The Anthropology of Islam in Light of the Trusteeship Paradigm

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Introduction

In order to explain the world that they study and propose hypotheses on, anthropologists and sociologists are able to develop concepts and theories in their own rights that might turn into new philosophical trends. They might also work with philosophers' concepts and theories. Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) developed his main concept in cultural anthropology, “thick description,” from Gilbert Ryle's (1900–1976) ordinary language philosophy, and the concept of “family resemblances” from Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889–1951). Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was tremendously influenced by the philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962), particularly by his idea of “epistemological obstacle” in *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* (1938). Likewise, Talal Asad (b. 1932) has developed “the idea of an anthropology of Islam” (1986) based on Alasdair MacIntyre's (b. 1929) understanding of tradition and virtue and on Michel Foucault's (1926–1984) definition of power and discourse.

The latter example is interesting in many regards, primarily because Asad, who has deconstructed the abstract category of “religion” (1993) as so deeply indebted to protestant theological emphasis on the inner life of believers, is apparently drawing his analytical framework to study Islam and Muslim practice on ideas, discourses and ontologies outside the realm of Islam as a discursive tradition. This is not to insinuate, as I will show in this chapter, the need to “be a Muslim” in order to study the Muslim subject or to refuse resourcing the anthropological analysis in traditions other than Islam. Rather, it is to show how neglecting Islam at the level of analysis can downplay important and crucial aspects of the reality of faith—particularly the modalities of Muslim-God relationship.

In this chapter, through Taha Abderrahmane's “Trusteeship Philosophy” which is rooted in the Qur'anic idea of trust (*amāna*)¹ that bonds the divine

1 Qur'an (33:72): “*innā ‘aradnā al-amānata ‘alā al-samāwāti wa-l-arḍ, fa-abayna an yaḥmilnahā wa-ashfaqna minhā, wa-ḥamalahā l-insān, innahu kāna zalūman jahūlā*” (We offered the Trust

and the human (see Hashas 2019, 209–233), I intend to reread Asad's anthropology of Islam and analyse anthropological works categorised as belonging to the "ethical turn" (Fassin 2014), called also "piety turn" (Osella and Soares 2009), which is focused on moral subjects and their subjectivities, particularly Saba Mahmood's (1962–2018) *Politics of Piety* (2005). Interestingly, this attempt does not contradict Talal Asad's view of what seems to be the main characteristic of modern anthropology, that is, "the comparison of embedded concepts (representations) between societies differently located in time or space" (Asad 1993, 17). I agree with Joel Robbins on his observation that "theologians might well feel mocked by anthropologists' ability to easily discover and prove lived differences" (Robbins 2006, 288), but I do not think Abderrahmane's philosophy² does neglect the diversity of Muslims' practices and worldviews. It, rather, acknowledges their "aspiration to coherence" (Moumtaz 2015) in their relationship with God to different degrees and at different stages of their life.

After showing some of the similarities between the two intellectual projects, and looking beyond the Asadian understanding of orthodoxy as a relationship to power—a discussion of which could be the subject of another article—I will scrutinize the concept of "discursive tradition" that has produced an "ethical turn" in—and beyond—the discipline of anthropology in the sense of focusing on ethical self-making (see Fassin 2014; Katz 2015). And, through Abderrahmane's "trusteeship paradigm," I will question Asad and Mahmood's use of MacIntyre's Aristotelian philosophy by unpacking the notion of the "correct model" or "apt performance" that Asad uses in his conceptualisation as a way to explain what Muslims seek to achieve in order to have ethical coherence.

My choice of the Asadian framework does not stem from a will to promote his conceptualisation that is already aggrandised, but rather to demonstrate the gaps in its philosophical roots that have led to downplay important aspects of the reality of Muslim faith in various anthropological studies. Therefore, this article is not addressed only to the Asadian conceptualisation, but also to all the following works that are based and focused on ethical self-making (e.g.

to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, yet they refused to undertake it and were afraid of it; mankind undertook it—they have always been inept and foolish). In this chapter, I use Mohammad Abdel Haleem's translation (2004).

