and phonetic congruity" (Abdul-Raof 2018, p. 327). Thus, the Qur'an as a perfect expression of the Arabic language that cannot be matched by other human creative works is a generally held Muslim view (Abdul-Raof 2018). The Qur'an refers to itself by many names, for example, the Reminder (*dhikr*), the Revelation (*tanzil*) and the Scripture (*kitab*) (Saeed 2008, p. 38). However, the Qur'an is the most common name for this Islamic holy scripture. As a technical term:

The Koran is the record of those formal utterances and discourses which Muhammad and his followers accepted as directly inspired. Muslim orthodoxy therefore regards them as the literal Word of God mediated through the angel Gabriel. They are quoted with the prefix 'God has said'; the phrase 'The Prophet said' is applied only to the sayings of Muhammad preserved in the Traditions. Muhammad's own belief, which is still held without question by his followers, was that these discourses were portions of a 'Heavenly Book' sent down to or upon him in Arabic version, not as a whole, but in sections of manageable length and in relation to the circumstances of the moment (Hamilton 1970, p. 24).

## 3. The Qur'an as Spoken Word

The word Qur'an means recitation, and the first word of the Qur'an that Muhammad received is "*iqra*" meaning read. In addition to its written form, the Qur'an is considered as an oral tradition because it was transmitted orally. Moreover, in its oral essence, the Qur'an is experienced by most Muslims daily during the five daily prayer (Quadri 2021). Thus, reciting the Qur'an from memory is assigned great value. Holding a central role, memorizing the Qur'an is "an effective method to provide instruction, opportunities for reflection, and spiritual formation" (Kabir 2021, p. 4). A Muslim who memorizes the Qur'an is referred to "as a *Hafiz*, or Guardian of the Qur'an", and they are often invited to events to render public recitations (Kabir 2021, p. 6). It also develops Muslims' knowledge of their faith. Moreover, according to Islamic tradition, those who memorize the Qur'an are promised heavenly rewards. Muslims are required to memorize some

parts of the Qur'an in order to properly perform their daily prayers. This illustrates the importance of the "sensorial aspect of Islam's primary sacred source", which is the Qur'anic recitation (Umashankar 2020, p. 234). Emphasizing the importance of "non-textual modes of engagement", Umashankar (2020, pp. 234–36) points to the "Multisensory Engagement" with the Qur'an, describing how Muslims engage sensorially with the Qur'an, which is an "an immersive spiritual experience".

Various norms regarding the recitation of the Qur'an have developed in the Muslim community. Muslims recite the Qur'an in social gatherings and public occasions. Many social occasions are opened and closed with a reading from the Qur'an (Mattson 2013). For example, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (the "*Mawlid*") is celebrated in many Muslim societies, during which the Qur'an is recited. However, some Islamic annual festivals, like *Mawlid*, have been rejected by some Muslim scholars (Mattson 2013). Muslims recite the entire Qur'an during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (Saeed 2008). Moreover, they attend mosque during the nights of Ramadan and gather to perform the communal evening prayers (*tarawih*) during which the Qur'an is recited (Saeed 2008). Such norms concerning interaction with the Qur'an, in fact, bring the Muslim community together. This actualization of the Qur'an emphasizes the strong presence of the Qur'an in Muslim societies.

Qur'an memorization is regarded with high importance in traditional Qur'an education (Berglund 2017). Students are taught the art of recitation as a part of their Qur'an education. The importance of memorizing the Qur'an is illustrated in embodying the text and acting according to its norms (Berglund 2017). This oral aural engagement allows Muslims the "unmediated experience of the Divine by treating the Qur'an not only as a text, but as beyond text" (Umashankar 2020, p. 326). Schools who teach memorization have good reputations in Muslim communities and are often preferred by parents for their child's Qur'anic education (Berglund 2017). The importance of Qur'an recitation can be seen in many universities. In the University of Jordan's Faculty of Islamic Law, for example, Qur'an recitation and memorization is emphasized in the curriculum (Umashankar 2020). Moreover, girl's Islamic schools in India also place a great importance on the recitation of the Qur'an and it is "the first immersive experience of the Qur'an for most young Muslims in a madrasa" (Umashankar 2020, pp. 234–35). The fact that the Qur'an was communicated orally by the Prophet Muhammad to his companions illustrates why "Islam is studied and seen as primarily an oral tradition as opposed to a textual or visual one" (Quadri 2021, p. 9).

