

List of contributors

Tor H. Aase, Professor, Department of Geography, University of Bergen

Eldar Bråten, Associate Professor, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen

Katy Gardner, Associate Professor, Department of Social Anthropology, School of African and Asian Studies, University of Sussex

Dru C. Gladney, Associate Professor, Program for Cultural Studies, East-West Centre, Hawaii

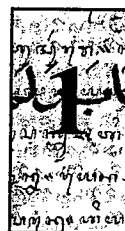
Sharif Harir, former Research Fellow at the Centre for Development Studies, University of Bergen. Presently with the Sudan Democratic Alliance in Asmara, Eritrea

Leif Manger, Professor, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen

Annika Rabo, Associate Professor, Institute of Tema Research, University of Linköping

William Roff, Professor Emeritus, Department of History, Columbia University, now St. Andrews

Knut S. Vikør, Director, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Bergen



Muslim Diversity: Local Islam in Global Contexts

Leif Manger

Introduction

The Orientalist perspective, according to Edward Said, has created the notion that 'Islam does not develop, and neither do Muslims; they merely are' (Said 1979: 317), and furthermore, that Islam is seen to be about texts rather than people. A couple of years earlier the anthropologist Abdel Hamid el-Zein raised a similar type of criticism (el-Zein 1977), in which he accused classical contributions on Islam within the particular field of anthropology for leaving out the 'voice of Muslims'. He urges anthropologists to talk more about Muslims, and less about Islam; more about how Muslims speak, not only about how they act.

Of course, to describe Islam as a static entity and to see Muslims and the Middle East in essentializing and reifying terms did not start in the 1970s. From the time of the Crusades 'The Islamic Threat', 'The Green Threat' and 'The Sword of Islam' have been established concepts, portraying Muslims as fanatic zealots. But the notions are not only political. The underlying assumptions expressed through such terms are also found among researchers and were also part of the critique raised by Said and el-Zein. In many studies Islam and the Islamic world were portrayed as 'lacking' the institutions that had taken the Western world forward, particularly the civil society that mediates between the ruler and the individual subjects, exemplified by concepts like Wittfogel's 'Oriental Despotism' (Wittfogel 1957). In the same vein Weber argued that Islamic societies lacked a 'spirit of capitalism' and an 'entrepreneurial spirit'.

However, in a more specific sense Said and el-Zein also raised the problem of how to study Islam as historical reality; partly a text-based

world religion, i.e. as a decontextualized global reality, and partly as localized, contextualized cases of so-called Islamic beliefs and practices, or as 'practical religion' to paraphrase Leach. Both authors are clear on what they do not like, and illustrate by criticizing classical contributions such as those of Ernest Gellner and Clifford Geertz.¹ Gellner describes Islam as a distinct historical totality, portraying a correlation of social structure, religious belief and political activity to an extent that makes Islam a blueprint of the social order (Gellner 1982). And Geertz argues for a perspective of 'core symbols' (Geertz 1968, 1983), in which we first analyse the meaning contained in the symbols, and second, relate such systems of meaning embodied in the symbols to socio-structural and psychological processes (Geertz 1973: 125). Arguing against such attempts to reduce Islam and the lives of Muslims to idealized patterns, both Said and el-Zein are less clear on the alternatives. Said's project is clearly to show that certain representations constitute a type of knowledge that also implies subordination of 'the Other'. His field is the one of 'politics of representation', his project was not about conceptualizing alternative views.² And el-Zein concludes that in the final analysis there is no such theoretical object as Islam.

Looking at the contributions presented in this book, they clearly convey a picture of the Islamic world as dynamic. The authors are also looking for conceptual ways to deal with this dynamism, arguing that the perspectives we are seeking must open up and accommodate descriptions of a wide variety of beliefs and actions labelled Islamic by people themselves; indeed, Muslim diversity must be our starting point. However, the essays also make it clear that it might not be enough only to hear Muslims speak; we also need analyses about how their stories are constructed, how they become real to those who take them to be true, and how they sometimes change. Thus we need perspectives that, in order to be useful, help us focus on contradictory discourses without preconceived notions of cultural and social integration, and they must lead us towards the concerns of real people. The perspectives we seek must not operate as 'straitjackets', providing us

1. Said at first did not include Geertz in his critique of Orientalism, but later changed this.

2. See e.g. Turner (1994) for a broader discussion on this.

with preconceived ideas about Muslim realities. These realities must be discovered and documented, and made sense of (Launay 1992).

Islam as a world system: the reality of *dār al-islām*

The contributions presented cover Muslim societies in several continents, from West Africa to Southeast Asia, from the Near East to China. The variety of cases, and the variety of beliefs and practices presented, certainly point beyond any simple Orientalist notion of an unchanging world of Islam. Similarly they point beyond a notion of any 'culture core' of Islam, defined by its place of origin, Arabia, and by Arabic language and culture only. Within Islamic studies such assumptions have led researchers studying Islam in Africa and in Asia to believe they were 'on the margins', that the religious beliefs they saw represented 'peripheral Islam' and that the religious practices they encountered were 'syncretist'.³ Such assumptions are shaken by studies from within the Middle East itself, as is well illustrated by Annika Rabo's essay in this volume, which focuses on Raqqa town in Syria. Being within what by most definitions would be considered the heartland of Muslim civilization, the local discourses on Islam look very much like the ones we encounter in the other essays, from different countries, different continents. Rather than unification we see internal pluralism, ethnic diversity and multiple discourses.

Indeed, in order to expand on the complexities they reflect, a necessary first step is to introduce a cultural historical approach and to see the Muslim world as a world system. Certainly, Islam is made up of specific texts, the Qur^ʾān, the Sunna, the Shari^ʿa and so forth. But the Muslim religion is also one with a particular history of events, starting with the Prophet Muḥammad, followed by the four *khalīfas*. Muslims are part of an imperial history of political expansion, of waves of political rise and decline, but also processes of intellectual development and tides of reformism and of accommodation, not reflecting the sequences of political and economic developments. Rather, what has been termed a dark age of Muslim civilization, i.e. after the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate, represents an extraordinarily rich cultural and intellectual period. The history of the Islamic civili-

3. See e.g. Stewart and Shaw (1994) for a discussion on 'syncretism'.

zation fits into broader schemes of the rise and fall of civilizations, and should be understood in contexts of civilizations and social forms preceding it and those that have followed it, as well as in the context of the ones with which it has coexisted (see e.g. Hodgson 1974). The world system we are seeking is not Wallerstein's capitalist system that led to *homo economicus* (Wallerstein 1974) but to a system of ideas, informal networks of scholars and saints, organized around the messages of the Qur^ʿān, building a righteous social order; in short, a system of symbolic interaction (Eaton 1990; Voll 1982).

It is within such a 'global culture' that Muslims around the world can experience themselves as members of the *umma* and it is, for instance, the culture that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa encountered on his travels. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa moved through a cultural universe in which he was very much at home, meeting merchants, scholars and princes, people with whom he could converse in Arabic about intellectual matters as well as about matters happening in distant parts of *dār al-islām*. And it is to this world that we can travel via the cases studied in this book, to see how that prophetic incident in Arabia in the seventh century helped shape individual lives in civilizations as different as the Irano-Semitic, Sanskritic, Malay-Javanese, Chinese and the Sudanic World of Africa.

In this general history lie hidden many foci that should inform our views of how Islam has developed in its many local forms. The emergence of the faith itself; political conquests as well as defeats; trade routes which provided contacts across culture areas; the confinement of Muslims within nation states; Muslims in control of that state; being discriminated against by the state or being victims of outright persecution; Muslim reaction to Western and Eastern domination, secularism and consumerism but also Muslim dependence on Western labour markets; modes of information and travelling – all these factors produced complexities that hardly can be explained away by sets of idealized processes. The above perspectives, of cultural history and world system, allow specific histories to come more clearly to the surface whereby the lives of Muslims can be portrayed in the context of that history, i.e. lives not only shaped by living in integrated localities organized according to Islamic principles, but as lives lived in arenas in which complex historical processes have taken place and indeed continue to take place.