2 Although I am discussing in this article Taha Abderrahmane's philosophy, he cannot be categorised according to the Western categorisation of disciplines. Abderrahmane is a philosopher, a logician and a theologian (not in the Christian sense) at the same time; he is an Islamic scholar, and not only a Muslim scholar, i.e. he builds his scholarship from within an Islamic discursivity rooted in a doctrine, a language, and an epistemology.

Mahmood 2005; Hirshkind 2006; Agrama 2010; Jouili 2015), many of which belong to the anthropology of piety. Moreover, this article acts as an introduction to a philosophical discussion that is sorely lacking within the ethnographic debate between the proponents of the “ethical turn” and those calling to focus on the “everyday.”

1 Trajectorial Similarities

Before starting our conceptual analysis of the Asadian “discursive tradition” and how Abderrahmane’s “trusteeship paradigm” could help to develop, and even adjust, various aspects of this concept, it is important to briefly outline the background of both intellectuals, particularly the moments that represented a political awakening for each of them, moments which explain a lot of the similarities in their intellectual trajectories; what might seem a coincidence is in reality an intellectual choice rooted in a strong critique of modernity and its colonial secular origin.

Without doubt, the year 1968 is historically distinct, after which the face of anthropology started to change. The big rise of revolutionary movements around the world, the access of European working-class children to the university, and the independence of numerous countries from European colonialism led many scholars to question the status quo: modernity. Back then, “ethnography [was] in the midst of a political and epistemological crisis” (Clifford and Marcus 1986, 1), and a new era of young anthropologists started to go beyond the Straussian structuralism and to challenge the dichotomy modern/traditional to talk about the end of modernity and the emergence of the postmodern.

But before that, the 1967 War known as the Six-Day War, represented a critical juncture in the life of many Muslim scholars who were students back then. Among them are the Pakistani-American anthropologist Talal Asad and the Moroccan philosopher Taha Abderrahmane. In addition to his bright intellectual lineage—his father was Muhammad Asad (born Leopold Weiss, d. 1948), the famous Muslim intellectual and ambassador—, Talal Asad was marked enormously by the 1967 war that he describes as “traumatic (...) in the sense that [he] couldn’t understand the reaction of so many people in Britain: a kind of exaltation on the part of the British which [he] thought was inexplicable to [him]” (Asad 2008). In a more engaged way, Taha Abderrahmane, while studying at the university, was extremely shocked and disappointed by the humiliating defeat of the Arab armies (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2015; see also Hashas 2015; 2019; Bevers 2017). This event pushed him to stop writing poetry and learn Western

languages (French, German, English, Latin and Ancient Greek) as necessary tools to focus on philosophy, particularly logic, in order to study the power of 'reason' and to know the reasons behind the failure of the Arab-Islamic reason.³

Although disciplinarily different, there are various similarities between Asad and Abderrahmane's works and the way in which they are both conceived and received. First, it is interesting how both Abderrahmane and Asad challenge the Western idea of the oblivion of the divine (*insā'* or *tansiyya*), one from a philosophical angle that points out the fallacy of "abstract reason", the other from an anthropological angle that deconstructs the orientalist way of looking at Muslims as actors *who do not speak, do not think, and only behave* (Asad 1986, 8). Second, both works engage with the Western canon in a postcolonial way. While Abderrahmane intends to displace the focus on Western philosophy as the sole valid one, towards dusting off the Islamic tradition which is able, according to him, to propose an alternative modernity, different from the "reality of modernity," based on the "spirit of modernity" (2006), Asad develops his concept of discursive tradition by deconstructing the conceptual evidences that constitute the pillars of the discipline of anthropology in its colonial construction meant to justify colonial domination. Finally, both approaches are criticized, to a large extent by some scholars with a secular liberal affinity, mainly because of their focus on ethics/piety and positioning it in opposition to liberal and secular notions about the state and the self. For example, Sindre Bangstead (2009; 2011) rejects fiercely, in the works of Asadian scholars such as Saba Mahmood, the emphasis on "piety" as a "radical alterity" in opposition to the Western secular ideal. He rejects also the conflation of secularism and liberalism in a similar way to Hadi Enayat (2017, 92) who accuses Asadian scholars of "essentialising secularism" in the sense of committing the "genetic fallacy" to consider liberalism and secularism as essentially Western ideologies.

