# Islam, Muslim and Anthropology

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### ABSTRACT

*Is there a link between Islam and anthropology? Is there a need for anthropological study of Islam and its adherents (Muslim societies)? This article discusses the connection between Islam and anthropology as well as the vitality of anthropology as a significant component of the study of Islam and Muslim societies across the world. Moreover, it tries to examine Muslim society–related issues and themes anthropology should focus on in order to grasp the plurality and complexity of Islam and Muslim societies.*

**Key words:** *Islam, Muslim society, Islamic studies, anthropology of religion, anthropology of Islam, anthropology of Muslim society*

For many Muslims in the world, Islam is considered a perfect and all-inclusive religion that does not need any assistance of what they term "non-Islamic sciences" to grasp and understand its deep meaning, history, doctrines, cultures, traditions, values, or norms. For them, Islam, arguably the second largest religion with its adherents reach more than 1.8 billion people on earth, has already a plenty of Islamic sciences and disciplines through which this religion needs to be studied, researched, approached, and understood. Muslims typically call "Islamic sciences" such as the following: *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *ushul fiqh* (Islamic legal theory), *'aqidah* (theology), *`ulum al-Qur'an* (sciences of the Qur'an), *`ulum al-Hadith* (sciences of Hadith), *tasawuf* (mysticism), *`ilm al-tafsir* (exegesis), and *`ilm al-da'wa* (missiology), to name a few.

While it is true that such Islamic sciences have been used by many Muslims across the globe throughout the history and ages to study Islamic faith, along with its fundamental texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith, it is nonetheless not enough to comprehend the depth, plurality and complexity of Islam if they rely solely on these sciences. Islam, as other religions, needs other multidisciplinary sciences as an instrument of research and study, including social sciences and humanities, to understand its rich history, density, and multiplicity. For instance, archeology will be very useful to comprehend and reconstruct the history of Islam and Muslim societies since the beginning of the birth of this religion in the 7th century of the Arabian Peninsula. Perhaps driven by the need to understand and reconstruct the history of Islam and the Arabian Peninsula, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since the last decade or so has begun to recruit archeologists from multiple countries such as the United States, England, France, Italy, Germany, China, and Japan to dig and discover archeological sites in the Kingdom. Abdullah Al-Zahrani, General Director of Archeological Research Studies at the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, said that there are over 100,000 sites of archeological interests in the Kingdom (Nugali 2019).

Moreover, the dichotomy of "Islamic sciences" and "secular sciences" is also inapt simply because all sciences are by nature "secular" meaning as a product of human knowledge and cultures. The dichotomy also contradicts with the fact that the Qur'an and Hadith themselves do not limit Muslims to study any particular / specific subject. Accordingly, since the era of the Medieval Islam,

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Muslims have studied multiple sciences and sources of knowledge, and have produced polymath scholars who had expertise and specialty in multiple subjects, including social studies, such as Tunisian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) or Iranian Abu Raihan al-Biruni (973-1050).

Ibn Khaldun has been widely considered as a forerunner for the modern disciplines of sociology, history, economics, historiography, and demography (Ibn Khaldun 2015). His classic work *Muqaddimah* (which is actually an introduction of his *Kitab al-`Ibar*) has been praised by–and influenced–many Western scholars, thinkers, and scientists including, among many others, Arnold Toynbee, N.J. Dawood, Franz Rosenthal, Ernest Gellner, and Bruce Lawrence. One of Ibn Khaldun's famous concepts and widely cited in academia is termed "asabiyyah", namely a group loyalty, solidarity, social cohesion, or cohesiveness of a group (Already familiar since the pre-Islamic era, `asabiyyah* refers to social solidarity with an emphasis on group consciousness, cohesiveness and unity. Popularized by Ibn Khaldun, `asabiyyah* is neither necessarily nomadic nor based on blood relations).   Ibn Khaldun argued that `asabiyyah* is the core of social organization and the fate of society depended on this concept, meaning that the rise and fall of society depends on the rise and fall of the `asabiyyah*. Although the concept was coined in the fourteenth century, it is still relevant nowadays and was discussed by a number of scholars (see e.g. Alatas 2013; Irwin 2018). The concept of `asabiyyah* whose basis can be religion, kinship, clan-ism, tribalism, ethnicity, ideology, economic and political interests, regionalism, and so forth is not unique characteristics of (Arab) tribal societies of the past but also becomes the features of modern societies and post-colonial nation-states.

Al-Biruni, less well known in the West (compare with Ibn Khaldun), was also a polymath scholar. A renowned scientist in physics, mathematics, economy, and natural sciences, al-Biruni had also contributed to the study and research on society particularly through his book *Tahqiq ma al-Hind*, known as *Kitab al-Hind* (i.e. *The Book of India*) (al-Biruni 1993). The book, first translated in German in 1887 by E. Sachau and appeared in English in the following year, is about the scientific explanation of caste, rites, and customs of Indian societies, particularly Hindus, Yogis, and Brahmins.

Unlike major books in the Medieval Islam, which were commonly based on deductive approach, *Kitab al-Hind* was based on research and ethnographic fieldwork for about 13 years in India (between 1017 and 1031). It also leans heavily on primary Hindu sources, including the sacred texts of Hinduism, and for that purpose, al-Biruni learned Sanskrit. Al-Biruni's ethnographic fieldwork took place long before Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), the founder of British anthropology and one of the pioneers of ethnographic fieldwork method, and Franz Boas (1858–1942), the founder of American anthropology and the champion of inductive approach. Al-Biruni's study on Indian society has also long preceded European Indianists such as Louis Dumont and Adrian Mayer. For these reasons, some scholars (e.g. Ahmed 1984) have argued that al-Biruni was a forerunner of the inductive approach as a research method, the father of anthropology, and the founder of Indology.

Both Ibn Khaldun and al-Biruni were just small examples of eminent Muslim scholars who understood and argued that Islam does not hinder a scientific study of society. Both scholars teach Muslims that studying other cultures and societies cannot impede one's own belief or faith. Their various work has confirmed that social sciences, especially sociology and anthropology, and humanities (e.g. history) have a deep root in Islamic history; thereby claiming that such sciences as "un-Islamic" is a big mistake. More importantly, their scholarly work signals that social sciences, along with their scientific investigation techniques, are significant and an integral component of Islam.

Rather than contrasting Islamic sciences with social sciences, it is more fruitful if Islamic scholars incorporate social sciences in describing, interpreting, analyzing, and understanding Islam. Sociological and anthropological perspectives and research techniques, for instance, will help understand or elucidate the complexity of Islamic doctrines, teachings, symbols, history, traditions, and cultures. In the past, some Islamic scholars also utilized such methods as *istihsan* (an Arabic term

for juristic discretion meaning "to consider something good"), *istislah* (an Arabic word for juristic discretion meaning "to deem proper or common good"), or *qiyas* (i.e. the deductions of legal prescriptions from the Qur'an or Sunnah by analogic reasoning) to better understand the plurality and density of Islam, the Quran, or Hadith. Like *istihsan, istislah* or *qiyas*, sociology and anthropology can also be used as a method to help explicate the thickness of the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islam in general.