It is beyond the scope of this introduction to detail this history, and the essays themselves deal with their relevant contexts; so here it will suffice to give some historical sketches of the early spread of Islam as part of a general global history. People and groups presented in the essays all came into contact with Islam at different points of this history and are affected by specific lines of development. Rabo's Syrian case represents an area that was among the first to be Islamized, after the Muslims expanded outside Arabia itself. Syria also became the centre of the first Muslim empire, the Ummayyads, Damascus being the imperial centre. In later centuries Syria and Palestine also represented the western starting point of a middle route of trade and communication towards the east, passing through the Abbasid capital of Baghdad before diverting in two directions. One route went over land through Persia, again splitting either towards Central Asia or towards India. The second diversion was southwards, down the Tigris to the Persian Gulf and eventually the Indian Ocean. Further north, another major overland route developed, linking Turkey, the Black Sea and Caspian Sea areas, Central Asia and China.

By 712 Arab armies had seized strategic towns of Central Asia like Balkh, Samarkand, Bukhara and Ferghana and were later invited by Turkish tribes to engage the Chinese armies. Although never dominating China, Muslims gained access to the Silk Route, which provided trade possibilities, but also intellectual contact and the spread of new ideas. All this represents a basic historical context for the cases of Aase and Gladney.

To the south Muslim navies sailed to India, starting Islam's encounter with the Indic civilizations in Sind and Punjab in the west, the Bengal in the east, the Bengali Islam being the context for Gardner's Bangladesh paper. The decline of the Mongol empire in Central and West Asia constrained developments and allowed the Indian Ocean to become an important arena for travelling, trade and learning. The western part of the Indian Ocean was dominated by Muslim merchants and shipowners operating from the Arabian coastal towns; a middle region connected the Indian coast with the 'Hinduized' southeast Asian regions of Sumatra and Malaya; and an eastern circuit, linking Java to China, thus bringing Muslims into the realm of Buddhism and Confucianism.

By the end of the thirteenth century, city-states appeared in Malay-speaking Southeast Asia, spreading Islam and at the same time providing Europe with spices. Two centuries later Islam started to penetrate the interior of Java, encountering not European traders as competitors as they did in the coastal towns, but a Hindu-Buddhist civilization, a historical development that Bråten's chapter reflects.

Similar processes brought Islam to Africa, via the trans-Saharan trade between North and West Africa, via the trade across the Red Sea to the Sudan and across the Indian Ocean to the Swahili coast, and up the Nile Valley, from Cairo, which after the fall of Baghdad took over as the main Muslim city and the seat of the Mamluk dynasty. The process began in the tenth century, and affected the regions and communities dealt with by Vikør, Harir and Manger.

If we focus on more recent history, our story would have to include the spread of the Western-dominated systems of capitalism and technology, of the colonial experience and the emergence of nation states. The essays all bring up examples of this recent history, showing the ways in which it provides basic contexts in the everyday life of Muslims.

The history of the Muslim world is also a history of economic and cultural diffusion, a history in which Muslims played a central role. Paper-making, which resulted from contact with China, helped to spread the Holy Word, as well as to consolidate bureaucracies. The spread of agricultural products within the Muslim world provides a similar example. The Arab conquest of Sind in 711 brought them knowledge about hard wheat, rice, sugarcane, new varieties of sorghum and various fruits. Such crops spread around the Muslim territories and contributed to changes in agriculture, land tenure and modes of taxation (Watson 1983). Similar stories could be told about the diffusion of scientific knowledge and technology (Al-Hassan and Hill 1986), and seafaring and navigation, particularly in dealing with Indian Ocean monsoons (Tibbetts 1981, Hourani 1951).

The dissemination of religious knowledge that is discussed in several contributions in this volume, through the activities of Sufi saints and scholars is thus paralleled in several other fields. It all points in one direction: rather than lacking in 'entrepreneurial spirit', the Islamic civilization was a dynamic one, spearheading developments as well as learning from other civilizations (Goody 1996). This is not the

place to present that history in detail, but to argue that an awareness of it is basic to the perspective here adopted, because the various points of contact represented meeting places which allowed for new types of development. The trade and the organization of caravans activated not only capital, but organizational patterns handling credit, legal patterns creating security around contracts, and so on. In such situations Islam was not only a religion, but the Shari'a provided a legal code for handling business and for dealing with conflicts. People well versed in the Shari'a therefore also acted as judges, arbitrators and so on, drawing on knowledge about earlier cases from elsewhere as well as their interpretation of the text itself. But the same processes also provided arenas in which Muslims met, and in which Muslims met with non-Muslims, thereby experiencing themselves as Muslims in their particular world. The factors at play are summarized by Eaton (1990: 17) in the following way:

The emergence of state institutions and urban centers that provided foci for the growth of Islamic civilisation; the conversion of subject populations to Islam; the ability of Muslim culture to absorb, adapt, and transmit culture from neighbouring civilisations; and the elaboration of socio-religious institutions that enabled Islamic civilisation to survive, and even flourish, following the decline of centralized political authority (Eaton 1990: 17).

Putting this in the perspective of a world system allows us to see the Muslim world as it interacts with other civilizations. Before 1500 none of the various civilizations was dominant, they were competing in particular places, but none held a hegemonic position over technological or social inventiveness, as the West came to do in later centuries. Pagans and followers of Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism and Zoroastrianism all interacted with Muslims. Different types of economic systems coexisted – agrarian-based systems, city-based commercial systems, state-based systems – and knowledge about their various organizations facilitated the developments hinted at above. The weakening of these systems through the Black Death, the collapse of the empire of the Mongols, the erosion of trading enterprises in the Indian Ocean, and so on, paved the way for post-1500 Western dominance. The collapse of the East thus facilitated the rise of the West, not overnight but as the accumulated effects over several centuries (Abu-

Lughod 1989: 361). And the processes we are living through now, at the end of the twentieth century, might well mark the end of the hegemonic position of the West, perhaps towards a situation of several core centres, in a way similar to the pre-1500 world. But this is beyond our discussion. We shall return to the Muslim world, and the problem of conceptualization.

Conceptualizing global systems

The introduction of the concepts of civilization, world system and globalization studies to this whole discussion is not new, of course (see e.g. Featherstone *et al.* 1995; Frank and Gills 1993; Friedman 1994; Sanderson 1995); nor are earlier studies free of the biases that we should seek to avoid. For instance, in the classical studies of civilizations there is an inbuilt notion that civilizations are characterized by writing and city life (e.g. Quigley 1961) which, combined with an evolutionary bias, lead us towards classifying civilization 'above' non-civilizations. Civilizations differed from 'primitive society', in that they were dynamic rather than static (Toynbee 1934–61); in that they were organized by some specific sort of human thought and feeling (material, spiritual or both) that dominated various periods of a civilization's history (Sorokin 1937–41); or that they represented a particular kind of surplus producing economy (Quigley 1961), to mention a few classical views (Sanderson 1995). The culmination of this evolutionary scheme is of course the emergence of the hierarchically organized world capitalist system (Wallerstein 1974). World systems theory is also criticized for containing biases of its own; in particular that it adopts a Eurocentric view of history, leaving out large parts of humankind as 'people without history' (Wolf 1982), and also that the perspective is heavily biased towards economic forces, denying an important role to cultural dynamics.

But perspectives that claim to focus on cultural forces also suffer from the above-mentioned biases. The best example here may be the two concepts of 'Great Tradition' and 'Little Tradition' (Redfield 1971), which have come under attack for leading our thinking towards static typologies of what is great and not-great, high and low, developed and underdeveloped, civilized versus uncivilized. The bias towards high religion and seeing cultural change as a process between

two opposite poles excludes non-religious factors that may influence developments but belong to other arenas and other types of actors than the ones the above authors choose as a focus. Clearly, the notion that there is only one single Great Tradition and a single Little Tradition is untenable, and these conceptualizations may be said to function as 'gatekeeping concepts' that limit instead of enhance insights into the complexities of local life (Appadurai 1986). The same criticism can be levelled against central works by authors who followed in Redfield's footsteps, notably the important studies on Indian civilization by Marriott (1955), Srinivas (1967) and Singer (1972). But we should not be blind to their achievements. The studies did point to cultural performances as units of observation, to the cultural stage on which the performances were enacted, and to the performers, i.e. the ritual specialists, and the cultural media used in the performance (Singer 1984: 165) thus pointing us beyond an understanding of culture only as an abstract order of signs, or a collection of habitual practices.