3 For almost the same reasons, another Moroccan philosopher, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri had the same objective, and ended up classifying the Arab-Muslim reason into: *al-'aql al-burhānī* (deductive reason), *al-'aql al-bayānī* (rhetorical reason) and *al-'aql al-irfānī* (mystic reason) (al-Jabri 1982; 1986). Abderrahmane criticises this categorisation in *al-'Amal al-Dīnī wa-Tajdid al-'Aql* (Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason) (1997) and classifies reason into three types: *al-'aql al-mujarrad* (abstract reason), *al-'aql al-musaddad* (directed reason), and *al-'aql al-mu'ayyad* (supported reason) that encompasses both previous ones. Later, in his book *al-Lisān wa-l-Mizān* (Language and Balance), he talks about *al-takawthur al-'aqlī* (the transformative reproduction of reason), pointing out the unlimited types of reasons.

2 The Asadian Anthropology of Islam

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the Asadian “anthropology of Islam” (see Anjum 2007, Bowen 2012, Moumtaz 2015, Grewal 2016, Mahmood and Landry 2017; also interviews with Asad: Ahmad 2015, Iqbal 2017, Anjum 2018). An important reason behind this interest is its strong critique of orientalist approaches that essentialise Islam (Said 1978), its ability to question the concepts and dichotomies used by Western anthropologists to study Muslims, the centrality it gives to questioning the anthropologist’s positionality and preliminary prejudices, and the way it fosters the emic perspective starting from the subjects’ worldview. One might argue that many anthropologists before Asad would consider these principles as prerequisites before any anthropological study, but Asad is the first one who has tried to make them coherent with the study of Islam. It is true that Abdul Hamid El-Zein has attempted to conceptualise an anthropology of Islam in his article “Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam” (1977), but he ended up,⁴ according to Asad, recognising a multiplicity of Islams, i.e. not recognising Islam as an analytical category (Asad 1986, 2).

Asad’s aim in his acclaimed article “The idea of an anthropology of Islam” (1989) was to make the indigenous discourse vocal and to reject the paternalist/colonial viewpoint wherein Muslim subjects *do not speak, do not think, and only behave*. By introducing the concept of “tradition”, Asad challenges both the structuralist prejudice derived from Ferdinand Tönnies’s dichotomy *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* (community/society) and promoted by Gellner, wherein Muslim practices are first and foremost the result of a structure, and the ontological materialist prejudice wherein change in Muslim societies is the outcome of the position of the actors only.

In his seminal article, Asad develops the idea to study Islam as a “discursive tradition.” This concept means that “Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artefacts, customs and morals”; “[i]t is a tradition” (Asad 1986, 14) in which discourses are related to conceptions of the Islamic in the past and the future, through a present. Clearly rooted in Foucault’s conception of power and discourse, this concept is also based on MacIntyre’s understanding of tradition that sets the ground for the historicisation of the actors’ actions due to their orientation to the past and to the diversity of retellings that a narrative of the tradition might have due to its discursive continuity (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], 222). Hence, the concept of “discursive

4 He could not realize his work and respond to Asad’s critique as he died soon after, in 1979 at the age of 44 (see Eickelman 1981).

tradition" is heavily based on the idea of the "correct model" or the "apt performance" (Asad 1986, 15) which means that all instituted practices are oriented to a conception of the past based on the foundational texts: Qur'an and Sunna.

The Asadian framework enables to study Muslims through the analysis of their tradition; it privileges the focus on piety and ethical self-making. Without proposing an alternative conceptualisation of Islam, some scholars criticised it in the sense that "there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam" (Schielke 2010, 2). Hence, I argue that criticising the Asadian framework is only possible through the ethical turn it enhances, in which anthropology of piety is predominant, i.e. through the critic of works based on his conceptualisation of Islam. In what follows, I will attempt to critique the philosophical roots of the Asadian anthropology of Islam by focusing on the anthropology of piety, namely through the main anthropological work belonging to the ethical turn: Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005).