Although Islam and Muslim society have been the subjects of research and study among contemporary cultural anthropologists (also sociologists), their contributions to Islamic studies are still limited and left behind, particularly compared with, for example, Islamic sciences. Based on these facts and arguments, this article is written. It discusses contributions of anthropology from historical past to contemporary era to the study of Islam and Muslim societies as well as examines whether Islam and Muslim society need anthropology. If so, what topics or issues anthropology, especially cultural anthropology, should focus on?

At first, I will briefly depict the encounter between (Western) anthropologists and Islam / Muslims, followed by description on the notions of the anthropology of Islam by focusing on the various approaches set forth by pioneers of the debate of the anthropology of Islam (or of Muslims societies). They include Clifford Geertz, Abdul Hamid el-Zein, Ernest Gellner, Richard Tapper, Akbar Ahmed, Talal Asad, Michael Gilsenan, Gabriele Marranci, among others. Toward the end of this article, I will reflect a question: is there a need for the anthropological study of Islam and Muslim society? If so, why and how?

## Anthropologists, Islam and Muslim Society

Anthropologists had fascinated religion and religious believers since the birth of anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, it is striking to find the fact that, with a few notable exception (see Evans-Pritchard 1949), professional anthropologists who conducted fieldwork in many colonial settings in the twentieth century of Africa and Asia tended to ignore Islam and Muslim societies. They simply left the study of Islam and Muslim societies to historians and/or those trained as Orientalists. Because early anthropologists did not attract to the study of Islam and Muslim societies, early ethnographic studies of religions did not touch Islam and its adherents, focusing merely on what so-called "primitive cultures" with special attention to the studies of Native Americans, African, or Polynesian societies. At that time, early anthropologists did not conduct research on Muslim societies mainly because they considered Islam a field relevant to the so-called "Oriental Studies," and not the anthropological studies.

Moreover, the first generation of anthropologists studied religion in a remote small-scale non-industrial society to find a simplest form of religion in a simple society. They did so in part because of the influence of a unilinear evolutionary theory that viewed religion pass through three stages: animism, polytheism, and monotheism (see Frazer 1890). Early anthropological studies of ("primitive") religions include, but not limited to, Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders* (1922), and Evans-Pritchard's *Nuer Religion* (1956).

To my knowledge, Evans-Pritchard perhaps the first anthropologist who studied Islam and Muslim society *per se.* Through his work *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica,* a study of the Sanussiya, a Sufi order or *tariqa*, in Libya (published in 1949), Evans-Pritchard wanted to show how a specifically Muslim institution–the Sufi order–could be built along extensive trans-Saharan trade routes and subsequently used to mobilize 'tribal' groups against the Italian occupation of Libya. Despite Evans-Pritchard's attention to the role of religion (Islam) and of religious leadership (in a Sufi order) in politics, anthropological research that followed often failed to deal seriously with Islam as an object

of study, privileging instead research on 'tribal' societies, particularly in the Middle East, where social structure and kinship were a major focus (Soares & Osella 2010: 2-3).

Following Evans-Pritchard's work on a Sufi order, Geertz studied Islam in a non-tribal society (e.g. Java, Indonesia, and Morocco). Geertz's research findings in his *The Religion of Java* (published in 1960) challenged the dominant anthropological literature of religion focusing on Africa at the time. It is not my intention to discuss the development of anthropology of religion here. Rather, by showing the first steps of this new field of study, I wish to underscore how monotheistic world religions, either Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or others, were absent from the interests of the early generation of anthropologists, notwithstanding the impact that Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1920) had on the sociological research of religion.

Why didn't early anthropologists attract to conduct research on Islam and Muslim society? Is that due to Islam is a monotheistic religion that they did not account Muslim societies as an area of field study? As a matter of fact, until the late 1960s or early 1970s, ethnographic research on Islam / Muslim society, although potentially "exotic" and intriguing, was extremely rare. Evans-Pritchard (1949), Barth (1959), or Geertz (1960) perhaps the only anthropologists at that time who conducted research on Muslim societies. Marranci (2008) argues that anthropologists considered studying Islam less attractive than studying religions or belief systems of tribal or small-scale societies mainly because they perceived Islam as lacking interesting cultural and symbolic features such as complex symbolic rituals or ceremonies. For them, Islam – more or less – is viewed as a simple religion that features an iconoclastic tradition, has an abstract conception of God, and focuses more on orthodoxy. They did not treat Islam as a "religion" with a plural and complex variation ("Islams") in terms of religious practices, ritual ceremonies, Islamic discourses, political expression, textual interpretations, and understanding of Islamic traditions and cultures. In fact, as other religions and belief systems, Islam is a deeply plural and complex religion.

However, things began to change since mid or late 1950s when several younger anthropologists began to conduct ethnographic study on Muslim societies in several parts of the world, following Evans-Pritchard's seminal study on the Sufi order of Libya described earlier. They included Fredrik Barth (1959), Clifford Geertz (1960, 1968), James Siegel (1969), Dale Eickelman (1976), Michael Gilsenan (1973), Abdul Hamid el-Zein (1974), Michael Fischer (1980), Ernest Gellner (1981), or Lawrence Rosen (1984), among others. In their studies, many of which built on work carried on patterns of authority in Muslim–majority societies (e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1949, Gellner 1969) as well as on other work by scholars of Islam (e.g. Hourani 1962, Smith 1957), they tried to depict the production of Islamic traditions within particular social contexts and through particular cultural understandings (Bowen 2012: 6-7).

Of all those early ethnographic studies, Geertz's (1968) was perhaps the most influential one and a major inspiration for the anthropological work of Islam and Muslim society. Barth's (1959) work, although appeared earlier than Geertz's work and discussed Muslim societies of the northern Pakistan, the book, entitled *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*, does not use the word "Islam" or "Muslim" in its cover. Besides, Barth's work puts emphasis more on ethnicity than religion. So thanks to the late Clifford Geertz (1926–2006), who for the first time an influential anthropologist wrote a book featuring the word "Islam" in its title: *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (1968). A collection of four brief chapters that are originally delivered as the Terry Foundation Lectures on Religion and Science for 1967 at Yale University, this 136-page-book inspired new generations of anthropologists who redirected their attention to the study of Islam as religion rather than to kinship, marriages, and village rural life (Fernea & Malarkey 1975).

Let me begin with the discussion of the anthropological studies of Muslim societies by presenting three main works that have been identified with the anthropology of Islam. These studies are Geertz's *Islam Observed* (1968), Gellner's *Muslim Society* (1981), and Gilsenan's *Recognizing Islam* (1982), all of which focus on the Middle East and North Africa except Geertz's work that includes Java

(Indonesia), in addition to Morocco. After briefly presenting these three primary books, I then offer a discussion of the debate concerning the concept of the anthropology of Islam (and / or "Islamic anthropology") as a field of study proposed by, among others, el-Zein (1977), Asad (1986), Ahmed (1986), Tapper (1988), Marranci (2008), and Bowen (2012), among others.

As stated earlier, Geertz's *Islam Observed* had opened the door for the anthropological studies of Islam and Muslim societies. It would also provide an intellectual basis for future generation of anthropologists conducting research on the Muslim world. In this book, Geertz begins his argument with outlining the problem conceptually and providing an overview of Moroccan and Indonesian (or Javanese more precisely) Islam. He then traced the evolution of their classical religious styles that, with disparate settings and unique histories, produced strikingly different spiritual climates. In Morocco, for example, according to Geertz, the Islamic conception of life came to mean activism, moralism, and intense individuality, whereas in Indonesia, the same concept emphasized aestheticism, inwardness, and the radical dissolution of personality.