To my mind, among more recent studies with a particular focus on Islam and Muslims, Talal Asad brings us further in the right direction, by maintaining a focus on the social organization of knowledge and meaning, without preconceived notions about dynamics. Asad suggests we look at Islam as a discursive tradition (1986), adopting the direction of Foucault's general notions of discourses and discursive formations always being historically situated, and always tied to and produced by power. Our task, says Asad, is to understand the production of knowledge and the institutional conditions for the production of that knowledge. We should not assume that religion and culture make up any a priori system of meaning, and we should not look for what is essential in Islam; rather than that we should look for historical social formations within which Muslims themselves engage in discourse on what should be central to Islam. In this perspective Islam does not become an acting agent but an arena of many processes that become Islamic because they belong to the discursive tradition of Islam. According to Asad the 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. Hence the discourses

relate conceptually to a past (when the practice was instituted and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a future (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through a present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions) (Asad 1986: 14).

The discursive tradition also has its social organization, including experts on different levels, with knowledge, with specific technologies for transferring their knowledge, with internal hierarchies, and with relationships to rulers and so on. The question here is not to seek the essence of Islam but to know the historical conditions necessary for the existence of particular religious practices and discourses.

Asad's perspective helps us solve several problems inherent in the tradition established by Redfield. First, what has been labelled Great Tradition is not seen to be outside localities, only to be found in libraries. It is right there in front of the observer, observable through written texts and the religious agents dealing with such texts. We should therefore pay more attention to the role of such traditional networks of learning and transmission of knowledge. Second, we are not confined to looking at one Great and one Little Tradition. The perspective allows us to look at many traditions, and with different dynamics. Thus we do not have to assume a unified level of culture but can accommodate the view that culture is distributive. Third, it entails a view that meaning is being produced in the relationship between religious symbols and people. The concept of meaning as a relationship puts greater emphasis on context and praxis. Within the perspective we can also bring in other types of dynamics, in other social fields, that also affect how people confer meaning on reality. The meaning is thus dependent on how actors are positioned in this totality, thus providing a basis for discussion of the wider integration of culture (e.g. Asad 1993).

Globalization and scale

Empirically we know, of course, that the contemporary lives of Muslims are characterized by processes of movement and transformations, and that the general emergence of transnational culture is also a Muslim phenomenon. The above agenda allows us to study the

various globalizing phenomena by shifting our focus away from simple structures and privileged local systems towards larger systems which, although characterized by complexity, still show coherence – a coherence that we can approach through a study of meaningful practice.

In order to capture some of this complexity we should also look in the direction of some of the perspectives presented in more recent literature on globalization. Appadurai's (1986; 1990) concepts of ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, finanscapescapes and ideoscapescapes to depict the various global flows of people, information, money and ideas of which contemporary people are part, and which in many ways replace national institutions, take us in the right direction. The same goes for Hannerz's use of 'networks' (Hannerz 1992). Both types of concepts point ahead towards analyses that are not constrained by the terms society and culture as part of local systems only.

Friedman (1994) argues more explicitly about the need to understand how the various flows are integrated in ways that form the lives of real people. Whereas Appadurai sees the pace of the global flows of transport and information as causes of disintegration and tension between the local and the global, Friedman argues that they represent logical outcomes of underlying processes of a similar disintegration in the economic field, in world accumulation patterns. Friedman does not see randomness and disjunction but structured processes of production of meaning within global processes, and the creation of 'identity-space' within the same processes. All three authors argue that instead of slipping into post-modernism, we should develop a view on how the new types of realities many people face are distinct versions of modern, transnational, intercultural experience (Clifford 1994). Whether we term such processes among non-European people 'creolization', 'hybrid culture', 'transculturation' or something else is not important at this point. My interest is in perspectives that can lead us towards types of analyses that can uncover the processes behind the production of meaning and identity spaces which Friedman talks about.

Discussions of this sort inevitably lead to the problem of scale in social analyses. Eickelman (1982) argues that there should be an analytical middle ground between the local and the global in which we

can put Muslims and their practices in socio-historical contexts. Such middle grounds could be 'the nation' or 'the region'. Although this could bring the lives of real people closer to us, such a procedure might also produce reifications on new levels of scale (e.g. 'Moroccan' Islam and 'Indonesian' Islam instead of 'village' Islam). To define any preconceived level of scale that would be valid in all places and at all times seems to me to be impossible. The relevant levels of scale are a product of our analysis, not a prerequisite for it. The issue is not to decide a priori at what level and in which fields the important dynamics are to be found, but rather to develop discovery procedures that allow us to establish the empirical dynamics in the first place (Barth 1992).

Grønhaug (1978) provides an 'early warning' against using such preconceived notions of the local, the regional, the national and the global. Rather, he argues for the necessity of establishing fields of connected activities as the starting point in our analyses. Such fields are organized around the concepts of tasks and teams, i.e. how people are pursuing various concerns in their lives. Based on material from Herat in Afghanistan, he shows how some of the fields are local in character, some regional, while others relate to international and global processes. The strength of Grønhaug's approach is his empirically based discovery of how each social field appears as an aggregate system, with a certain territorial distribution, a certain scale and a certain social organization. Furthermore, it allows us to see the flows within various fields as being moulded by different factors. Not only do technologies and signs travel, but so do real people, and in so doing, they shape their own life courses. Just as we can untangle social fields in Herat, I think we can use the same procedure to untangle the new transnational linkages between people without becoming trapped in a bipolar, local-global perspective. Contemporary, supra-local identities (diasporic, refugee, migrant, national, etc.) are not spatial and temporal extensions of a prior, naturally given identity rooted in 'locality' and 'community', nor do we have to see the global as a new, artificially imposed, or inauthentic type of identity (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). We should rather see any identity as being 'constructed' and our aim should be to study such processes of identity formations as they unfold within different contexts. I believe this is also what Appadurai

is arguing for when he talks about the different streams as 'fractals', of 'chaos' rather than order, and of 'rhizome' as a basic metaphor (1996). The aim should be to avoid models of integrated local systems and to focus on the unbounded, deterritorialized character of such communities, without sacrificing our ideal to uncover basic patterns and dynamics. In a world of overlapping social networks with cross-cutting boundaries and flows of meaning, everybody's experience is ultimately touched by global social processes (Kuper 1992: 7), but at the same time people's interpretation of such processes vary a lot and produce a variety of localized adaptations and responses.

Meaning and the media of transmission

Among the globalizing phenomena that characterize our time, the existence of media has been paid much attention in the literature. An increasingly expanding book market is making available to Muslims a type of literature that discusses the role and the position of Muslims in the world. Through mass education and the spreading of literacy, an increasing number of people gain access to this type of literature (Eickelman 1992, Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996). Through TV and cassettes the same messages are also being transmitted, without requirements of literacy. The so-called 'CNN-revolution' has exposed people to similar media messages, no matter where they are situated globally; and this includes the Muslim world. Taken together, such developments influence Muslims and work on their imagination, creating what Appadurai has coined 'communities of sentiments' (1996).

The creation of such 'imagined communities' is also at the base of Benedict Anderson's discussion of the emergence of modern nationalism (1983). According to Anderson, modern nationalism can be distinguished from other ideological and political forms, for instance those of cosmic and divine kingship or those of papal Europe. These were focused on symbolic centres and were hierarchical, embracing diverse cultural, social and political communities whose position was defined through their relation to the dominant centre. Nationalist contexts, in contrast, are 'boundary-oriented' and are 'internally horizontal' (Anderson 1983: 22). Nationalist ideologies universalize space and time as members of the nation are synchronized

in one temporality and occupy a single spatial context, thus being exposed to similar experiences in the world.