3 The Aristotelian Behavioural Philosophy in Light of the "Trusteeship Paradigm"

Before engaging with the explanation of Abderrahmane's "trusteeship paradigm," let us discuss what has incited me in part to write this chapter, that is the philosophical base behind the Asadian concept of discursive tradition. Asad (1986, 14) argues that "If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts the Qur'an and the Hadith," but he does not himself root his conceptualisation of Islam in an Islamic philosophical or theological ground.⁵ Rather, he indebts his concept, as mentioned previously, in the work of the Scottish ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre, particularly his famous book *After Virtue* (1981) where he viewed modern moral and political philosophy from the standpoint of an Aristotelian moral practice.⁶

5 Given the centrality of 'praxis' (*'amal*) in his conception of intellectual exercise, Abderrahmane argues that "it is with certainty that we know that the self can find no perfection without the complementarity of the tradition, and that no complementarity is ever possible without an indigenous methodology [... which] *brings into a unity theoretical knowledge and praxis*" (Abderrahmane 2015, 70, in Hallaq 2019, 52). Following this epistemological remark, it is time for anthropologists to not only question their positionality as part of the long anthropological reflexive tradition but, starting from their own positionality and praxeology, to question the positionality of anthropology itself in relation to other sciences, primarily metaphysics.

6 One cannot deny that aspects of the Aristotelian philosophy were incorporated in what Abderrahmane calls the Islamic *tadāwulī* (discursive and practical) field. Abderrahmane

Many scholars, from various disciplines, working on Islam have found in MacIntyre's understanding of tradition and critique of the philosophical root of modernity—Enlightenment—an interesting ground for their work. Wael Hallaq acknowledges that his project proposed in *The Impossible State* (2013) was going to be exactly the same as what MacIntyre had proposed if the moral resources that he [Hallaq] intends to dust off in the premodern were not only reflecting a philosophical ground but also a “way of living” (Hallaq 2013, 6). Accordingly, MacIntyre's work has also revived the use of the Aristotelian framework in order to study the “ethical” in various disciplines, notably the ethical self-making of individuals in anthropology. Saba Mahmood's book *Politics of Piety* (2005), considered as the most important anthropological work influenced by the Asadian framework, draws also on the Aristotelian understanding of virtue, through a Foucauldian definition of ethics “not as an idea, or as a set of regulatory norms, but as a set of practical activities that are germane to a certain way of life” (Mahmood 2005, 27). In what follows, I will read Saba Mahmood's work through Taha Abderrahmane's critique of the Aristotelian philosophy.

It is true that Saba Mahmood does not aim to generalise her description of pious practice to all Muslims, but she uses one exclusive theoretical framework to analyse her subjects, that is the Aristotelian tradition of moral practice combined with the Foucauldian genealogy of ethics.⁷ This framework privileges extensively the practical activities of individuals in the anthropological analysis, since it gives importance to morphology of moral action (Mahmood 2005, 25); it considers “ethics as always local and particular, pertaining to a specific set of procedures” (Mahmood 2005, 28), and it is based on a series of material separations: praxis/*techné*, ethical practice/morals, code oriented/ethics oriented, and even *ʿaql* (reason)/*rūḥ* (spirit).⁸

does not reject Aristotelian philosophy in its totality but analyses its usage according to two categories of interpenetration (between foreign and indigenous sciences): “external approximate” which occurs when an imported science, like Aristotelian logic accommodates itself to the *tadāwul* of the indigenous sciences, and the “remote external” which occurs when an indigenous science enters upon a foreign one to find refuge and legitimacy, which is the case of the Rushdian philosophy (i.e., philosophy of Ibn Rushd) in relationship to the Greek philosophy and metaphysics, see Abderrahmane (2007, 126–138). One can argue that Asad's use of the Aristotelian moral practice through MacIntyre's ethics is part of the latter type of interpenetration.