I will not summarize Geertz's work in details here, nor will I provide a new critique or defense of this seminal study on Moroccan and Javanese Muslims, as some anthropologists have provided fine summaries, critiques and defenses (e.g. Crapanzano 1973; el-Zein 1977; Varisco 2005). Rather, I wish to evaluate how *Islam Observed* has contributed to the formation of the concept of an anthropology of Islam (and Muslim society). Although Geertz's earlier work, *The Religion of Java* (1960), discussed various types of socio-religious and ritual practices among Javanese Muslims, the book does not use the word "Islam" in its cover. The same thing happens to Barth's *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (published in 1959) or Siegel's *The Rope of God: an Ethnography of Aceh, Indonesia* (published in 1969). The two books, even though discussing Muslim phenomena and were influential for other readers, failed to attract anthropologists researching on Islam and Muslim societies.

Some praised Geertz's work while others criticized it. Although there is agreement and disagreement, what both supporters and critics of Geertz's *Islam Observed* can agree upon is the lack of real Muslim voices in his ethnography. The eventual student of the anthropology of Islam hoping to find a sort of "Malinowskian inspiration" from Geertz's experience of fieldwork in Morocco and Indonesia can only remain frustrated. (See, for instance, Bronislaw Malinowski's classic Argonauts of the Western Pacific in which he recorded a detailed account of the Trobriand Highlanders' cultures in the Pacific Islands). This is partly perhaps because this book is a collection of essays from a series of his lectures. In *Islam Observed*, unlike in his *The Religion of Java* (1960) which is full of ethnographic data gathered from his selected informants, fieldwork is nothing more than a validating, "I was there."

I have to recognize, however, that in his *Islam Observed*, Geertz has provided at least two innovative elements as follows. First, a needed comparative approach to Muslim societies and then sets forth a series of theoretical observations concerning the social role of religion. In the book's preface, Geertz says, "I have attempted both to lay out a general framework for the comparative analysis of religion and to apply it to a study of the development of a supposedly single creed, Islam, in two quite contrasting civilizations, the Indonesian and the Moroccan" (Geertz 1968: v). In this regard, Geertz set up a maximal cultural contrast (Morocco and Indonesia's Java) to try and grasp the specificities of Islam.

The second element is the redefinition of Robert Redfield's category of great tradition and little tradition (i.e. from urban versus rural civilization to scripturalism versus mysticism). In Redfield's (1956) vision, the studies of anthropology relate some elements of the great tradition (e.g. sacred theme, story-element, teacher, ceremony, or supernatural being) to the life of the ordinary people. The dichotomy of little and great traditions have long been a major debate among social scientists, including anthropologists. Nonetheless, Geertz ended up essentializing Islam. Indeed Geertz has considered the particular historical, cultural, and social differences between Morocco's Islam and Indonesia's but he has expressed the argument that all are expressions of Islam. To sum

up, despite the useful and challenging contribution that Geertz has offered to the anthropological study of Islam, the ultimate result of his analysis has offered a counterproductive essentialist view of what Islam, rather than, a Muslim, is. Geertz did provide, for the first time, that "paradigm" that the first studies of Muslim societies lacked. From his choice of title to the essence of his interpretation, Geertz has made Islam the protagonist of the anthropological discourse, albeit readers can spot little (if any at all) anthropology in *Islam Observed*.

If Geertz's study had a strong influence on American anthropologists, who started to consider Muslim societies worthy of studying, in Britain, Ernest Gellner (1925-95) through his *Muslim Society* (1981) would provide British social anthropology with its authoritative work on Islam. Gellner (as well, many of his disciples) has forcefully defended his work on Islam and Muslim societies, while others have strongly criticized his ethnocentric and monolithic approach to it as much as his total support for an essentialized segmentary lineage theory. This book, consisting of twelve essays, is a collection of his previously published work in various academic journals or book chapters. As an edited volume, it is hence uneasy actually to evaluate fairly and comprehensively towards this book since each chapter has discussed a particular topic some of which sometimes difficult to relate with a general theme of this book such as "The Sociology of Robert Montagne" (Chapter 8). Additionally, Gellner has presented each chapter with a deep discussion, thorough knowledge, and rich literature. It is thus unfair bias to make overgeneralizing comments on the book.

Although it is difficult and unjust to assess this book fairly, there are some weaknesses of his arguments, concepts, analyses, and notions about Islam that need for further examination. The first weakness is about his argument that Islam is somehow like a fixed and unchanging faith. Gellner maintains that Islam is "the blue print of social order" in which "a set of rules exists, eternal, divinely ordained, and independent of the will of men, which defines the proper ordering of society…these rule are to be implemented throughout social life" (Gellner 1981: 1). Gellner (*ibid*), furthermore, quoted Alexis de Tocqueville's phrase: "Islam is the religion which has most completely confounded and intermixed the two powers… so that all the acts of civil and political life are regulated more or less by religious law."

The second shortcoming is that Gellner puts more emphasis on Evans-Pritchard's model of segmentary lineage theory to analyze the plurality and complexity of Muslim societies and then overgeneralize Islam and the Muslim world. It is not surprising, however, if Gellner used Evans-Pritchard's famous theory since he was a faithful pupil of Evans-Pritchard, the father of segmentary lineage theory. Through this theory, Gellner has framed his analysis of the Middle Eastern and North African Muslim societies within the traditional division between, again, little (or he calls "folk") and great traditions. Although Gellner has admitted the influences of several great thinkers in the past such as Ibn Khaldun, David Hume, Robert Montagne, and Edward Evans-Pritchard (Gellner 1981: vii), it seems Evans-Pritchard who was more influential than others.

In brief, Gellner's central arguments in this book are, among others, that (1) Islam cannot change and (2) deeply divided into two constant contrasting worldview or, say, binary oppositions, namely a mode of thinking found in many societies and cultures based on opposites. For Gellner, Islam is in some way a contest between "the orthodox center and deviant [folk /heterodox] error" that "seems perennially latent in Islam" (Gellner 1981: 4-5). Far from being the religion of living Muslims with deeply plural and multifaceted opinions, ideas, feelings, practices, understandings, interpretations, or identities, Gellnerian Islam is an essence that remains constant in its model. Hence, if segmentary theory shapes Islam in the village, the Qur'an shapes the urban Muslim. Because of the lack of references to other anthropologists who have conducted fieldwork in the Muslim societies of the Middle East and North Africa, Gellner's work on Islam / Muslim societies are somewhat surprising.

The question remains: what might students of the anthropology of Islam learn from Gellner's work? Again, as in the case of Geertz, Gellner's *Muslim Society* was certainly not how to study Islam

appropriately, not hoe to undertake ethnographic fieldwork properly, not how to understand their informants, and certainly not how to observe the impact that colonialism had on Muslim societies. Gellner seems not interested in understanding Muslims or "Islams" (with plural); rather, like Geertz, he believed he had provided the ultimate explanation of Islam as a cultural system. What Gellner in reality provided was a simple Eurocentric philosophical-political view of Islam in which the "Islam founding Arabs appear only as segmentary Bedouins" (Varisco 2005: 75). The influence that Gellner has on British anthropologists studying Islam has been obvious. However, Gellner's study of Islam has not provided any contribution to what anthropology of Islam might be, or ever, what it means to study Islam. One of the reasons for this lack of reflexivity is that *Muslim Society* is not a monograph based on coherent research and deep ethnographic fieldwork, but rather a self-glorifying anthology, which lacks unity.