The important factors in this development are, first, a move away from 'holy languages', in the sense that certain issues could only be dealt with in specific languages. Such holy languages had brought literate specialists and also provided control mechanisms against heresy. 'Those who knew' were not only united through their knowledge, but also their mastery of the proper language, thus making up a more efficient information network. A major development to change such a situation was the vernacularization of languages and the spread of the book through what McLuhan called 'print capitalism'. This is at the base of long historical developments which brought universities, modern studies of languages and other necessary conditions which provided the basis for nationalism. It also brought the novel and the newspaper: literary means that carried a new sense of calendric coincidence of unrelated events and people. Again, according to Anderson, as the religious person underlines his existence in the chain of events through his morning prayer, modern man reads his morning paper over breakfast and becomes related to a host of events conjoined by the date at the top of the newspaper. Satellite TV and other technological developments are adding to this process, modern media representing a new 'holy language' with new 'experts' affecting our world views just like the ancient experts, in whatever language.

Muslims alongside everybody else are exposed to and can draw their own lessons from such messages. And new realities, like labour migration to the Gulf region or to Western countries, new economic relationships between nations, the spread of Western education as well as Muslim education, are all factors that greatly affect the ways the world is being interpreted by Muslims. Several writers have taken up this new attempt to understand Islam as the social life of religious discourse, i.e. how written texts and oral traditions are produced, read and reread in order to deal with Muslim realities. Empirical contexts have varied, from studies in courts (Messick 1993; Rosen 1989), sermons and Islamic teaching (Antoun 1989, Gaffney 1994), but also processes in non-religious fields (e.g. Fischer and Abedi 1990) looking at posters, videocassettes and so on, and the general shift from an oral to a written tradition (Shyrock 1997).

Given the cultural historical perspective I have argued for, it is necessary also to look at earlier technologies through which meaning has been travelling, to build a comparative view on how such technologies have influenced contact between Muslims, and how the Muslim imagination has been shaped by it. This point brings us back to Jack Goody's (1986) arguments on the development of literacy and the technology of printing. A culture with important aspects based on writing is significantly different from one based on oral tradition only. But there are also different types of literacy. As Eickelman (1978) has shown, the dominant literacy developed by the traditional Muslim educational system is the one of rote learning, i.e. learning fixed texts by heart. This was done in face-to-face relationships between teacher and pupil. A different type of literacy is the one brought by Western education, in which literacy is not for storing limited knowledge but a tool for acquiring new knowledge. The implication of this has been explored in an interesting way by Launay (1990) in the case of the Dyula of the Ivory Coast. By linking the two types of literacy to two different social groups, and to the emergence of modern colonial education, he is able to show how modern literacy is part of a process of marginalization of the groups identifying themselves with local Muslim traditions. Local religious standards were not acknowledged by the modernizing group bringing in religious ideals from Arabia. And Eickelman himself shows how literacy and the availability of mass-produced books allow people themselves to interpret the world and not to have the world interpreted for them by various experts (Eickelman 1992).

Discourse and moral communities

The general perspective discussed above shows how discourses among Muslims will be shaped by complex processes, relating to the developments of labour markets, technologies of communication and the media. We need to add, however, an important point which relates to the *content* of the Muslim discourses that we can observe. We have argued that although globalizing processes are at work, and the media of transmission are open for a globalized spread of information, the content of Muslim discourses is also very much shaped by local realities. We should therefore also look at Muslim communities as

'moral communities', i.e. communities to which the members consciously belong, and in which there is a moral discourse about that belonging (Launay 1992). Such discourses are based on evaluations that are meant to decide whether specific beliefs, practices and rituals belong within the moral community and are based on what people accept or reject from their past history as well as how they criticize the practices of others to justify their own. As such discourses are informed both by local realities and more universal Islamic notions, such an analysis can both show us how Muslim identities change and also broaden our understanding of the changing social meaning of religious categories.

What Launay refers to here is, for instance, the general notion of *umma* that makes all Muslim people belong together in a specific relationship to God characterized by equality. The same equality is expressed in the Qur^{ān} as well as other holy texts. However, Muslims living in any real society are also characterized by inequalities (based on age, gender, social status, etc.) that are products of other socio-historical forces than Islam itself. Such inequalities are of course also part of various local discourses, which have to be related to the Islamic ones. Similar debates are raised with reference to behaviour, i.e. which acts are acceptable and which are not. Such debates often include arguments referring to decontextualized Islamic principles, such as *adab*, *Shari'a*, and *ʿādāt* as well as arguments justified in local sources of authority (Ewing 1988; Metcalf 1984). Such debates also affect local people's definition of what constitutes 'legitimate knowledge', not once and for all but as an ongoing conversation, as shown for instance in Lambek's study on Mayotte (Lambek 1992) and Boddy's study on Sudan (1989), both with an empirical focus on possession cults, and Launay's own description of the dynamics between a Sufi tradition under challenge by modern *Wahhābī* in the contemporary Ivory Coast. Many discourses of the kinds mentioned can and do go on simultaneously in a community, and they do not have to be internally 'coherent' and reducible to notions of functional integration. People can participate in many discourses without losing their coherence as persons and without seeing their communities as being disintegrated. Inconsistencies do not lead to breakdown, but are food for further discussion.

Muslim diversity

Turning to the diversity of Muslim beliefs and practices with which we are presented within the essays, they all give an impression that there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain them. The material certainly provides a variety of ethnographic contexts in which Muslims live their lives, and seems to support Gilson's (1982) conclusion that Islam must be defined by what Muslims everywhere say it is; that we should talk not of the world of Islam, but a world of many Islams. But, listening to the Muslims as they speak through the pages of this volume also shows that Islam is more than a product of any local, regional or national situation. Certainly we find many traces of the cultural historical traditions mentioned earlier, and certainly the essays show that Islam has a global nature in that, for the believers, it contains generalized truths. In that sense Islam is very real. Muslims do assume that there is an Islam, and that they know what it is, i.e. the Muslims speaking in our cases are all essentializing, and they are all classifying acts, statements, rituals as to where they belong within the Islamic tradition as they see it.

The ways in which the various authors deal with this issue make the essays more than isolated examples of local Muslims and their lives. They are cases that allow for comparative analyses of Islam as a lived religion. The essays present different conceptual intakes to their studies, but they do revolve around debates, discourses or conversations that focus on defining the boundaries of 'moral communities' and that it is through the Islamic discourse that certain moral communities appear. An interesting observation from the contributions here presented is that such discourses are not necessarily about the cosmological dimensions of things. In most cases the essays show that this is not the case. They show that such local discourses revolve around issues of religious practices; they are about morality and identity. To hold one identity implies not holding another, and how people 'choose' such identities and their views on what constitutes proper behaviour can be studied. But such 'religious' identities go together with other identities that make up a total inventory of identities in a specific place. How such bundles of identities fit together will vary, but in the Muslim societies described, discourses about such local realities are in one

way or another couched in Islamic idioms, or are couched in discourse that resonates with the Islamic one. Quoting Launay again, Islam in this sense does not reflect society, it makes sense of it. Several essays in this book argue that rather than focusing on beliefs and conscious religious thought alone, we should link such aspects of the religious process to practices and dynamics in non-religious fields in order to understand the various ways in which religious beliefs and habits become politicized as symbols of identity.

The Muslims presented in the essays are well aware of differences and inconsistencies, within their own societies as well as between their own societies and those of others. An important aim of these essays is also to see how Muslims themselves make use of such differences in their own lives. What becomes clear, then, is that such comparisons made by Muslims are not intellectual exercises, but are very real, and form the basis for the shaping of identities. This can go on as peaceful processes, but identities can also sometimes appear in violent opposition to one another, and the struggles can lead to new evaluations of what is Islamic.

Such processes include references to what are taken to be the basic Islamic texts (Qur^{ān}, Sunna, Shari^{ʿa}) but cannot be reduced to such readings and interpretations of esoteric texts alone. First of all, the basic texts may not be at all unified. Shari^{ʿa}, for instance, is not made up of a single collection of texts, but consists of an accumulated body of texts, from many centuries and from many continents. Furthermore, many of the Muslims dealt with in our cases do not have any direct access to such texts, and depend on interpretations by local literate people, or their own interpretations of events and information brought to them through different sources. Thus the present essays show a multiplicity of voices involved in such interpretations, not only voices of the scholars of texts but also 'ordinary' Muslims, diversified as they are in age, gender, class, ethnicity, education and so on. This further strengthens the notion that Islam comprises not only the cosmological theme of the holy texts, but lived identities in local contexts, emerging within ongoing debates about what is right and what is wrong.