7 Both used by Asad. In his article “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam” there is no mention of the Aristotelian moral practice, but it is present through MacIntyre's moral philosophy. In addition, Asad uses “discourse” in the Foucauldian sense as a relationship to power, which is exactly the difference, according to Saba Mahmood, between Asad and MacIntyre's definition of “tradition” (Mahmood 2005, 115 n. 56), being inherently discursive for Asad.

8 In her analysis of the work of Mahmood, and drawing on the Foucauldian paradox of self-

Although this framework goes against the Kantian understanding of moral action as emanating only from the critical faculty of reason, it is centred on the “abstract reason” and embodied form of practice. This framework has driven Mahmood (2005, 29) into considering “the importance of these practices [residing not] in the meanings they signify to their practitioners, but in the work they do in constituting the individual.” She goes further by considering the body “not as a medium of signification but as the substance” (Mahmood 2005, 29). Asad cannot disagree with her since he has reviewed his concept of “discursive tradition” based on the same ground, moving from the excessive focus on discursive argumentation to the embodied practice.⁹ For him, “Tradition, of course, is not just a matter of argument—indeed argument is mostly peripheral to it. Tradition is primarily about practice, about learning the point of a practice and performing it properly and making it part of oneself” (Asad 2006: 234).¹⁰ Mahmood’s aim to demonstrate that the mosque participants do also have an agentival capacity based on a voluntary ability to be taught rather than a resistance to the norm has pushed her to consider the embodied form as the main element of ethical analysis. It was clear for Mahmood that such a conclusion could be perceived in contradiction with some women’s understanding of bodies, hence she mentions unexpectedly in a footnote (Mahmood 2005, 157 n. 3): “it is interesting to note that the women I worked with did not actually employ the body-mind distinction I use in my analysis.”

Before explaining Taha Abderrahmane’s “trusteeship paradigm” and proposing an anthropological use of it, let us question the previous frameworks used by Asad, and later by Mahmood, through his philosophy. Abderrahmane deconstructs conceptually the use of the notion of “reason”, notably by Muslim scholars and philosophers who applied the Greek conceptualisations to Islam without questioning their epistemological roots in the classical period.¹¹

denial, Werbner concludes: “Their [Cairo Mosques’ *dā‘iyāt*] subjectivity and agency are surely anchored in this world of sacred learning, in *‘aql* (intellectual reasoning) rather than in *rūḥ* (spiritual inspiration)” (Werbner 2018, 86).

- 9 I would not say that this aspect was silenced and marginalised, but was absent in his seminal article (1986). One could hardly deny the importance of embodiment and performativity when Asad says: “practice is Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims—whether by an *‘alim*, a *khatib*, a Sufi *shaykh*, or an untutored parent” (Asad 1986, 15).
- 10 Asad reiterated this move in his recent book *Secular Translations* (2018, 5): “discursive tradition is not merely a verbal process; it is also and primarily an implicit continuity embodied in habit, feeling, and behavior that one acquires as a member of a shared way of life that is translated from one time to another.”
- 11 Abderrahmane addresses his critique to various classical Muslim philosophers, particularly to Ibn Rushd who “imitates Aristotle” (Abderrahmane 2000, 125), as well as modern

According to him, “if the word reason (*‘aql*) in Arabic language refers to a *name of a meaning* (*ism ma‘nā*) that engenders a description localised in the heart just like auditory or sight, the translation has transformed it into the *name of an object* (*ism dhāt*) meaning a specific quintessence localised in brain” [*emphasis added*] (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1995, 174; see ‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2012a, 63–74). In other terms, in Arabic, *‘aql* is an action similar to hearing or observing; it is an activity of the various parts of the body, including the heart, rather than a material object operating in the brain. Instead of attributing to reason a pure cognitive function, and to the heart an emotional/reactionary one, Abderrahmane argues for the non-separation between reason and heart,¹² similarly to the non-separation between reason and the various senses, as there is a reason in the sense and a sense in the reason (Abderrahmane 2012a, 67). Such a definition has a whole impact on the way in which we conceive reasoning and meaning, inner state and outer conduct, performative behaviour and inward disposition. Abderrahmane classifies reason¹³ into *‘aql mujarrad* (abstract reason) which recognises the attributes through observation, *‘aql musaddad* (directed reason) which aims at moving from the world of conception to that of realisation centred around action, and *‘aql mu‘ayyad* (supported reason) which combines action and observation together, leading to “*al-mulābasa*” (one is a garment of the other and vice versa); the latter is described by him as an “alive practical observation” (*naẓarun ‘amaliyyun ḥayy*) (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1997, 122) in which reason is not contradictory to revelation.