Another anthropological work that has been identified with the anthropology of Islam is Gilsenan's *Recognizing Islam* (1982) that appeared just one year after Gellner's *Muslim Society,* albeit its final shape of Gilsenan's book was in the period of 1979–81. During that period, complex political processes took on an apparent dramatic simplicity in an extraordinary series of events that became the Iranian (Islamic) revolution that later led Imam Khomeini (1902–89) into power. As Gellner (and Geertz at some point), Gilsenan is a sociocultural anthropologist that conducted research in the Middle East, especially southern Arabia (Yemen). However, unlike Gillner's and Geertz's, Gilsenan's work was intensely rooted in his years of ethnographic fieldwork in the Arab Middle East. He wrote: "My own basic procedure has been to use a lot of material drawn from personal experience of Islam and try to re-create the surprise of the moment when my work really began…I have used my own work as the main source and concentrated on communities in the Middle East" (Gilsenan 1982: 22). Through an anthropological approach deeply rooted in the practice of fieldwork and reflective tradition, Gilsenan's work provides readers with an inspiring study of the different embodiments of Islam.

Furthermore, in contrast with Geertz's and Gellner's work on Islam, Gilsenan's seminal book succeed in avoiding essentialism and overgeneralization. Gilsenan, moreover, claims that his work is an effort to demystify Western standard approaches to Islam and as a reaction to previously dominant modes of thought in anthropology, political science, history, and Oriental studies. For Gilsenan, anthropology (certainly in his time) put emphasis on functional interrelations, with units usually defined as villages or tribes, put the rest of the world "in brackets". Political science, moreover, stressed elites, a division between essential forms of society called traditional and modern, and a view of politics very close to current Western political interests in the area. Orientalism, for Gilsenan, operated within a tradition that had become ossified, seeing text to be commented on often with the reverence of a medieval divine, (some) adoring Islam but suspicious of Muslims, and frequently downright hostile to and uncomprehending of political movements in the contemporary Middle East (Gilsenan 1982: 20-1).

Based on Gilsenan's deep description and analysis presented in this book, it is valid to state that his work can be a good start to use as the foundation for anthropology of Islam. Notwithstanding that his work remained located within the Middle East and Northern Africa, Gilsenan's work has not privileged the village over the city and has avoided the "little" versus the "great" tradition dichotomy, as well as the Gillnerian version of segmentary theory. Indeed, Gilsenan, although he never refers to anthropology of Islam, has highlighted some basic principles in studying the Muslim's religion. These principles were hardly an innovation in the anthropological study of religions and cultures, including the ethnographic study of Islam and Muslims.

In the book's preface, Gilsenan wrote: "I did not consider Islam to be monolithic 'it', an entity which could be treated as a theological or civilizational historical bloc, unchanging and essentially 'other' in some primordial way. Nor did I wish to put forward an account of belief, doctrine and

history, as systematized by Orientalists, theologians or jurists. I was and am concerned with more sociological questions of social and cultural variation in very different societies subjected to the conflict of the colonial and post-colonial periods and of the very turbulent processes we label modernity" (Gilsenan 1982: 5). Moreover, Gilsenan has examined the practices and everyday lives of persons describing themselves as Muslims and the discourses of authority that are taken for granted or struggled over. He also attempted to understanding Muslim society and reflect back critically on the ways in which Westerners in general tended to approach the societies (*ibid*: 5).

Furthermore, Gilsenan has demonstrated an effort to understand what Geertz and Gellner had concealed. He has developed clear methodological and analytical paradigms, part of which is the attempt to "dissolve" the essentialist view of a Muslim mind "explain [ing] a whole series of events and structures that are otherwise totally baffling and alarming" (*ibid*: 19). Following this anthropological approach means discussing Islam as, not a single, rigidly bounded set of structures but rather as a word that identifies varying relations of practices, representations, symbol, concept and worldview within the same society and between different societies.

There are patterns in these relations, and they have changed in very important ways over time. My aim is not to persuade the reader to substitute a relativized and fragmented vision for one of global unity. Rather it is to situate some of these religious, cultural, and ideological forms and practices that people regard as Islamic in the life and development of their societies" (ibid: 19). Gilsenan thus has reversed Gellner's Eurocentric view of Muslim societies, and provided a paradigm for understanding Islam as a discourse within society rather than an essence shaping it. Unfortunately, however, notwithstanding the weighty contribution that Gilsenan has made towards the formation of the anthropology of Islam, his work has not been widely discussed in reviews within the field.

## The Historical Roots of the Idea for Anthropology of Islam

As discussed above, although since late 1940s or 1950s Muslim societies have been a subject of anthropological study, the concept of anthropology of Islam had not been discussed until late 1970s. Despite the fact that some eminent anthropologists such as the late E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1902 – 73), the late Clifford Geertz (1926–2006), or the late Fredrik Barth (1928–2016) already conducted research on Muslim societies since late 1940s and mid-1950s, namely Libya for Evans-Pritchard (1949), Java and Morocco for Geertz (1960, 1968), and then Swat Pathans of Pakistan for Barth (1959), there was no anthropologist so far at that time that was interested in discussing and conceptualizing an anthropology of Islam. If any, the discussion only attracted very tiny anthropologists.

Although the debate on the concept of the anthropology of Islam only attracted a very small number of anthropologists, it was not uneasy to find ethnographic studies of Muslim communities. After Evans-Pritchard, Geertz, and Barth, a number of anthropologists followed their steps. Some of them studied Muslims in the Middle East or North Africa (e.g. Cole 1975; Fernea and Malarkey 1975; Eickelman 1981; Gilsenan 1982; Gellner 1981; Norton 1987), others conducted research on Muslim societies in South, Central, or Southeast Asia (e.g. Hefner 2000, 2016; Louw 2007; Barfield 2012). -It is quite recent that Western anthropologists, except Clifford Geertz who started studying Javanese since 1950s that touch a bit Javanese Muslims and then Morocco in 1960s, devoted to the study of Muslim societies outside the regions of the Middle East or North Africa Nowadays, some anthropologists studied Muslim communities in Europe, North America, or Australia (Ozyurek 2014; Bowen 2016; Khabeer 2016).

To my knowledge, the idea of the anthropology of Islam was, at first, initiated by the late Abdul Hamid el-Zein, a Temple University's anthropologist. In 1977, el-Zein wrote an intriguing article for *Annual Reviews of Anthropology,* titled "Beyond Ideology and Theology: the Search for the Anthropology of Islam." Sadly, this article only intrigued small anthropologists a few years later. To

some extent, it also happens in sociology. Although Max Weber (1864–1920) had long discussed about Islam, it was only in the 1970s the conceptualization of the sociology of Islam began to emerge in particular thanks to the role of the sociologist Bryan Turner (b. 1945). From his earlier articles on Ibn Khaldun, to his classic on Weber's sociology of Islam, to his discussions about orientalism and its avatars, the sociology of Islam has been one of the essential themes in Turnerian sociology. For Turner, Islam is never treated as a separate variable or unique object on its own, but always contextualized as a social phenomenon (Turner and Nasir 2016: v).