Summing up, the essays presented in this book give us a way out of the old problem of how to classify combinations of so-called Muslim beliefs, customs and identities with non-Muslim ones. Or rather, the

essays show that it is a question wrongly put. The issue is not one of classification, but of grasping the content of the discourse itself. Such discourses confer meaning to individual life wherever it is positioned, and help create 'identity-space', in which a person can lead a life that everywhere, including in Muslim communities, is characterized by change and flux. And, as the essays show, the content of the discourse cannot be decided a priori, but rather, must be discovered through ethnographically based research.

On the essays

Katy Gardner's essay on the changing role of the local Bangladeshi saint cult contains material that shows how the local-centre relationship is being mediated through discourses that are legitimized and given authority by relating them to various standard Islamic notions of authority. Positions are evaluated according to how they are placed in a hierarchical way, based on the notion of a centre and the notion that the closer one comes to the centre, the more authoritative is the position. However, in showing how the local *pīr* cult is marginalized, the essay shows clearly that there is no agreement upon what is authoritative and what is not, nor that there is only one centre. Furthermore it argues that the basic factor involved in transgressing the Sylhet locality relates to the opening up of new patterns of labour migrations to the Middle East. Instead of Sylhet being a centre for a local cult, the notion of the local Sylhet centre is becoming one associated with marginality and poverty, a process brought about by the migrants' counterpoising it more directly to the spiritual centre of Islam in Arabia, the home of the Prophet, the place of Mecca and Arabic texts. Thus, argues Gardner, the establishment of notions about 'homelands' and 'foreign lands' (*desh – bidesh*), involves shifting perceptions of locality, expressed both through ideology, meaning that the centre has hegemony over the locality, but also as an expression of political and economic relations. Such discourses are shaped in a process that is not only religious, but also affected by mundane factors like the way labour migration is being organized in Middle Eastern countries (short-term contracts), the economic possibilities opened by such migration (investment in land at home); and resulting processes of economic differentiation (migrants as big landowners).

Katy Gardner's essay also shows how difficult it is to assume a unified terminology within Islam, and to try to conceptualize the new 'revivalism', in Sylhet by a single term. The migrants may appear as fundamentalists in the sense that they base their views on *adab*, but at the same time they are 'modernizers', in the local Sylhet context, but not a modernism containing secularism but religious traditionalism. Similarly, the *pīr* cult is difficult to categorize as either Sufi or orthodox, and the figure of *pīr* as only local holy men, as the same term is used for saints of the highest order. Consequently, the notion of Great Tradition versus Little Tradition, of orthodoxy versus syncretism, and so on, is at best problematic. Rather than representing different forms of Islam, it represents different discourses within Islam, in which different principles, texts and sacred places are being used in order to authorize a position.

Tor Aase's essay on the conflict between Sunnīs, Shī'īs and Ismā'īlīs in Gilgit, Northwestern Pakistan, problematizes our understanding of 'sects' and 'sectarian loyalties', in Islam in relation to the contemporary Gilgit situation as well as providing a perspective that can be utilized vis-à-vis the so-called sectarian splits in early Islamic history. The historic conflict between Sunnī and Shī'a Islam was one in which the authority of the followers of the Prophet was disputed. Whereas the Sunnīs wanted to 'normalize' Islam in the period after the death of the Prophet, the Shī'īs wanted to preserve the charismatic authority of the Prophet. In Weberian terms the Sunnīs sought a routinization of charisma, whereas the Shī'īs wanted a perpetuation of it. The Sunnīs reverted to traditional Arab ways of electing their leaders, through tribal council of elders and general communal consent (*bay'a*). The Shī'īs believed in a line of Imams, the Imam certainly being of a status below the Prophet, but having similar personal and charismatic qualities, and drawing authority not from the *umma* but from divine inspiration. The consequences of these disputes are basic to Islamic history. The Shī'īs rejected the first three *khalīfas*, as they were elected by the *umma*, and claimed instead that Ali and his descendants were the rightful descendants of the Prophet. This all led to the battle of Kerbala, in which Ali's son Hussein was killed in AD 680. The drama aside, the development of the different branches in a way signified the development of different 'moral communities', defined by the mode of leadership; one (Sunnī) based on traditional Arab patriarchal authority;

another (Shī'a) based on the charismatic authority of the Prophet. On one level the conflict in Gilgit certainly had elements of this, particularly in the various ways the conflict rhetoric developed. It was couched locally in the Islamic language of *jihād*. Sunnīs accused Shī'īs of being infidels (*kuffār*) (and Ismā'īlīs of being *Agha Kanis*, i.e. under foreign influence); the Shī'īs accused the Sunnīs of being Wahhābī. Similarly, acts are to an increasing degree being evaluated as *halāl* or *harām*. A new Shī'a village that was made after the expulsion of people from Sunnī areas was called Hussein-ul-Medina, reflecting both the Prophets *hijra* to Medina and Hussein's martyrdom at Kerbala, people writing 'Live like Ali, Die like Hussein' on the rocks.

However, Aase's contribution is to show that this particular understanding was not a consequence of inherent qualities in Islam as an essentialized religion, indeed, his point is that at its core the conflict in Gilgit is not necessarily about religion at all. But the author is careful not to say that religion does not play a role. Couching the conflict in the idiom of Sunnīs versus Shī'īs brings particular dimensions to the conflict. Like the early Muslims, the Sunnīs and Shī'īs of Gilgit do not see themselves as being part of an 'orthodoxy-heterodoxy' dichotomy within Islam or that the Shī'a position is more 'political', which would be in line with academic views on this matter. As Muslim believers, their position is seen not as sectarian or political, but as the rightful position, representing universal, theological legitimacy. This explains why religious symbols are so charged with meaning, and hence so effective as mobilizing tools, and it explains why they added such heat to the conflict in Gilgit. But this does not explain the causes of the conflict. Rather than putting the question in such terms, the question that should be asked is what forces made such positions necessary to those people who came to hold them? Aase's empirical discussion of basic socio-cultural categories in Gilgit as well as the politico-administrative processes at the local, regional and national levels in Pakistan, thus work as the backdrop against which people formed their views and which directed their action. The conflict is neither a simple revitalization of religion, nor simply a reflection of an underlying social structure.

Knut Vikør challenges our understanding of another central issue in Islam, the concept of *jihād*. His chapter shows how careful we should

be in taking pre-established understandings about such a concept and assuming that historical movements characterized by that term are identical. Vikør's empirical concern is with the careers of three particular Fulani scholars who appeared as *jihād* leaders in West Africa. The cases of Usman dan Fodio, Ahmadu Lobbo and 'Umar al-Fūtī show that we cannot assume that the revivalist movements led to revolt in any simple, mechanical way, but rather that they covered a wide variety of movements, thinking and socio-political realities and that the success of these movements came about by accident rather than design. However, although shaped by local social and political conditions, once they were underway, the *jihād* movements portrayed certain underlying features. As in Aase's case, the mobilizing impact is strong as *jihād* movements are also built on central models from Islamic history. It is mentioned in the Qur'ān and it also relates to the way the Prophet himself dealt with the issue of nonbelievers.

All three leaders in Vikør's case leave their homelands on a *hijra* to escape from the land of non-believers, only to return to fight the 'infidels' (*kuffār*), thus clearly mirroring the classical Islamic concepts of *jihād*, linking it to *takfīr*, i.e. the declaration of someone as a non-believer, and *hijra*, emigration from the land of unbelief after having preached against the unjust or pagan leader. But as Vikør also shows, Islamic scholars have at all times debated the way these concepts are to be interpreted, particularly the role of *hijra*. He claims that specific interpretations are affected not only by theological debates but also by the socio-political conditions during specific periods. For instance, interpretations seem to change during times when Islam was spreading, compared to when it was under threat, periods during which *jihād* and *hijra* are stressed. West Africans knew about the various interpretations of *jihād* and the local understanding was of course shaped by this. Furthermore, Vikør argues that the Muslim intellectual elites that were involved in such interpretations were not isolated and local, but were part of the Muslim networks of Sufi *ṭarīqas* meeting other Muslims on their pilgrimages. Through this elite local people were brought into contact with the international currents of Muslim thought. This started cultural historical processes that came to characterize 'the Sudanic World', but Vikør warns that the understanding of these processes is badly served by applying concepts like 'folk' or 'local Islam' to depict

them. Certainly the processes took place in the West African region, but they were part of cosmopolitan Muslim developments. To capture this reality, Vikør suggests that we think of Islam as a 'library of concepts', from which Muslim actors can draw elements around which to build their practice, the Muslim scholars operating as interpreters of such concepts.