#### 4. The Compilation of the Qur'an

There are three stages for the collection of the Qur'an, which started in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, followed by the time of Abu Bakr's caliphate and finally during the caliphate of Uthman b. Affan (Wheeler 2021). The compilation process of the Qur'an into a comprehensive text began after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. During the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an was revealed in portions, but it was not collected into a single text (Wheeler 2021). The Prophet recited all the portions he received to his followers who have memorized the Qur'an and documented its verses on makeshift materials including "palm leaves, fragments of pottery and, according to traditional accounts, on the shoulder blades of camels" (Nigosian 2004, p. 67). There was no complete collection of the Qur'an during the lifetime of the Prophet. Many verses were "in the collective memory of members of the community" (Khan 2014, p. 194).

During his caliphate, Abu Bakr ordered that the Qur'an was to be collected into one single collection of pages because he was concerned with the loss of the Qur'an due to the death of a large number of Qur'an reciters. Thus, Umar, a well-known companion of the Prophet, encouraged him to collect the Qur'an (Wheeler 2021). Thus, Abu Bakr set Zayd b. Thabit the task of collecting the Qur'an. Hadiths indicate two methods by which the Qur'an was collected during caliph Abu Bakr's rule. Reports indicate that the Qur'an was collected from what was written down and kept in the house of the Prophet Muhammad.

Moreover, Zayd b. Thabit was asked to collect the Qur'an from those who memorized it (Wheeler 2021). The first collection of sheets (*suhuf*) was passed to Umar upon Abu Bakr's death, and to his daughter Hafsa upon his death.

The definitive editing of the Qur'an took place during the reign of caliph Uthman b. Affan. During the reign of Uthman, disputes were sparked over the way the Qur'an was to be recited (Khan 2014). This dispute was the driving force behind the project of establishing codices of the Qur'an (Khan 2014). During his reign, a group of Muslims were allocated to collect all the documents and check "all oral traditions related to the Prophet" and put them into one single corpus (Nigosian 2004, p. 68). He called upon Zayd and other companions to copy the pages of Prophet Muhammad's recitations into a codex (Quadri 2021). Uthman b. Affan ordered that "no verse was to be included in the codex except that for which there were two witnesses" (Wheeler 2021, p. 7). Uthman asked Hafsa to give him the *suhuf*, sheets that were collected during the reign of caliphate Abu Bakr and promised that they would be returned to her. Khan (2014, p. 196) describes how Hafsa is "depicted as being extremely careful and guarded in her release of the *suhuf* to the caliph Uthman". Uthman then sent a codex to four prominent cities and decided that any other non-canonical Qur'an codex should be destroyed (Khan 2014).

The Qur'an was initially transmitted orally to the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. However, the death of many Qur'an reciters and the emergence of the different readings of the Qur'an among Muslims led the caliphs to collect and codify the Qur'an. The importance of memorizing and reciting the Qur'an is manifested in the obligatory ritual prayer in which Muslims are required to memorize some Qur'anic verses in order to perform five daily prayers. To memorize the Qur'an is to not "just know the Qur'an but to truly embody it in one's actions and character" (Quadri 2021, p. 10). Boyle (2006) discusses several advantages for students who memorize the Qur'an. First, scriptural memorization gives them moral direction and helps them come closer to God and be "good citizens". This is because embodied Qur'an "acts as a sort of moral or ethical compass for them" (Boyle 2006, p. 492). Moreover, he recognizes that they learn the Islamic morals mentioned in the Qur'an and try to practice them. Boyle adds:

The embodied Qur'an provides a source of guidance—a moral compass—for the memorizer, possibly in a direct and literal sense as the meaning of the Qur'an unfolds in the mind of the memorizer, but also in a metaphorical sense by its very sacredness becoming inscribed on the body of the memorizer. The embodied Qur'an deepens students' spirituality and offers comfort and security as it increases their awareness of the presence of God (Boyle 2006, p. 492).