Drawing on this classification, Abderrahmane criticizes two Aristotelian maxims regarding the importance of practice, besides a maxim that goes against it.

First, he criticises the Aristotelian ethicists who consider “concretisation” (*mulāmasa*) impossible without starting to act/practice. He considers their

Muslim scholars who almost idealise Ibn Rushd and his work, notably Mohamed Arkoun (d. 2010) and Mohamed Abed al-Jabri (d. 2010) whose objective, according to Abderrahmane, is to “spread the spirit of secularism” (Abderrahmane 2000, 121). To understand the intellectual project of al-Jābrī and Arkoun, but also Adonis, Ḥasan Ḥanafī, and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd which is criticised by Abderrahmane because it resulted in the dilemma of aiming at “riding the back of the *turāth*” to adapt it to the modern system, see Hallaq (2019, 15–25).

12 Based on this observation, Abderrahmane points out that *fiqh* (jurisprudence), while *fiqh* (literally means comprehension), *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *‘aql* (reason) are all actions of the heart according to Qur’an: “... *lahum qulūbun lā yafqahūna bihā*” (... with hearts they do not use for comprehension) (7:179) and “... *wa-ṭaba‘a Llāhu ‘alā qulūbihim fahum lā ya‘lamūn*” (God has sealed their hearts: they do not understand [know]) (9:93), and “... *fataḳūna lahum qulūbun ya‘qilūna bihā* ...” (... with hearts to understand [reason]) (22:46).

13 As mentioned previously, this classification is not exclusive as he talks about *al-takawthur al-‘aqlī* (rational reproductivity).

definition of the “tangible” (*malmūs*) wrong, because either they mean the “crude tangible” (*khām*) which does not achieve the level of profound observing (*naẓar*), or the “transformed tangible” (*muḥawwal*), which is transformed through the projections of the act of observing. Therefore, concretising precedes observing in the former (“crude tangible”), while it is at the same level with it in the latter (“transformed tangible”). In both cases, reason does not depend on practice; it remains purely abstract (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1997, 123).

Second, he criticizes the Aristotelian idea that the act of concretising through practice is more beneficial to reason than the act of observing. The problem here lies in the meaning given to practice, which is limited to directing the senses towards the outward to work materially with it. As a logician, Abderrahmane asks the question ‘how could that be possible?’, knowing that practice is simply about acting with the senses (*al-‘amal bi-l-jawāriḥ*), while observing tends to extract the abstract from data of the sensual practice, in addition to the fact that it aims to values much higher than what is achieved through practice (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1997, 124).

Finally, in opposition to the Aristotelian model, some argue that abstract reason does not contain any aspect of concretising, which, according to Abderrahmane, is totally inaccurate since the projections of reason are taken from the sensual. In this regard, even the qualities of reason that the senses do not possess, such as analysing, deducing, classifying and composing, cannot be put in practice without their conjunction with the sensual (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1997, 123).

The two first critiques correspond exactly to Mahmood’s continuous attempt to emphasize the idea that cultivation of virtues among women of the mosque movement is mono-directional, i.e. “exteriority as a means to interiority” (Mahmood 2005, 134). This is not to argue that Mahmood considers the relation between inner states and outer conduct in one directional way, that is, from the external to the internal; but she considers both directions as opposite and exclusive. In other terms, cultivating inward ethical dispositions by habituating oneself through bodily acts is opposite to developing the practice through inner reasoning. Mahmood opposes explicitly Muhammad Said al-Ashmawi’s (d. 2013, liberal thinker, prominent Egyptian judge and former head of Egyptian Court of State Security) liberal stance about modesty as an inner virtue that affects external practice to women of the mosque movement for whom “a modest bodily form (the veiled body) did not simply express the self’s interiority but was the means by which it was acquired” (Mahmood 2005, 160). In order to foreground her conception of agency, based on the Aristotelian notion of habitus, Mahmood concludes that “it is through repeated *bodily* acts that one trains one’s memory, desire, and intellect to behave according to established standards of conduct” (Mahmood 2005, 157).