Dru Gladney's broad historical overview of four modes of Muslim influence in China, that all have helped give identity to the Muslim populations (Hui) of China, touch both on how different types of contacts have created different types of Muslim organizations, and also on how different types of religious movements are tied to contacts with different centres and how they have developed differently in a Chinese context, particularly through different links to Chinese warlords and later on, the Chinese state. The four movements that Gladney describe are, first, the Gedimu (*qadīm*) in the fourteenth century which was a form of village Islam embedded in the local socio-cultural setting of Hui villages; second, Sufi groups were established in the late seventeenth century, introducing schools and created a network among the villages, accusing the Gedimu Islam of being too Chinese. The third and fourth modes of Islam in China belong to the twentieth century, and are represented by reformist groups like the Wāhhābīs who came early in the century, and the Salafiyya, who appeared in the 1930s.

Gladney shows how travel, education and contact with Muslim centres have played a role for all movements. The earlier ones were brought both by outside missionaries and also by Chinese Muslims who operated along the Silk Route and were products of the intellectual links to Central Asia and also to Arabia itself. Wāhhābīsm and the Salafiyya were also introduced by people who had also been travelling, on pilgrimage to Mecca, or for education at Al Azhar University in Cairo. But, as Gladney shows, the movements were not only products of intellectual and religious processes. The Silk Route was of course a trading link of major importance to many imperial centres, and the contemporary situation is characterized by increasingly close ties between the Chinese economy and the oil economies of the Middle East. The increasing number of people going to Mecca on pilgrimage, business contacts to the Middle East and a better know-

ledge of Arabic can make it easier to maintain links to fellow Muslims elsewhere, for instance through global Muslim organizations. At the same time, the increasing economic links between the Chinese government and the Middle East also bring resources to China, in the form of development funds which are used for 'Muslim infrastructure' like mosques and schools, which might support the Muslims in general, but also affecting internal balances between the various Chinese Muslim movements.

Rather than depicting four different types of Islam, Gladney shows a situation in which Chinese Muslims at all times have been affected by several types of developments, and that the outcome cannot be read from simple notions about Islam. The Wahhābīs, for instance, are educated, urban-based Muslims who have advocated scripturalism, but unlike other similar groups the Chinese branch has maintained close relations to the state, particularly after the Communist takeover, moving in the direction of becoming nationalist, modernist and anti-Sufi. The Salafiyya appeared as a non-political group, using Salafī manuals brought by returned *hājīs* to engage in public discourse with the Wahhābī and also other groups, preaching a purified Islam based on the Qur'ān and the Sunna, not representing a Chinese Islam, but rejecting Eastern ideas and values. However, as Gladney also shows, after a split in the movement one faction is being supported by the government thus opening up further developments in China; this underlines Gladney's general claim, that we need to problematize processes of Islamization and revivalism. We should not look at such processes as 'tides' rolling over communities, but rather think of them as 'modes' that allow for the complexities Gladney observes in his Chinese case.

Eldar Bråten's essay on Islam in Java directly assesses some of Geertz's classical notions about Indonesian Islam. Based on fieldwork in the 1980s, Bråten claims that the categories Geertz used to describe Islam in Java in the 1950s – *santri* (traders), *abangan* (peasants/animism), *priyayi* (aristocrats/mysticism) – cannot be used for the people that Bråten was dealing with some 30 years after Geertz' studies. In some cases people did not even know the terms, in others they carried a different meaning from the one pointed out by Geertz. The thirty years are important to Bråten because it is through the

changing political circumstances that he sees changing notions of Islam emerge. Bråten shows how, in the Javanese village of Batasan, local Islamic life evolves through discourses that are related not only to Islamic beliefs and practices, but also to handling problematic issues in local and national politics. Different historical realities produce different notions of what it implies to be a Muslim, and instead of finding clear-cut categories, Bråten discovers a situation characterized by contradictions; he sees Muslim individuals balancing belief in a spirit world not sanctioned by Muslim leaders and he sees Muslims balancing their views on women's dress, school curricula and so on which often appear in opposition to the views of a modernizing and authoritarian government. People deal with this by stressing harmony, and by downplaying potentially conflicting and contradictory issues. Three strategies are mentioned; first the one of privatizing behaviour relating to the spirit world; second, by changing behavioural patterns according to contexts; and third, using expressions and symbols that can be read in many different ways, i.e. always allowing for a sympathetic reading. Such strategies allow 'ordinary' Muslims to combine Islamic practices with spiritual beliefs, and it also allows Islamic leaders to argue for the need to purify Islam without challenging the political leadership's modernization policies. But they do not produce an overall categorization of Muslim belief and practices identical to the one introduced by Geertz.

Annika Rabo focuses on the many 'versions' of Islam and the links between them in the Syrian town of Raqqa. A basic element of the local Muslim discourses is that they are about practices, not about faith. The indigenous tribal groups of Raqqa adhere to the basic pillars of Islam, but also stress their traditional customs and traditions (*'ādāt wa-taqālīd*) as being important. At the same time there is differentiation according to age and gender in how practices are followed within the community. Women for instance, are not recognized as possessing the same knowledge of Islam as the men but are still key upholders of the cherished customs and traditions. The surrounding villages seem even less concerned with their faith. There were at the time of Rabo's study no village mosques, and people would not pray or fast and few people went on the *hajj*. Certainly, townspeople noted this, and looked down upon rural people calling them *shawā'i'a*, i.e.

lacking in culture. Townspeople held stereotypes about rural fathers 'selling' their daughters (because of higher brideprice in the villages), of local *shaykhs* who walked on fire, etc. But it was the practices that were scorned – nobody claimed that other people did not have faith. The practices were used as ethnic markers rather than indicators of belief. In this interpretative framework, Rabo argues, the indigenous townspeople of Raqqa were in fact clinging on to their notions of being a superior town elite, while in reality they are losing out to both rural villagers and newcomers to the town, a process that is driven by Syrian government development policies.

Islamic practices, argues Rabo, must therefore not be reified, but seen as symbols that carry meanings on many levels. And Islam cannot be taken as an explanation, but rather a filter through which events are being interpreted. This is further illustrated by the lack of religious fervour of Raqqa people during the Muslim Brotherhood uprising in Syria in the 1980s. The uprising was one in which Islamic fundamentalism stood against the secular regime of President Asad, but rather than supporting the 'Islamic cause', Raqqa people remained calm, showing that local Muslims do not always act with political fervour against secularism, and also that people that appear as 'apolitical' can still consider themselves highly religious.

Sharif Harir's essay deals with his own people's relationship to Islam. The Zaghawa of the extreme north-western Sudan have been Muslims for centuries, but they have many local customs and traditions which researchers, like the French Tubianas, have labelled pre-Islamic. Harir is critical of such attempts to classify Islamic belief and practice and maintains that people always make selections from the many possible positions within Islam, being constrained by factors like language (the Zaghawa are non-Arabic speakers with a high illiteracy rate) and local traditions (the Zaghawa are pastoralists with specific relationships to their home territory).

Harir goes on to show how these general points relate to the various Zaghawa discourses about a sacred mountain and how the local beliefs in the mountain and its powers have been preserved among some Zaghawa whereas it has been attacked by others as representing paganism. The different positions are represented by Zaghawa groups influenced by Muslim missionaries (*fakis*) from their Fur neighbours,

by the introduction of national institutions like government, schools, medical centres and mosques and by their involvement in trade and labour migration. Historical realities of this type have produced groups that argue for a more textual Islam, that provide new frames of interpretation and influence the Zaghawa's perceptions of themselves and their local area. In this process the sacred mountain is losing out as a central force of Zaghawa life, symbolizing their territory, having healing powers and affecting the fertility of the land. Whereas the Zaghawa pastoralists had no difficulty combining a perceived Muslim identity (including Muslim beliefs and ritual calendar) with a belief in the sacred mountain, the emerging elite groups see this as an embarrassment which Harir clearly relates to the need of this elite to pursue strategies and present identities that are acceptable in the wider Sudanese elite. The economic and political processes described by Harir have created people with elite aspirations who have become major spokesmen for a more contextualized religion. This clearly shows that this is not only an ideological process but a change with obvious class dimensions.