The relationship between practice and moral personhood has been a subject of controversy. Some believe that "the moral person is she who acts irrespective and even in spite of her particular, embodied, habituated and practically formed (and informed) moral dispositions" (Winchester 2008). This article suggests that this assumption is not necessarily true because many Muslims who recite the Qur'an may have moral dispositions that develop out of their embodied religious practices. This assumption is also challenged by Winchester (2008, p. 1755) who describes it as "limited". He justifies his view by postulating that Muslims' religious practices are considered central to the "ongoing development" of their moral selves (Winchester 2008, p. 1755). He views the religious practices as "a morally constitutive form of cultural action" (Winchester 2008, p. 1755). In emphasising the central role of the religious practices, he concludes that:

religious practices are not simply derivative of underlying moral attitudes or dispositions, but, rather, that embodied practices and moral subjectivities operate through a relational and mutually constitutive process that unfolds over time (Winchester 2008, pp. 1754–55).

As a process of embodying the divine word, Qur'an memorization is considered crucial in forming the habitus of a good Muslim. Thus, through practicing the Qur'anic verses, Qur'anic teachings become the basic source of their moral.

## 5. Islamicate Concept

Introducing Hodgson's concept of Islamicate is important in order to understand how he produced the term which is used in this paper. He believes that the word Islam has two senses. The first is associated with the religious sense of the word, which is faith. The second is the socio-cultural aspect of Islam, which is Islamicate. Clarifying these two dimensions of the word Islam, Hodgson (1977, p. 57) argued:

'Islam' and 'Islamic' too casually both for what we may call religion and for the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion... The society and culture called 'Islamic'... are not necessarily 'Islamic' in the first. Not only have the groups of people involved in the two cases not always been co-extensive... much of what even Muslims have done as a part of the 'Islamic' civilization can only be characterized as 'un-Islamic' in the first, the religious sense of the word. One can speak of 'Islamic literature', of 'Islamic art', of 'Islamic philosophy', even of 'Islamic despotism', but in such a sequence one is speaking less and less of something that expresses Islam as a faith.

Drawing on his concept of Islamicate, Islam as faith does not entail what people have done as part of what is commonly described as "Islamic" civilization. Shahab Ahmed (2015) criticized this view claiming that art and philosophy can be described as Islamic. Following Hodgson's own formulation, referring to philosophy as "Islamic" in the religious sense of the word is problematic. Philosophy, for example, refers to philosophy produced in Islamic societies, not just by Muslims. It is not necessarily concerned with religious issues. It is also not derived from the Qur'an and *Hadith* (sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad). However, it reflects the influence of Greek systems of philosophy, but it is used to discuss issues related to Islam and the Qur'an. Thus, referring to it as Islamicate would make it clear that it is not derived from Islamic traditions but reflects the influence of Greek systems.

Hodgson believes that the term Islamic cannot be attributed to "the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion" (Hodgson 1977, p. 57). However, through his terminology, he does not equate Islamicate with secular because he states "it is not possible, nor perhaps, even desirable to draw too sharp a line here for (and not only in Islam) to separate out religion from the rest of life is partly to falsify it" (Hodgson 1977, p. 57). Thus, for him, what is Islamicate is not separate from Islam but exceeds it. Islam as a faith is derived from the sacred texts of Islam, Qur'an and *Hadith*. What is described as Islamic art, for example, is not derived from these sources. However, it is related to Islam but not in the Islamic sense that expresses Islam as a faith.

The Qur'an contains morals and ethics that surround many aspects of life. Thus, Muslims who read the Qur'an and become acquainted with its meanings are expected to practice its contents. The concept of Islamicate will be used to understand the impact of social factors on the perception of the Qur'anic text. These factors that affect the understanding of the Qur'an can be described as Islamicate because they are not necessarily religious factors. They are associated with the Muslims' habitus, including their education, their peers and their parents. Thus, it is important to study habitus to understand Muslims' experiences of reading and reciting the Qur'an.