Such a dichotomous worldview is highly problematic for Abderrahmane who talks about the axiom of “dual self-ethicisation” (*al-takhalluq al-muzdawaj*) (‘Abd al-Rahmān 2014, 32), i.e. the process of ethicisation can happen in both directions, outward to inward and vice versa; they can happen both at the same time, depending on the status of the individual in its closeness to *fiṭra* (innateness).¹⁴ For instance, in the work of Mahmood, Amal’s account about the status of her shyness as an “incomplete learning” does not mean necessarily that “action does not issue forth from natural feelings but *creates* them” (Mahmood 2005, 157 [original emphasis]); it means also that Amal is “synchronizing her outward behavior with her inward motives until the discrepancy between the two is dissolved” (Mahmood 2005, 157). It is this contradiction insinuated in Mahmood’s two previous quotes that Abderrahmane resolves through his critique of the Aristotelian behavioural philosophy.

When analysing this critical aspect of Mahmood’s work, one might invite the on-going debate between proponents of the focus on the ethical and those of the turn towards the everyday in the study of Islam (see Fassin 2012; Schielke 2012; Fadil & Fernando 2015, Deeb 2015). It is widely acknowledged that Saba Mahmood is one of the proponents of the ethical as she focuses on piety. Besides the dichotomy piety/everyday that became the main characteristic of this anthropological debate, one might question the dichotomy internal/external that characterise her work. I argue that in the same way that the “everyday” is still a hollow category that needs further theoretical and analytical discussions, the external is not exclusively a positive area of material apparent practices. In other terms, both dichotomies emerge from a certain conception of the human life that I consider the core question behind the everyday/ethical debate, that is, life either as a list of separations, or as a whole, as a unity. On the one side, some consider human life as composed of a set of arenas—although not clearly determined and defined by its proponents—, where the ethical is a single aspect separated from others or at least in interaction with the economic, the political, the social,¹⁵ while, on the other side, others perceive the ethical as encapsulating the actions of the subject all the time.

14 The concept of *fiṭra* in the Islamic tradition refers to the origin of the creation, particularly the pure divine ethical teaching. In Abderrahmane’s philosophy *fiṭra* is inherent to the nature of every human. It finds root in the Qur’an (30:30): “*fa-aqim wajhaka lil-dīn ḥanifā fiṭrata Llāhi al-latī faṭara al-nāsa ‘alayhā*” (So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fitrah of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. So [Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to [set your face to] the religion. This is the natural disposition God instilled in mankind).

15 This separation “economic, political and social/cultural” used often by social scientists is itself a modern separation (see Wallerstein 1991). The dichotomy economy/culture is con-

4 The Anthropological Use of the “Trusteeship Paradigm”

In this part, I would develop anthropologically the five pillars of the “trusteeship paradigm” in regard to the Asadian anthropology of Islam illustrated in Mahmood’s work on piety. The idea is not to claim a Muslim exceptionalism, but rather to argue that the embeddedness in modernity as a “historical condition” does not mean its exclusivity as an ideal way of life for the Muslim self-making; “The variety of traditional Islamic practices in different times, places, and populations indicates the different Islamic reasonings that different social and historical conditions can or cannot sustain” (Asad 1986, 16). Hence, the contradictions that Muslims live in the everyday are an aspiration to coherence with the “apt performance” (Asad 1986, 15) and to the world of trusteeship (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2014; 2016; 2017) rather than a rejection of the norm through the strict adoption of the modern dichotomous thought of the secular versus the religious.