The future of the Zaghawa discourse on Islam thus depends upon the future of the groups that hold the different positions. The pastoralist adaptation, which seems to be basic for a perpetuation of local beliefs in the sacred mountain, is under pressure from drought as well as from socio-economic changes. It is likely therefore, that the place of the sacred mountain in Zaghawa discourse will change and that people themselves will label it a remnant of the past that is best forgotten, but not because it is a pre-Islamic remnant but because of its place in a Zaghawa cosmology no longer adhered to by Zaghawa individuals.

Leif Manger's essay also stresses the interplay between an indigenous, non-Arabic, non-Islamized Sudanese people, the Lafofa Nuba, and their interaction with the Arabic and Islamic traditions of the Sudanese society at large. He takes as his starting point local debates over what is a Muslim in the Lafofa context and what is not. Debates about what 'being Muslim' should mean are common in all Muslim societies, but the Lafofa case shows how such debates are framed in societies in which processes of Islamization and Arabization are contemporary processes. Manger shows that they should not be understood simply as processes of conversion from a 'pagan' Lafofa tradition but that they

require types of analysis that deal with issues of belief as well as broader issues of identity management.

As inhabitants in an area with a history of slave capture, the Lafofa have to deal with the social stigma people from such areas have experienced. The contemporary changes observed by Manger clearly denote processes of identity management intended to deal with this stigma. This identity management is set in the context of the social organization of an indigenous Lafofa tradition of knowledge and the various types of Muslim traditions that the Lafofa have been in contact with, particularly the one of Sufism. But the dynamics discussed are affected not only by the ways in which the different traditions are internally organized but also by processes of identity management and self-presentation by individual Lafofa within larger social fields. Strategies and symbols involved vary within different historical contexts and it is through analysis of this variation that Manger shows the way in which the traditions are related to politics and to social power. The Lafofa tradition and the Muslim one of Sufism do not coexist in a vacuum or as an open competitive field, but in processes through which the Arabic and Islamic traditions assume a hegemonic position. This is further dramatized by the contemporary developments between a Muslim Brotherhood government and the Nuba, involving forced, government-backed Islamization.

The afterword by William Roff, which ends the book, is different in scope from the others, but it again raises some central issues to this volume, i.e. the comparative study of Muslim societies. In the essay that I distributed to the workshop – in which many of the present contributions were presented (Manger 1992) – I set out to discuss some conceptual issues involved in the comparative study of Muslim societies. Roff's point of departure is his discovery that much literature and many of the viewpoints to which I referred in that essay originated in one particular study programme in the USA, the SSRC/ACLS Joint Committee on the Comparative Study of Muslim Societies. Sixteen out of 68 references used in that essay came from such publications (Asad, Cornell, Eickelman, Ewing, Gaffney, Gellens, Hefner, Kuring, Launay, Mas'ud, Metcalf, Pastner, Piscatori, Prindle, Pugh and Roff himself). The reader will find that much of the same applies to this introduction, and Roff's essay therefore provides useful information

on a number of studies that discuss problems also raised in this volume.

References

- Al-Hassan, A.Y., and D.R. Hill, 1986. *Islamic Technology. An Illustrated History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Al Shahi, A. (ed.), 1987. *The Diversity of the Muslim Community. Anthropological Essays in Memory of Peter Lienhardt*. London: Ithaca Press.
- Anderson, B., 1983. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Antoun, R., 1989. *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World. A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Appadurai, A., 1986. 'Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery', in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28: 356–61.
- , 1990. 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', in: M. Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalisation and Modernity*. London: Sage.
- , 1996. *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Asad, T., 1983. 'Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz', *Man*, 18.
- , 1986. 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam'. Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Occasional Papers Series. Washington: Georgetown University.
- , 1993. *Genealogies of Religion. Discipline and Reason of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Barth, F., 1975. *Ritual and Knowledge among the Baktaman of New Guinea*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- , 1983. *Sohar. Culture and Society in an Omani Town*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- , 1984. 'Problems in Conceptualizing Cultural Pluralism', in: D. Maybury-Lewis (ed.), *The Prospects for Plural Societies*. The American Ethnological Society, Proceedings.
- , 1987. *Cosmologies in the Making. A Generative Approach to Cultural Variation in Inner New Guinea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , 1989. 'The Analysis of Culture in Complex Societies', *Ethnos*, 54 (I–II).

- , 1990. 'The Guru and the Conjurer: Transactions in Knowledge and the Shaping of Culture in Southeast Asia and Melanesia', *Man*, 25.
- , 1992. 'Towards a Greater Naturalism in Conceptualizing Societies', in: A. Kuper (ed.), *Conceptualizing Society*. London: Routledge.
- Binder, L., 1988. *Islamic Liberalism. A Critique of Development Ideologies*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Boddy, J., 1989. *Wombs and Alien Spirits. Women, Men and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Clifford, J., 1994. 'Diaspora', *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 (3).
- Comaroff, J., and J. Comaroff, 1992. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Cornell, V., 1983. 'The Logic of Analogy and the Role of the Sudi Shaykh in Post-Marind Morocco', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 15.
- Crick, M., 1982. 'Anthropology of Knowledge', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 11.
- Dabashi, H., 1989. *Authority of Islam. From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads*. London: Transaction Publishers.
- Daftary, F., 1994. *The Assassin Legends. Myths of the Isma'ilis*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- David, K. (ed.), 1977. *The New Wind. Changing Identities in South Asia*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.
- Eaton, R.M., 1990. *Islamic History as Global History. Essays on Global and Comparative History*. (no place of publication mentioned): American Historical Association.
- Eickelman, D., 1978. 'The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 20 (4).
- , 1982. 'The Study of Islam in Local Contexts', *Contributions to Asian Studies*, 17.
- , 1987. 'Changing Interpretations of Islamic Movements', in: W. Roff (ed.), *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- , 1990. 'Social Theory in the Study of Muslim Societies', in: D. Eickelman and J. Piscatori (eds), *Muslim Travellers*. London: Routledge.
- , 1992. 'Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Society', *American Ethnologist*, 19.
- Eickelman, D., and J. Piscatori (eds), 1990. *Muslim Travellers. Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*. London: Routledge.

- , 1996. *Muslim Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Esposito, J.L., 1983. 'Introduction: Islam and Muslim Politics', in: J.L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ewing, K. (ed.), 1988a. *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- , 1988b. 'Introduction: Ambiguity and Shari'at – a Perspective on the Problem of Moral Principles in Tension', in: K. Ewing (ed.), *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Feathersone, M., S. Lash and R. Robertson (eds), 1995. *Global Modernities*. London: Sage.
- Fischer, M., 1980. *Iran. From Religious Dispute to Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Fischer, M., and M. Abedi, 1990. *Debating Muslims. Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Fortes, M., 1983. *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Frank, A.G., and B. Gills (eds), 1993. *The World System. Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* London: Routledge.
- Friedman, J., 1994. *Cultural Identity and Global Process*. London: Sage.
- Gaffney, P., 1987. 'Authority and the Mosque in Upper Egypt: The Islamic Preacher as Image and Actor'. in: W. Roff (ed.), *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- , 1994. *The Prophet's Pulpit. Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Geertz, C., 1968. *Islam Observed. Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- , 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- , 1980. *Negara. The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- , 1983. 'Local Knowledge: Fact and Law in Comparative Perspective', in: C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge. Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Geertz, C., H. Geertz and L. Rosen, 1979. *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society. Three Essays in Cultural Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Gellens, S., 1990. 'The Search for Knowledge in Medieval Muslim Societies: a Comparative Approach', in: D. Eickelman and J. Piscatori (eds), *Muslim Travellers*. London: Routledge.
- Gellner, E., 1982. *Muslim Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gilsenan, M., 1982. *Recognizing Islam. An Anthropologist's Introduction*. London: Croom Helm.
- Goody, J., 1986. *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , 1996. *The East in the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grønhaug, R., 1978. 'Scale as a Variable in Analysis: Fields in Social Organization in Herat, Northwest Afghanistan', in: F. Barth (ed.), *Scale and Social Organization*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press.
- Gupta, A., and J. Ferguson (eds), 1997. *Culture, Power, Place. Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hannerz, U., 1992. *Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hefner, R., 1985. *Hindu Javanese. Tengger Tradition and Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- , 1987. 'The Political Economy of Islamic Conversion in Modern East Java', in: W. Roff (ed.), *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- , 1987. 'Islamizing Java? Religion and Politics in Rural East Java', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 46 (3).
- , 1990. *The Political Economy of Mountain Java. An Interpretive History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hodgson, M.G.S. 1974. *The Venture of Islam*. 3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Horton, R. 1971. 'African Conversion', *Africa*, 41 (2).
- , 1975. 'On the Rationality of Conversion', *Africa*, 45 (3 & 4).
- Hourani, G., 1951. *Arab Seafaring. In the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kapferer, B., 1989. Nationalist Ideology and a Comparative Anthropology, *Ethnos*, 54 (I-II).
- Keesing, R., 1987. 'Anthropology as Interpretive Quest', *Current Anthropology*, 28 (2).
- Khuri, F., 1990. *Imams and Emirs. State, Religion and Sects in Islam*. London: Saqi Books.