## 6. Habitus

Being critical of the sociological contribution of his contemporary sociologists, Bourdieu introduced his concepts of the habitus and field as a response to other concepts, the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss. For Sartre, existentialism views the world of action as "entirely dependent on the decrees of the consciousness that creates it, and therefore entirely devoid of objectivity" (Bourdieu 1990b). Thus, existentialism is concerned only with human subjectivity. Bourdieu's critical observation of the underpinning assumption of Sartre and his advocates is that existentialism views the social world as "a product of individual actions" (Bourdieu 1993). On the other

hand, structuralism perceives the world of action objectively, interdependent from its agent. For Bourdieu, structuralism is “the death of the subject” as it considers the agent passively observing the world from above (Bourdieu 1993). Bourdieu perceives the opposition between these two concepts as an opposition between subjectivism and objectivism, and he tries to overcome this false perception through his sociology. Bourdieu’s theory focuses on the logic underpinning the practices of social actors that are often perceived as “habitual or naturalized ways of doing things” (Harvey et al. 2020). The “concrete human activity” is given meaning and value by the social context (Bourdieu 1990a). People would adopt different practices according to their beliefs, dispositions and positions in the social world (Bourdieu 1990b).

Habitus is the individual’s experience that shapes his dispositions and the way he thinks and acts in social situations. Aristotle’s philosophical notion of *hexis* (“state”) is translated into “habitus”. Before re-elaborating the term by Pierre Bourdieu, it was used by Marcel Mauss’s (Liu 2012). Habitus, including agents’ conceptions and behaviour, determines the agent’s way of dealing with the world. Habitus refers to socially acquired dispositions, ways of thinking and opinions. Bourdieu defines habitus as follows:

The durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation” (Bourdieu 1977, p. 78).

Habitus is constituted of durably inculcated, generative, transposable dispositions. Bourdieu believes that habitus is “a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways” (Bourdieu 1991). Habitus includes dispositions that are “durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions” (Bourdieu 1990b). These dispositions are durably inculcated because they are gradually acquired, lasting to function in different situations throughout the individual’s life. This means that once they are acquired, they cannot be easily changed. Moreover, they are “generative and transposable in the sense that they are capable of generating a multiplicity of practices and perceptions in fields other than those in which they were originally acquired” (Bourdieu 1991). Because habitus is an “art of inventing”, it is constituted of dispositions that are generative in the sense that they “produce an infinite number of practices” (Bourdieu 1990b). In fact, individuals are not always aware of the fact that their behaviour is guided by habitus because these actions are “tacitly” gained by agents which dispose them to act in a particular way (Bourdieu 2000).

Habitus enables social actors to understand the available options in the field; thus, favouring options according to their own dispositions. Agents may exclude practices that are unfamiliar to them, depending on the habitus that includes “prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions” (Bourdieu 1990a, p. 54). Viewing habitus in a such way, means that agents are inclined “to behave in some ways rather than others” (Albright et al. 2018). Thus, agents “tend to exclude” practices that are incompatible with their habitus (Bourdieu 1990b). Some agents favour “different possibilities available to them”; thus, they “deploy every sort of strategy to make one set or the other prevail” (Bourdieu 1983). Therefore, habitus allows agents to draw on a “repertoire of possible actions” in any situation (Albright et al. 2018). While habitus allows agents to draw on a repertoire of possible actions in any situation, it also makes them exclude certain practices that are unfamiliar in their cultural situations. Thus, the agents’ habitus, which generates practice, includes the perceptions and beliefs of what one should and should not do (Bourdieu 1977).

Discussing the habitus of Muslims that developed out of their regular religious practices is crucial as it would represent a point of reference when analyzing how the habitus is affected by their daily religious practices. The habitus “structures in terms of the structuring experiences” (Bourdieu 1977, p. 87). Thus, the regular religious practices contribute towards building their moral dispositions. Therefore, in order to understand the habitus of any individual, it is crucial to look at the actions of its agents, and it is also important

to figure out “what they learn, how they learn and what they do as a result of learning” (Nash 2003, p. 53). The concept of habitus is used in this article to understand the influence of reciting the Qur’an as well as performing religious practices mentioned in its verses in general, and ritual prayers in particular on the constitution of moral self.