In 1986, about ten years after the publication of el-Zein's article, anthropologist Talal Asad (b. 1932) wrote an article "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." Interestingly, in the same year, British-trained anthropologist Akbar Ahmed (b. 1943) also wrote a book entitled *Toward Islamic Anthropology*. Both anthropologists consciously offered a challenging reflection on the anthropology of Islam in an attempt to continue the debate that el-Zein started nearly ten years before. However, it should be noted, despite some reflexive attempts such as those provided by al-Zein (1977), Asad (1986), and Ahmed (1986), an epistemological discussion on what the anthropology of Islam might be never fully developed.

However, although there has been a great deal of anthropologists studying Muslim societies and or researching themes related to Islamic religion, with the notable exception of small numbers of fine anthropologists (e. g. Geertz), they are, for the most part, still unsuccessful in reaching a wide audience outside their own discipline. Until quite recently, anthropology, compared with political science, for instance, appears to be less influential in inspiring policy making or attracting the attention of the political world, think tank groupings, and mass media (Marranci 2008). The scholarly products of deep and thorough ethnographic fieldwork might be too complicated, too detailed, and therefore unconvincing for stakeholders, government officials, political leaders, state authorities, or mass media and think tank institutions that are unfamiliar with anthropological work or ethnographic study. For them, the survey results or outcomes of quantitative research method are considered in general more convincing than those of long-term multifaceted ethnographic research technique commonly used in (cultural) anthropology, albeit some contemporary anthropologists began to use quantitative research technique, in addition to primary qualitative ethnographic fieldwork.

Al-Zein's challenging article (1977) mentioned above actually attempted to reopen a debate beyond theology and ideology (of Islam) that became common and popular practice among Muslim scholars and specialists of Islam and Muslim societies. However, al-Zein's article remained unexplored beyond the scholarly diatribe on "one Islam" (i.e. those who understand Islam as one united entity and Muslims as a monolithic group) versus "many Islams", namely those who believe in the plurality and complexity of Muslim societies and of Islamic practices, interpretations, and understandings. While el-Zein's efforts seemed to fail, the short essays of Geertz's *Islam Observed* seemed to succeed. But still it remained an isolated case and certainly did not aim to shape or clarify what the anthropology of Islam might have been. What Geertz (and also Gellner's *Muslim Society*) did is just "observing Islam." Although Talal Asad (1986) and Akbar Ahmed (1986, 1984) tried to reawake the debate of anthropology of Islam, their efforts also remained largely ignored, producing response and reflections only after decades had passed (see e.g. Lukens-Bull 1999).

Moreover, comparing the work of five anthropologists focusing on Muslim societies (i.e. Geertz, Bujra, Crapanzano, Gilsenan, and Eickelman) against prominent theological viewpoints of Islam, al-Zein's article challenged his reader with a provocative question: "in the midst of this diversity of meaning, is there a single, real Islam?" (el-Zein 1977: 249). El-Zein answered negatively. According to el-Zein, anthropologists wishing to study Islam should recognize that,

"Islam as an expression of this logic can exist only as a facet within a fluid yet coherent system; it cannot be viewed as an available entity for cultural systems to select and put to various uses. 'Islam' without referring it to the facets of a system, of which it is part, does not exist. Put another way, the utility of the concept 'Islam' as a predefined religion with its supreme 'truth' is extremely limited in anthropological analysis. Even the dichotomy of folk Islam / elite Islam is infertile and fruitless. As I have tried to show, the apparent dichotomy can be analytically reduced to the logic governing it" (el-Zein 1977: 252).

El-Zein then suggested that anthropologists should fully reject the essentialist dyad "true Islam" (i.e. great tradition, scripturalism, orthodox Islam, etc.) versus "false Islam" (i.e. little tradition, mysticism, heterodox Islam, etc.), which certain anthropologists have propagated together with Islamic theologians and Muslim scholars. El-Zein, furthermore, put forward a structuralist approach, which starting from the 'native's model of 'Islam, that analyzes "the relations which produce its meaning." Beginning from this assumption, he adds:

"The system can be entered and explored in depth from any point, for there are no absolute discontinuities anywhere within it—there are no autonomous entities and each point within the system is ultimately accessible from every other point. In this view there can be no fixed and wholly isolable function of meaning attributed to any basic unit of analysis, be it symbol, institution, or process, which does not impose an artificial order on the system from outside. That is, the orders of the system and the nature of its entities are the same—the logic of the system is the content of the system in the sense that each term, each entity within the system, is the result of structural relations between others, and so on, neither beginning nor ending in any fixed, absolute point" (el-Zein 1977: 251-2).

In el-Zein's view, furthermore, "Islam," "economy," "history," "religion," and so forth (the quotation marks are el-Zein's) do not exist as things or entities with meaning inherent in them, but rather "as articulations of structural relations, and are the outcome of these relations" (el-Zein 1977: 251). For el-Zein, the anthropologist who uncover structural relationships through an intricate analysis of the content of religious rituals and beliefs shares with natives "a logic which is beyond their conscious control" and thus objective (*ibid*. 252). Anthropological and theological discourse differs from popular, conscious expressions of belief only in their greater systematization and "in the particular aspects of these local interpretations selected for analysis" (*ibid*. 246). El-Zein moreover argued that most anthropological accounts of Islam, like those of theologians, utilized presupposed and fixed assumptions concerning consciousness, history, and meaning, predetermine the limits as to what is properly religious and Islamic, and arbitrarily distinguish folk from elite and real from false Islam. The resulting utility of the concept 'Islam' as a predefined religion with its supreme 'truth' is "extremely limited in anthropological analysis" (el-Zein 1977: 248-9).

El-Zein's approach, according to Eickelman (1981a), is obviously a radical departure from earlier studies of Islam that underline a single, real, and true one Islam. Eickelman also commented that Zein's notion of structuralism is worth considering in detail, "for it is to my knowledge the first major application of such a method to an ethnographic study of Islam" (Eickelman 1981a: 363). Eickelman (1981a), moreover, highlighted el-Zein's intellectual courage, since, as a practicing Muslim, el-Zein advanced theoretical positions that, if misunderstood, as indeed they were, could have been rejected by Muslims, both elite and lay people. El-Zein indeed had courage claiming that anthropologists can provide a social scientific analysis of Muslim life through the observation of the diverse interpretations of Islam (see also Marranci 2008: 40-1).

El-Zein's proposal of the "anthropology of Islam" received critical comments from Talal Asad about ten years later. Asad rejected el-Zein's argument as "a brave effort, but finally unhelpful" (Asad 1986: 2). Not only criticizing el-Zein, Asad also criticized Gilsenan's paradigm because, "like el-Zein, [it] emphasizes….that no form of Islam may be excluded from the anthropologist's interest on the ground that it is not the true Islam. His suggestion that the different things that Muslims themselves

regard as Islamic should be situated within the life and development of their societies is indeed a sensible sociological rule, but it does not help identify Islam an analytical object of study" (Asad 1986: 2). Finally, Asad argued that in an anthropological study of Islam, Muslims' theological views could not be ignored. This is the origin of Asad's harsh comment on both el-Zein and Gilsenan's views. Later, Abu-Lughod (1989) accused Asad's ideological stances that led him to misunderstand the two authors' positions.