- Kuper, A., 1992. 'Introduction', in: A. Kuper (ed.), *Conceptualizing Society*. London: Routledge.
- Kuring, R., 1988. 'The Culture of Ethnicity in Pakistan', in: K. Ewing (ed.), *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lambek, M., 1990. 'Certain Knowledge, Contestable Authority: Power and Practice on the Islamic Periphery', *American Ethnologist*, 17 (1).
- , 1992. *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte. Local Discourses of Islam, Sorcery and Spirit Possession*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Launay, R., 1982. *Traders without Trade. Responses to Change in Two Dyula Communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , 1990. 'Pedigrees and Paradigms: Scholarly Credentials among the Dyula of the Northern Ivory Coast', in: D. Eickelman and J. Piscatori (eds), *Muslim Travellers*. London: Routledge.
- , 1992. *Beyond the Stream. Islam and Society in a West African Town*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Loeffler, R., 1987. *Islam in Practice. Religious Beliefs in a Persian Village*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Manger, L., 1992. 'On the Study of Islam in Local Contexts', *Forum for Development Studies*, 1.
- Mannheim, K., 1952. *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Marriott, M., 1955. 'Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization', in: M. Marriott (ed.), *Village India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marriott, M., and R. Inden, 1977. 'Toward an Ethnosociology of South Asian Caste Systems', in: K. David (ed.), *The New Wind*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.
- Martin, R. (ed.), 1985. *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies. Some Examples of a Dynamic Tradition*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Masud, M., 1990. 'The Obligation to Migrate: the Doctrine of Hijra in Islamic Law', in: D. Eickelman and J. Piscatori (eds), *Muslim Travellers*. London: Routledge.
- McLuhan, M., 1962. *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Messick, B., 1993. *The Calligraphic State. Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Metcalf, B. (ed.), 1984. *Moral Conduct and Authority. The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- , 1990. 'The Pilgrimage Remembered: South Asian Accounts of the Hajj', in: D. Eickelman and J. Piscatori (eds), *Muslim Travellers*. London: Routledge.
- Mossafari, M., 1987. *Authority in Islam. From Mohammad to Khomeini*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Mutalib, M. and Tj ul-Islam Hashmi (eds), 1994. *Islam, Muslims and the Modern State. Case-Studies of Muslims in Thirteen Countries*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Ortner, S., 1984. 'Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26 (1).
- Parkin, D., 1985. 'Controlling the U-Turn of Knowledge', in: R. Fardon (ed.), *Power and Knowledge. Anthropological and Sociological Approaches*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.
- Pastner, C., 1988. 'A Case of Honor among the Oasis Baluch of Makran: Controversy and Accommodation', in: K. Ewing (ed.), *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Peacock, J., 1978. *Muslim Puritans. Reformist Psychology in Southeast Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Prindle, C., 1988. 'Occupation and Orthopraxy in Bengali Muslim Rank', in: Ewing (ed.), *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pugh, J., 1988. 'Divination and Ideology in the Banaras Muslim Community', in: Ewing (ed.), *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Quigley, C., 1961. *The Evolution of Civilizations*. New York: Macmillan.
- Redfield, R., 1971. *The Little Community/Peasant Society and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Roff, W. (ed.), 1987a. *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning. Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- , 1987. 'Islamic Movements: One or Many?', in: W. Roff (ed.), *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning*. London: Croom Helm.
- Rosen, L., 1984. *Bargaining for Reality. The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- , 1989. *The Anthropology as Justice. Law as Culture in Islamic Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Said, E., 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Sanderson, S. (ed.), 1995. *Civilizations and World Systems. Studying World-Historical Change*. California: Alta Mira Press.

- Schimmel, A., 1975. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Shyrock, A., 1997. *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination. Oral History and Tribal Authority in Tribal Jordan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Singer, M., 1972. *When a Great Tradition Modernizes. An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*. London: Pall Mall Press.
- , 1984. *Man's Glassy Essence. Explorations in Semiotic Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Sorokin, P., 1937–41. *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, 4 vols. New York: American Books.
- Srinivas, M., 1967. *Social Change in Modern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stewart, C., and R. Shaw (eds), 1994. *Syncretism, Anti-Syncretism. The Politics of Religious Synthesis*. London: Routledge.
- Tambiah, S., 1970. *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tibbetts, G.R., 1981. *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese*. London: Royal Asiatic Society.
- Toynbee, A.J., 1934–61. *A Study of History*, 12 vols. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Turner, B. 1994. *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*. London: Routledge.
- Van der Veer, P., 1989. *Gods on Earth. The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre*. London: The Athlone Press.
- Voll, J., 1982. *Islam. Continuity and Change in the Modern World*. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press.
- , 1983. 'Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: Tajdid and Islah', in: J. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Waldman, M., 1985. 'Primitive Mind/Modern Mind: New Approaches to an Old Problem Applied to Islam', in: R. Martin (ed.) *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies. Some Examples of a Dynamic Tradition*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Wallerstein, I., 1974. *The Modern World System 1*. New York: Academic Press.
- , 1980. *The Modern World System 2*. New York: Academic Press.
- Watson, A. 1983. *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World. The Diffusion of Crops and Farming Techniques, 700–1100*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Muslim Diversity

- Wittfogel, K., 1957. *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Wolf, E. 1982. *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- el-Zein, A/H., 1977. 'Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 6.



Return Mailing label

Return To:

Interlibrary Loans
Davidson Library - Bldg 525
University of California
Santa Barbara, CA 93106

Introduction

Returning home to Northeast Bangladesh after an absence of ten years, Abdul Rouf is a picture of Islamic piety. Although he has lived and worked in Britain for most of his adult life, he appears untouched by Western secularity; more than anyone in his homestead, he prays regularly, and spends long hours reading the *Qur'ān Sharīf*. He also has the shaved head and white robes of a *hājji*, for like many return migrants he visited Mecca on his way back from London. Abdul Rouf seems to represent a new form of Islam in Bangladesh: one that focuses upon (in Geertz's phraseology) 'core symbols' such as pilgrimage to Mecca, and Arab text, which are both ideologically and physically distant to Bangladesh. The dominance of these symbols is combined with puritanical definitions of 'correct' Islam – always presented as fixed and immutable. These changes are increasingly taking the place of belief and practice focused upon local religious sites and figures.

In this chapter I shall discuss what might be termed Islamic 'orthodoxy' in Sylhet (by this, I mean the increasing influence of correct procedures), and its relationship to overseas migration. Using ethnography from a migrant village in Nobiganj, a district south of Sylhet Town, in Northeast Bangladesh, I shall argue that labour migration to the West and the Middle East has involved shifting perceptions of locality. Increasingly, *bidesh* (foreign lands) are aspired to, at the expense of the *desh* (homelands). Embedded in this process is the hegemonic dominance of the 'core' over the 'periphery', for