### 6.1. Qur’an Reciters Forming Habitus

The dispositions constituting habitus have been described as being durably inculcated, generative and transposable. The dispositions of Muslims that developed from the practice of reciting the Qur’an are durably inculcated because they are acquired throughout the Muslim’s life. As he/she reads again and again, they may develop new dispositions transposable in the sense that they may be used in different situations and contexts. The Qur’an refers to itself as “the reminder” and this name “gives implications about the religious, atheistic, and social meanings of the experience of re-reading” (Ismail 2023, p. 110). Ritual practices mentioned in the Qur’an are also generative practices. The act of ritual prayer is described as being generative in the Qur’an because Muslims who perform their daily prayers are capable of developing many positive dispositions.

### 6.2. Moral and Ethical Effects of Reading the Qur’an

There are many Qur’anic verses that mentions the need to perform the prayer which often is accompanied with the command of paying the *zakat*, the charitable tax required of Muslims. Giving *zakat* to needy members of the community and the ritual prayers are “an important outward and visible sign of community belonging” (Leaman 2022, p. 214). The following verse describes ritual prayer as a means of promoting ethical behaviour:

Recite what is sent Of the Book by inspiration To thee, and establish Regular Prayer: for Prayer Restrains from shameful And unjust deeds; And remembrance of God Is the greatest (thing in life) Without doubt. And God knows the (deeds) that ye do (Qur’an 29:45).

This verse clearly states the role of this religious practice in building a habitus that prevents “shameful and unjust deeds”. This perspective about ritual prayers is also seen in other verses in the Qur’an:

Man was truly created anxious: he is fretful when misfortune touches him, but tight-fisted when good fortune comes his way. Not so those who pray and are constant in their prayers; who give a due share of their wealth to beggars and the deprived; who believe in the Day of Judgement and fear the punishment of their Lord—none may feel wholly secure from it—who guard their chastity. . . Who are faithful to their trusts and their pledges; who give honest testimony and are steadfast in their prayers (Quran 70:19–23).

In this Qur’anic verse, the one who prays is described as being charitable, faithful and honest. Thus, according to the perspective of the Qur’an, through ritual prayer, a Muslim develops a habitus that brings community members together and encourages them to behave as their creator wished them to behave. Leaman (2022, p. 222) states, “prayer helps believers maintain ethical and righteous lives and allows them to develop their own personal relationship with God”.

Ritual prayer in Islam (*salat*) is obligatory, which is a direct engagement with the divine performed five times a day, during which Muslims recite some Qur’anic verses and perform specific postures, some of which are mentioned in the Qur’an. It is often performed with others as “a sign of the community (umma) and a marker of identity” (Leaman 2022, p. 213). Performing ritual prayers requires certain postures, including “standing (qiyam), bowing (ruku’), kneeling (jilsa) and prostrating (sujud)” (Leaman 2022, p. 215). The different postures are spiritually significant as they connote certain meanings concerning the relationship between the Muslim praying and God. Al-Ghazali (2008) describes these postures as having a deep meaning. He describes prostration as “the highest level of



submission, for you are bringing the most precious part of your body, namely your face, down to meet the most lowly of all things: the dust of the earth" [Al-Ghazali \(2008, p. 199\)](#).

Prayer ritual can be performed either with a group of Muslims or can be performed alone. In congregation, Muslims are required to attend Friday prayers every week. Thus, ritual prayer can be perceived as "a means of developing a sense of solidarity, community and identity" ([Leaman 2022, p. 216](#)). Daily prayers are "a moment of communal worship", creating a sense of unity among Muslims in their societies ([Leaman 2022, p. 217](#)). Performing ritual prayers in groups can be seen as "reminder that being a Muslim is about being part of a wider community" ([Leaman 2022, p. 219](#)).

Through analysing the influence of certain religious practices on the lives of different converts, [Winchester \(2008\)](#) focused on prayer, fasting and *hijab* (covering) relationships with constituting moral self. In his study, he found out that through prayer, converts developed dispositions necessary for a new moral way of life as some converts gave up drinking to be able to perform prayer five times day ([Winchester 2008](#)). Moreover, converts explain how prayer is a humbling experience because they are required to go down and prostrate. This reminds them not to be arrogant because according to one of the converts "A lot of times human beings have a tendency to view themselves as being more than they are" ([Winchester 2008, p. 1766](#)). [Winchester \(2008, p. 1766\)](#) concludes that in practicing prayer:

converts were restructuring their everyday lives according to cultural schemes of transcendent time and sacred authority, embodying these schemes, in turn, as durable dispositions of mindfulness and humility. These arbitrary schemes of culture became embodied as lived realities; submission to the authority of Allah was not just performed but felt, becoming, in and through practice, part and parcel of the embodied moral subject.