For Asad (1986: 14), moreover, "if one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concepts of a discursive tradition [Islam] that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. *It is a tradition*" [emphasis added]. For the first time, Asad proposed the blueprint that this discipline lacked. One cannot understand Asad's paradigm for the anthropology of Islam without grasping his use of the word "tradition." For him, tradition "consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the *correct* form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history" (Asad 1986: 14, italics added).

A tradition, Asad continued to argue, is conceptually linked to a past (marking the formation of the tradition), a future (marking the strategy of survival of the tradition) and a present (marking the interconnection of the tradition with the social strata. Therefore, Asad concluded, for analytical purposes "there is no essential difference….between 'classic' and 'modern' Islam" (*ibid*: 14). Asad claims that a tension exists between historical, political, economic and social dynamics, which through orthopraxy try to change tradition, and the tradition itself, which tries to resist through orthodoxy.  For this reason, Asad can claim that anthropologists such as Gilsenan (who has denied the centrality of orthodoxy in Islam) or Gellner (who has transformed certain specific doctrines into the heart of Islam itself) are "missing something vital; orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship—a relationship of power" (*ibid*. 15). To sum up, Asad argued that the anthropology of Islam "seek[s] to understand the historical conditions that enable the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions, or their transformation, and the efforts of practitioners to achieve coherence" (*ibid*. 17).

Despite Asad's view of Islam as a "tradition" may be an interesting insight, I disagree with his limited and proto-theological paradigm of the anthropology of Islam, because of the following reasons.

First, not all Muslims (though perhaps defining themselves as such) have a deep knowledge of the Qur'an or the Hadith. Many Muslims for sure learn how to read the Qur'anic verses which are written in classical Arabic (*fusha*). But many others cannot read them. Even though they learn how to read the Qur'an, many of them do not understand the meaning of each verse they read. As well, there are millions of Muslims who do not understand Arabic (classical or modern) or do not practice praying or fasting regularly. Many Muslims also perform *salah* (prayer) in Arabic without understanding the meaning of every Arabic reading in the prayer. In fact, the majority of Muslims are non-Arab, live outside the Arab region, and speak local non-Arabic languages: Persian, Hindi, Urdu, Bahasa Indonesia, Malay, Pukhto, Turkish, Kurdish, Javanese, Tai, and many others. Even Arab Muslims themselves, even though they certainly speak colloquial (*ammiyya*) Arabic, are not guarantee that they can comprehend the meanings (much less interpretations) of the Qur'an or read the Qur'an properly and correctly if they do not or never study grammar of classical Arabic (*fusha*), the language of the Qur'an.

In short, there are many "nominal" or "non-practicing" Muslims in many parts of the world from African continent to Central, South, East, and Southeast Asia. They are also many Muslims consider themselves as "cultural Muslims" that take or adopt Islam as a cultural identity rather than a theological entity. Should, according to Asad's definition of the anthropology of Islam,

anthropologists consider these particular Muslims to be bad or untrue Muslims? It is obvious that Asad's judgmental attitude would contradict one of the main aspects of anthropology as a discipline: the avoidance of bias. Moreover, for the anthropologist of Islam, the knowledge of the Qur'an and relevant Islamic literature remains an important good practice; but anthropology should not necessarily start from where Muslims start, as Asad suggested.

Second, Asad has narrowly limited the anthropology of Islam to an analysis of the power struggle between Muslims trying to maintain orthodoxy and the changing world challenging it. It seems Asad imagined Muslims are one group, or "idealized" them as one entity (orthodox Muslims!) that share similar values, norms, practices, and cultures, an imagination that is empirically, historically, sociologically, and anthropologically wrong. Finally, I am skeptically suspicious of Asad's 'brave', but too ideological, efforts to define, as the book's title indicates, "the idea of an anthropology of Islam."

Notwithstanding this lacuna, as Bowen (2012: 6-7) has noted, Asad has provided an interesting point when he urged us to pay attention to the powerful influential religious figures who authorize some interpretations and understandings of the Islamic tradition and suppress others. It is indeed a matter of debate whether Islamic / Muslim discourse, practice, and culture are a product of individual creativity (of a Muslim) or an outcome of interpretations, opinions, ideas, and understandings authorized and enforced by influential religious leaders, scholars, or clerics. While some studies underscore the vitality of the roles of such influential religious authorities as shaikh, Sufi master (guru), clerics, scholars, or leaders on the formation and transformation of Islamic knowledge and practice (e.g. Eickelman 1992), others tend to neglect the elite influences and put emphasis on the contributions of ordinary or lay Muslim's creativity, manipulation, pragmatism, and strategy.

## Between Anthropology of Islam and Islamic Anthropology

It is obvious that during the late 1970s and early 1980s some anthropologists, either Muslim or non-Muslim, studying Islam and conducting research on Muslim societies (e.g. Abdul Hamid el-Zein) tried to define and conceptualize an anthropology of Islam, while others (like Akbar Ahmed) proposed an idea of Islamic anthropology To my knowledge, the emergence of the idea to "Islamize" anthropology among specialists of Islam and Muslim society (i.e. those supported the concept of Islamic anthropology) was a product, directly or indirectly, of two significant movements as follows.

First, a Muslims' reaction toward Orientalism, of which ideas of the late Edward Said (1935-2003), a literary critic, a public intellectual and a founder of academic field of postcolonial studies, had been central in the shape of non-Marxist Third Wordlist scholars. Secondly, the emerging movements of the Islamization of knowledge since the 1960s. The project of the Islamization of knowledge took important step in the 1970s through the work of the late two influential and well-known Muslim scholars, namely Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1921–86) and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (b. 1931) (Abaza 2002). Ismail Raji al-Faruqi was a Palestinian–American philosopher, Islamic scholar, writer and activist, widely recognized by his peers as an authority on Islam and comparative religion. Moreover, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (born in Bogor, Indonesia) is a prominent contemporary Muslim philosopher and thinker who is considered by many to be a giant of scholarship in the Muslim world.

At the time, much of the debate focused on the different role and contribution that anthropology should have from theology. Some Muslim anthropologists like Talal Asad and Akbar Ahmed found unacceptable the suggestion that many Islams, rather than one Islam, could exist. Akbar Ahmed is a stalwart defender of the "one Islam" position, while el-Zein was an advocate of "many Islams". In his controversial *Toward Islamic Anthropology* (published in 1986, the same year with Asad's *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* discussed earlier), Ahmed wrote, "there has been a suggestion by Muslim anthropologists [among others, el-Zein] that there is no one Islam but many

Islams, a suggestion taken up by Western anthropologists. I disagree with this position. *There is only one Islam, and there can be only one Islam*" (Ahmed 1986: 58, italics mine).

Although Akbar Ahmed and Talal Asad are main supporters of "one Islam", both differ in conceptualizing the links between Islam and anthropology. Looking at Ahmed's book title, for example, there is an essential distinction between Ahmad and Asad or el-Zein. While el-Zein and Asad propose the idea of the anthropology of Islam, Ahmed suggests the concept of Islamic anthropology. In a short article published in 1984 entitled "Defining Islamic Anthropology," Ahmed clarified the idea of "Islamic anthropology" as "not to be little Western anthropology and its achievements, or to annul its past, but to create an additional body of knowledge based on scientific and unbiased information which adds to our understanding of it" (Ahmed 1984: 4).