Thus, through being part of the habitus, religious practices generate new patterns of acting. [Nigosian \(2004, p. 72\)](#) states:

the Qur'an includes a great diversity of material and touches on many themes. But it has but one essential message to humanity: be pious. Over and over again and in a variety of ways, the Qur'an exhorts its hearers to "command what is good and forbid evil".

The Qur'an stresses the importance of piety, and Muslims who read the Qur'an are constantly reminded of the importance of engaging in pious thoughts and doing good works. Moreover, the Qur'an provides the guidance necessary to "become a fully realized and perfected human being" ([Schubel 2023, p. 2](#)). The Qur'an is not only ideas and concepts, but it is also embedded in social practice. Thus, reciting the Qur'an generates perceptions and practices that are gradually acquired by the Muslim reciters, inclining them to act in certain ways. Thus, the habitus of these Muslims is expected to be affected by the practice of reciting the Qur'an as well as the concepts mentioned in its verses. The First *surah* received by the Prophet Muhammad is:

Recite! In the name of your Lord, who created humanity (insan), from a blood clot. Recite! Your Lord is most noble, He who taught by the knowledge of the pen, taught humanity (insan) that which it knew not (Qur'an 96:1–5).

[Schubel \(2023, p. 1\)](#) comments on this verse that "the Qur'an, from its very first revelation, thus makes clear its central purpose—to further the Creator's ongoing project of "teaching humanity". In fact, many of the virtues of humanity are mentioned throughout the Qur'anic verses that could be part of many Muslims' habitus. The dispositions acquired by Muslims through reading the Qur'an could function in different situations throughout their life, in their relationship building and the way they function in their society.

The moral system in the Qur'an guides Muslims in their lives. This moral system takes into consideration the spiritual, physical and social aspects of their lives. Qur'anic ethics covers Muslims' relationships with God, Muslims and non-Muslims. Through embodying the rules indicated in many Qur'anic verse, Muslims would develop a habitus

of the ways to act with other people, as citizens and as communities. Through their complete submission to God, believers would build a habitus that helps them build good relationships with people, thus building a better Muslim community. The following verse illustrates how, through reciting the Qur'an, Muslims would develop moral, social and religious responsibilities: "Believers, do not betray Allah and the Messenger, or knowingly betray others [by committing an abuse of trust]" (Qur'an 8:27). Acting according to this verse positively affects Muslims' relationships with others. Thus, the Qur'an is not just words, but it enables Muslims to pursue a socio-moral good in Muslim society. Another Qur'anic verse indicates the moral effort that is to be followed by Muslims to live in a harmonious society:

yet he has not attempted the steep path. What will explain to you what the steep path is? It is to free a slave, to feed at a time of hunger an orphaned relative or a poor person in distress, and to be one of those who believe and urge one another to steadfastness and compassion (Qur'an 90: 11–17).

These are some fundamental statements and principles of morality made by the Qur'an for all Muslims. These religious rulings and dispositions could be instilled in Qur'an reciters' habitus and result in moral values that could benefit the Muslim society.

Through regularly reciting the Qur'an and living according to its teachings, Muslims will form a habitus that shapes their thoughts and actions. In addition to the moral and ethical effects on the Muslim's habitus, there are other spiritual values contained in the Qur'an that play a key role in forming the habitus of Muslims.

### 6.3. *Spiritual Effects of Reding the Qur'an*

This article shows how through embodying Qur'anic verses, Muslims may develop a habitus that helps them find inner peace. Keskin (2021, p. 6) states "demonstrating to believers that their Islamic belief is a source of inner peace, becomes a motivator for them to strongly hold onto their faith and practice their religion". Many concepts that are related to inner peace are mentioned in the Qur'an. Patience, gratitude and contentment are spiritual benefits that a Muslim may develop after reading the Qur'an and embodying its verses. There are many Qur'anic verses that command believers to be patient, for example, "Seek help in patience and prayer" (Qur'an 2:45), "Be patient; encourage each other to patience" (Qur'an 3:200) and "and remain patient. Surely, God is with those who remain steadfast patient" (Qur'an 8:47). The value of patience is emphasized in these verses. *Sabr* (patience) is defined as "enduring, bearing, and resisting pain, suffering and difficulty, and being able to deal calmly with problems" (Gülen 2006). Qur'anic verses about patience indicate that closeness to God is associated with being patient. Being constantly commanded to be patient, a Muslim would "prepare himself for a long struggle with his desires and natural inclinations" (al-Jawziyya 2009). Thus, Muslims who regularly read Qur'anic verses about patience may develop dispositions associated with self-discipline that helps them to interact positively in their societies. Reciters of the Qur'an are reminded of resisting temptations in order to get closer to God. Patience as presented in the Qur'an may help making hardships easier to bear. Hardships are viewed in the Qur'an as being inevitable tests for people. God advises Muslims that patience should be the response that they need in order to get closer to Him. This verse illustrates the point:

We will certainly test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and fruits (earnings); but give glad tidings to the persevering and patient. Those who, when a disaster befalls them, say, "Surely we belong to God, and surely to Him we are bound to return." Such are those upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy, and they are the rightly guided ones (Qur'an 2:155–157).

Muslims reading such reminders will constantly have patience as part of their habitus, viewing hardships in a positive light.

In addition to preparing Muslims for hardships, the Qur'an does provide how Muslims are expected to act during good times. Gratitude is just like patience in the way it brings Muslims closer to their God as illustrated in this verse, "then remember me and I will remember you. Be grateful to me and do not reject me" (Qur'an 2: 152). Many verses remind Muslims of the endless blessings surrounding them and that they should be grateful for God. The importance of gratitude has been mentioned in the Qur'an: "And Allah brought you out of the wombs of your mothers while you knew nothing, and gave you hearing, sight, and intellect so perhaps you would be thankful" (16: 78). Gratitude "is a mindset where all the goodness that one has in their life are acknowledged to the point that it humbles the person, leaving them in contentment" (Keskin 2021). Gratitude becomes part of a Muslim's habitus as he/she is reminded in the Qur'an that the more he/she is grateful, the more blessings he will receive. This is based on the Qur'anic verse "If you are thankful, I will most certainly give you more" (Qur'an 14: 7).

Positive thought about events is another concept discussed in the Qur'an. This verse illustrates the mindset that Muslims are encouraged to have as part of their habitus: "it may be that you dislike something, though it is good for you. And it may be that you love something, though it is bad for you. And God knows, and you do not know" (2: 216). The Qur'an emphasizes that Muslims should not make quick judgments on events. This leads to another characteristic emphasized in the Qur'an, contentment. This spiritual state means that the Muslim has reached a state of satisfaction. This state is depicted in the Qur'an, "Indeed, in the remembrance of God do hearts find satisfaction (Qur'an 13: 28). A Muslim who reads the Qur'an would develop dispositions that enable him/her to be content of God and what comes from God.

The presence of the Qur'an in the daily lives of Muslims makes it live and practical, improving social aspects in Islamicate societies. The process of reasoning during reading the Qur'anic verses may differ from one Muslim to another. Thus, the habitus of Muslims reading Qur'anic verses may differ in different Islamicate contexts.

The practices of agents of a similar group are usually harmonized (Bourdieu 1977). Group habitus "reflects and expresses" the habitus of individuals of the same group. It includes "common schemes of perception, conception and action" as well as "the sharing of a worldview" among agents of the same group (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 60). Because the habitus of individuals of the same group is "united in a relationship of homology", it can be said that the habitus of those who recite the Qur'an and perform religious practices is relatively homologous. The practices of any agents within a group can be seen as a metaphor of any of the others (Bourdieu 2012). Individuals within a group are subject to similar "moral, religious or political inculcations" (Bourdieu 2012, p. 111). The homogeneity of the agents' life experiences results in the homogenizing of group habitus (Bourdieu 1977). Thus, individuals who regularly perform certain religious practices, for example, ritual prayer, are likely to have relatively similar moral dispositions. According to the Qur'an, Muslims who perform the ritual prayers are likely to maintain ethical and righteous lives.