It is important to highlight that the notion of the anthropology of Islam has developed from disparate ethnographic studies focusing on Muslims; consequently it has lacked a definite paradigm, a definition, or a theoretical blueprint. In other word, anthropology of Islam is still in a debate, an open-ended project and a polyphonic discourse. Islamic anthropology, by contrast, has been theorized, provided with a clear paradigm and blueprint: Islam (Marranci 2008). Ahmed's idea of the Islamic anthropology (1984, 1986) has received much attention from anthropologists through extended reviews and discussions, albeit they have shown an overall skepticism towards Ahmed's argument, with some, like Richard Tapper (1988) vehemently rejecting it.

Prior to reviewing Tapper's disagreement with Ahmed (and other proponents of the Islamic anthropology or the anthropology of Islam), it is useful to understand what Ahmed means by Islamic anthropology. For Ahmed, Islamic anthropology is defined loosely as "the study of Muslim groups by scholars committed to the universalistic principles of Islam—humanity, knowledge, tolerance—relating micro village tribal studies in particular to the larger historical and ideological frames of Islam. Islam is here understood as theology but sociology, the definition thus does not preclude non-Muslims" (Ahmed 1986: 56). Ahmed's emphasis on the inclusiveness of Islamic anthropology should be appreciated. Yet a strong contradiction in terms falsifies all the universalistic framework of Islamic anthropology. Ahmed has stated that Islam, in Islamic anthropology, is not theology but rather sociology. Hence, he has concluded, Islamic anthropology does not rule out non-Muslim anthropologists. Now, I wonder, how a non-Muslim, who may not recognize Muhammad as a prophet and be agnostic about God, could apply Islamic anthropological methodology. Thus, Islamic anthropology, however explained or sold, is nothing else than anthropology based on a theological determinism.

Although Ahmed's initial idea of Islamic anthropology is intended to create a separate room within a house of (Western) anthropology, it soon turned into a big house and treats Western anthropology as a small room. A prime argument of Islamic anthropology is that, because of its basis in Islam, it is logically, theoretically, and morally superior to other approaches. As Ahmed (1984: 2) has noted, the idea behind the Islamic anthropology is to provide an alternative body of knowledge of Western anthropology because the field (Western anthropology), "attracted two types of people: missionaries and colonial administrators." Anthropology then is acceptable, according to Ahmed (*ibid*), only "if purified from the subversive material, methods, and terminology of the missionaries and colonial administrators."

However, ironically, Ahmed's concept of Islamic anthropology is also trapped in the same extremist pole because there are theological assumptions behind this idea. Can anthropology be built based on theological premises? Ahmed's assertion of "t*here is only one Islam, and there can be only one Islam"* (1986: 58) or a sort "ideal type" of Islam is also empirically unrealistic since there are variations of Islamic traditions, cultures, practices, factions, schools, discourses, understandings, and interpretations. Since the early days when Islam was born in the 7th century of Mecca, Islam had been a major contest among Muslims themselves that later resulted in the political-theological-

intellectual-legal-social division, schism, and factionalism. The birth of *ahl al-hadith* (lit. people of Hadith or traditionalists) and *ahl al-ra'y* (lit. rationalists or reasoners), the rise of multiple theological schisms (Murji'a, Jabbariyya, Qadariyya, Khawarij, Shia, Sunni, Ibadi, Mu'tazila, and many others), the occurrence of Islamic streams (e.g. Sufism or Salafism), and the emergence of schools of Islamic jurisprudence (e.g. Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, or Hanbali within the Sunni school or Ja'fari in Shia), are all examples of a variety and complexity of Islamic practices.

Although Muslims believe in Muhammad as a prophet or Allah SWT as their God, the way they practice and understand it is extremely different and diverse. Even though Muslims have agreed on the Qur'an as a primary Islamic text, they differ significantly in understanding and interpreting the Qur'anic verses. Muslims' ritual practices are also extremely varied and complex from one Muslim to another or from one Islamic grouping to another. Muslims also have different understanding and interpretations regarding many Islamic concepts, either related to politics, economy, social, legal, spirituality, ethics, norms, and others. Accordingly, as el-Zein (1977) has noticed, there is no "Islam" (singular like Edward Tylor's concept of "culture") but "Islams" (plural like Boas' or Geertz's ideas of "cultures"). To bring the idea in a broader sense, Ahmed's Islamic anthropology—like Asad's anthropology of Islam—refuses the fact of cultural diversities which is part of the legacy of anthropology. Ahmed's Islamic anthropology and Asad's anthropology of Islam look different but actually they share the same faith. What the competing versions of the ideas share is a basis in Islamic texts. They are, in other words, to borrow Tapper's phrase, "Islamic approaches to the study of anthropological texts, rather than anthropological approaches to the study of Islamic texts" (Tapper 1988: 185).

Another significant point needs to be underlined is that both Ahmed's and Asad's ideas are too skeptical and suspicious with Western anthropologists whom they saw had been contaminated by colonial administrators and missionaries. In fact, Asad (1993) has said that anthropology is a creation of Western colonialism. It seems to me that they saw Western anthropologists, without exception, would bring biases (e.g. ideological and theological agenda, European-Christian-modernist traditions, ethnocentricism, and so forth) when they undertook research in non-Western societies, particularly Muslim communities (compare their ideas to Said's *Orientalism*). Indeed Ahmed's critique is confined largely to unsupported statements about "the notorious ethnocentricity of Western anthropology" (Ahmed 1986). Nonetheless, the proposals for an Islamic anthropology have the virtue of being explicit in their values and ideological commitments. If anthropology as a science, Mona Abaza has said, reflects serious controversies and prejudices of the Orientalist heritage (as Ahmed & Asad asserted), "the reader is yet left insecure as to whether the Islamic anthropology is not a reverse side of the same coin" (Abaza 2002: 28).

Underlying assumption of the idea of Ahmed's Islamic anthropology and Asad's anthropology of Islam is that Islam (along with the culture and society of Muslims) cannot be studied and understood by non-Muslim anthropologists. Both anthropologists, to my knowledge, have ignored the fact that even Western anthropologists are not a monolithic group consisting of people that have similar concerns, ideas, purposes, or agenda. Indeed they were some anthropologists, either American or European anthropologists, who worked hand-in-hand with colonial administrators and supported the colonial presence in the "Third World" societies or embraced ethnocentrism by undervaluing non-Muslims or non-Western societies in general, but others (like the founder of American anthropology Franz Boas and his students) intensely fought against ethnocentric biased points of view among Western academics and scientists that put the West as the "superior culture" while the rest (non-West) as the "inferior culture". Putting too much suspicion on Western anthropologists also neglects the fact of the changing phenomena and trends in the Western academia, besides ignoring individual variations among anthropologists. The world changes, anthropologists change. After World War II, many had changed in anthropology. They are many

anthropologists working on Muslim societies that resulted in a high quality of research findings away from theological, ideological, or ethnocentric biases.

Indeed, I have to recognize, they were some Western anthropologists in the past (like Geertz or Gellner) studying Islam and Muslims from European-Enlightenment frameworks; as a result their studies are unbalanced and biases. But, can we guarantee that if Islam and Muslims are studied by Muslim anthropologists will result in unbiased, fair research findings and away from ethnocentrism? I will answer negatively. Some Muslim anthropologists fight against Western ethnocentrism while at the same time (some unconsciously) are trapped within or happily embrace "Eastern ethnocentrism".