However, the habitus of Qur'an readers is not the same for every individual in different Islamicate contexts. The experience of reciting the Qur'an differs from one person to another (Ismail 2023). Habitus describes and explains the different conceptions and experiences of those who read the Qur'an. According to Bourdieu, habitus generates practice and accounts for "differences associated with different positions" (Bourdieu 1998, p. 8). Thus, it might be possible to find a link between one's understanding of the Qur'an and his/her habitus. For example, some Muslims who read the Qur'an, translate some verses literally. Others, however, adopt a different approach towards the interpretation of the same verses. Habitus may account for the reasons of these different understandings of the Qur'anic verses. The habitus "cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 78). This might explain why some Muslims find the literal or figurative understanding of these verses as the only reasonable interpretation.

Reciting the Qur'an is "not only an individualistic worshiping ritual but is also a social collective practice that has been scrutinized throughout centuries of Islam" (Ismail 2023, p. 110). Palestinian women gather to read the Qur'an in Nablus in the West Bank, for instance. This gathering is considered a "social practice during which they have some rest to drink, eat, tell jokes and exchange the city updates and presents" (Khalifa 2015, p. 22). This may be considered an example of an Islamicate habit that is associated with reading the Qur'an because many women participating in such events may not be Muslims. Such habitual developments from the domain of Islamic religion are associated with Islam and reciting its sacred text. These practices, in fact, extend to cultural and social dimensions (Ismail 2023). Such norms that are associated with the interaction with the Qur'an brings the society together, and it also illustrates the strong presence of the Qur'an in Islamicate societies.

## 7. Conclusions

Held as sacred, the Qur'an is considered very influential in the daily lives of Muslims, who take it as the original revelation given by God to man. Muslims' beliefs, behaviour and attitudes are rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an. As a vital part of the daily lives of Muslim society, the Qur'an is not only important for scholars and preachers, but it is also memorized and recited by people at all levels of society. Muslims, regardless of the time and place in which they live, recite the first chapter of the Qur'an in their daily prayers, and most recite a few verses in addition to *al-Fatiha*, the Qur'an's first chapter. Reciting the Qur'an has always been a crucial part of Muslim life, from scholars to young children. They often start learning its recitation from an early age, and they are also encouraged to memorize some of its chapters. Some Muslims memorize the entire Qur'an, and if any Muslim succeeds in memorizing it, he/she will be celebrated and regarded a special status in the community. The Qur'an itself stresses the importance of its recitation, not only as a part of daily prayers but also as a form of worship in its own right.

The use of Bourdieu's concept of habitus illustrates how embodied dispositions acquired from religious practices are morally, socially and culturally significant. This article investigates dispositions emerging from religious practices, including reciting the Qur'an and ritual prayer. It demonstrates how, through reciting the Qur'an, Muslims form a habitus that explains their tendencies associating with becoming good Muslims. The Prophet Muhammad received the Qur'an verse by verse as spoken word. During his life, many of his companions memorized its verses and practised them. Because the Qur'an represents the way of life for Muslims, caliphs realized the importance of its compilation and codification. Many Muslims up to this day realize the importance of reciting and memorizing the Qur'an. The Qur'an, in fact, highlights the relation between the religious practices and certain moral dispositions. This article provides an illustration of how Muslims' religious dispositions that are guided by religious principles are instilled in their selves.

The Qur'anic verses talking about religious practices suggest that there is a relation between the embodied practice and the moral self. The notion of habitus explains this relationship because it provides an insight into the process of the inculcation of the religious trajectory of Muslims embodying religious practices. Their habitus accounts for their moral dispositions. Their trajectory "governs the representation of the position occupied in the social world and hence the vision of its world and its future" (Bourdieu 2012, p. 111). This article indicates that there is a relationship between the religious practice mentioned in the Qur'an and moral disposition. However, for some agents, the case is not always conforming to their habitus which has already been inculcated in them over many years because some agents may experience "ruptures from major past lived experiences. . . adopting beliefs and practices that are new and even contradictory to those inculcated in them" (Alkhamis 2013). Although many Muslims "celebrate their religious identities" within Islamicate societies, others, however, "are not immune to the everyday encounters with incongruity, heterogeneity and complexity that, particularly in multi-cultural societies, can result in them modifying or changing their habitus" (Mellor and Shilling 2014, p. 285).

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