It should be noted that the quality of research will not be determined by the religious or ethnic identity of anthropologists, but how well anthropologists apply research methodology and theoretical frameworks, as well as their purposes and motives of doing such research. It is significant to emphasize that the best anthropological studies of Islam, by Muslims or non-Muslims, have resisted the tyranny of those (whether Orientalist outsiders or conservative-minded *ulama* insiders) who propose a "great tradition" ("scripturalist") approach to the culture and religion of the periphery. These anthropologists, as Tapper (1988: 192) has noted, aim to understand "how life (Islam) is lived and perceived by ordinary Muslims, and to appreciate local customs and cultures (systems of symbols and their meanings) as worthy of study and recognition in their social contexts, rather than as 'pre-Islamic survivals' or as error and deviation from scriptural norm (i.e. "great tradition").

### Is There a Need for Anthropology of Islam? Concluding Remarks

The question, then, is there a need for anthropology of Islam? The answer to this question will depend on how you define such a concept. For me, if the anthropology of Islam (not "Islamic anthropology" or even "Islamist anthropology") means, simply the "fair study of Muslim communities, along with their complex understanding of texts, beliefs, practices, cultures, traditions, ideas, history and so forth through theoretical frameworks and research methods developed in the field of anthropology," the answer will be "yes".

Since anthropology is the "science of men," anthropologists need to reach a broader audience, not only "primitive," tribal, small-scale, societies. 1.8 billion Muslims, whether in the West or in the East, North or South are certainly worthy to study. Indeed, there have been growing concerns of today's Western anthropologists to study Muslim societies especially since the tragedy of the September 11, but their impacts on public policies still limited, especially compare with the work of political scientists or that of International Relation specialists. to my knowledge, only few contemporary anthropologists of Islam (e.g. Robert Hefner or John Bowen) whose research and work on Muslim societies have been highly appreciated and acknowledged by non-anthropologists or social scientists. Apart from this limitation, however, anthropological voices of the Muslim world, which has been misunderstood by many Westerners, are extremely needed.

However, if the anthropology of Islam means like what Akbar Ahmed and Talal Asad outlined earlier, my answer is "No". My observation of the idea of "Islamic anthropology" (or even "anthropology of Islam") proposed by these scholars, notwithstanding their fine contributions, speaks too much Islam and less anthropology. Richard Tapper (1988) even commented more austerely stating that the idea of "Islamic anthropology" does not credit either to anthropology or Islam.

Furthermore, if an anthropology of Islam in the sense of what I have depicted previously (here I treat anthropology of Islam like anthropology of religion in general) is needed, there are a number of significant and specific issues need to be highlighted as follows.

First, anthropologists—whether Muslims or non-Muslims—need to pay attention to the complexity and diversity of Muslim societies. Today's Muslims varied, not simply Bedouins or Sufis, not simply Arabs, Middle Easterners, or North African Muslims. In fact, the biggest portion of Muslims resides in non-Arab / Middle East countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, or Turkey. Muslim communities are like a forest seeing from a distance looks united but if getting closer into it there are many different trees and branches of Islam (Muslims). Hence, seeing Muslims from monolithic perspectives of, for instance, Weberian, Huntingtonian, Evans-Pritchardian, Gellnerian, or Geertzian will be extremely unjust, unfair, inaccurate, and misleading.

Second, the anthropology of Islam should involve "translating and humanizing ordinary [Muslim] believers' cultures," as well as "analyzing the production and use of Islamic 'text'" (Tapper 1988: 192). To my knowledge, both Geertz and Gellner tended to "dehumanize" heterodox, syncretic Muslims in favor of orthodox, urban ones. Analyzing or understanding the production of Islamic "texts" is also significant since Muslims tend to use it for different purposes. The term "texts" also needs to be elaborated or clarified because Muslims understand "texts" in different ways. As Bowen's study in the Gayo Muslims of Aceh has suggested, traditionalist, modernist, reformist, and village/rural Muslims of the Gayo understand "Islamic texts' ' differently and they use them for different reasons and purposes (Bowen 1993). Accordingly, understanding "Islamic texts" merely from the perspective of the Qur'an or Hadith (as Asad and Ahmed have claimed) is deceptive and contrary to the various facts of Muslim societies on the ground.

Third, elements of the "great traditions" (e.g. religious texts, formal beliefs, and the religious officials and others who produce such traditions) should be analyzed in their social and cultural contexts, allowing the relevance of political manipulations, power struggles, inter-group competitions, economic constraints, and tribal / kinship / ethnic loyalties and so on, not simply a rational textual determinism: "orthodoxy" versus "orthopraxy."

Fourth, the anthropology of Islam needs to study how Muslims (as individuals, groups, societies, or nations) present, construct, and reconstruct themselves as Muslims (as a major constituent of their identity), for instance, through markers of various kinds such as diet (proscription of pork and alcohol), myth and genealogy (e.g. holy decent), veneration for the prophet (e.g. maulid traditions), conflict (e.g. Sunni-Shi'a), discursive traditions (e.g. the Gayo Muslims) (Tapper 1988).

Fifth, anthropologists of Islam should engage contemporary problems and issues facing Muslims worldwide. These include drugs, black markets, HIV, secularism, LGBT, terrorism and counterterrorism, vigilantism, peace movements, democracy, inter-religious cooperation, transnational Islamist movements, ethno-religious violence, Muslims in the West, feminism, globalization, Internet, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Artificial Intelligence, Muslims in non-Muslim countries, Muslims in Muslim majority countries, nationalism, environmentalism, and many others. In an era when Muslims have undergone rapid social change studying "conventional" anthropological issues will be out of date. In short, the anthropology of Islam needs to deal with the dynamics of Muslim lives expressed through their ideological and rhetorical understanding of their surrounding (social, natural, virtual) environment.

Sixth, anthropologists of Islam also need to move beyond conventional methods of anthropology such as those of "Malinowskian traditions" (i.e. deep ethnographic fieldwork) by applying and incorporating macro-perspectives and cross-discipline methods (e.g. sociology, history, political science, linguistics, theology, religious studies, among others). Imagine how social media like Zoom, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and others can function as a means of creating "imagined communities," how jihadists in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, or Egypt build international complex networks from the Middle East or South Asia to Southeast Asia, how radicals utilize Internet to create a cyber global jihad, or how Muslims from various countries can freely chat and email with their fellow Muslims through certain apps. How can anthropologists approach such issues facing

today's Muslims? How can anthropologists deal with the "global village" of Islam where a "place" or "boundary" of Muslims blurs? In the era of Internet, social media, and blogging, informants can tell their story just from in front of a computer or mobile phone!

In short, anthropologists of Islam face new challenges, some of which are the product of new technologies, contemporary political developments, socio-religious changes, among others. The complexity of all matters described above can only be investigated by anthropologists who understand and realize the dynamics and complexity of Islam and Muslims societies, as well as comprehend methods and theoretical frameworks whether an "insider" (one who is from the community studied who shares its culture and religion) or an "outsider" (one from outside community studied), a native or foreigner, a Muslim or non-Muslim.

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