The “trusteeship paradigm” (*al-unmūdḥaj al-ʾitimānī*) is based on five principles: the principle of requisition, i.e. returning deposits (*mabdaʾ al-ʾidāʾiyya*), the principle of signification (*mabdaʾ al-āyātīyya*), the principle of innateness (*mabdaʾ al-fiṭrīyya*), the principle of wholeness (*mabdaʾ al-jamʿiyya*), and the principle of testimony or witnessing (*mabdaʾ al-shāhidīyya*). It is derived from the trusteeship philosophy based on supported reason (*al-ʾaql al-muʾayyad*), avoiding the corruptions of the abstract reason (*al-ʾaql al-mujarrad*) and the obstacles of the directed reason (*al-ʾaql al-musaddad*) (Abderrahmane 2014, 14). Theorising trusteeship based on these types of reasons does not mean categorising reason strictly in these three. Abderrahmane points out the unlimited number of types of reasons that vary depending on the spatio-temporal contexts. He calls this process of continuous variation: “*al-takawthur al-ʾaqlī*” (the multiple reproduction, or multiplication, of reason)¹⁶ (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 1998). Abderrahmane argues for the inexistence of a fixed rationality, both temporally, as what is rational today might be irrational tomorrow, and spatially, since what is perceived as rational in a field might be considered irrational in another (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2000, 54). Hence, talking about the singularity of the abstract reason is simply a reduction of the entire human rationality into one category of reasoning.

sidered by some scholars as a “chicken-egg dilemma” that can be resolved through notions of “entanglement” or “intersectionality” (see Grosfoguel 2002; 2011).

- 16 According to Abderrahmane, this process is always the outcome of a “rational, intentional and beneficial action” (Abderrahmane 1998, 23).

It is important to mention that Abderrahmane in his critique of secularism adopts three axioms (*musallamāt*). The first one concerns the divine commandment (*al-āmiriyya al-ilāhiyya*) that anything God asks for is good and just. The second one concerns the process of “dual self-ethicisation” (*al-takhalluq al-muzdawaj*), either from the internal to the external or the opposite. And the last one, very important in what follows, is the “religious interchangeability” (*al-tabaddul al-dīnī*) according to which the revealed religion has two manifestations: an innate manifestation (*ṣūra fiṭriyya*) that inhabits the original message revealed to the prophet in accordance with the innateness of the human, and a temporary manifestation (*ṣūra waqtīyya*) that, due to its distance from the prophet, contains “doctrinal and representative residues, as well as legal and institutional influences that distance it, more or less, from its innate origin (*aṣliḥ al-fiṭrī*), and limits its innovative spirit and enlightening message” (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2014, 32).

These two aspects *al-tabaddul al-dīnī* and *al-takawthur al-‘aqlī* are essential to understand the anthropological use of the “trusteeship paradigm.” Although one might understand Abderrahmane’s categorisation as normative in the sense that it positions some people closer to the original message compared to others—which is empirically valid—it corresponds perfectly to the Asadian framework where Islamic traditions and practitioners, within their diversity, seek coherence. For practitioners, coherence is about “the molding of the self into the ideals of the tradition”, while for traditions it is “the attempt to define and enforce correct practice” (Moumtaz 2015, 124). According to Asad, and similarly to Abderrahmane, they do not achieve it, “due as much to the constraints of political and economic conditions to which the traditions are related as to their inherent limitations” (Asad 1986, 17). Hence, the “trusteeship paradigm” does not go against the Asadian objective to focus, within the anthropology of Islam, on the study of “the historical conditions that enable the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions” (Asad 1986, 17).

In other terms, the “trusteeship paradigm”, although normative in its philosophical orientation, does not impeach the anthropological recognition of the diversity of Islamic discourses and practices. Borrowing Joel Robbins’s formulation (Robbins 2006, 287), it might even “lead anthropologists to revise their core projects.” The idea behind this article is to show a novel relationship between an Islamic philosophy (rooted in a theology) and the anthropological study of Muslims. The following use of the trusteeship paradigm’s principles demonstrates the extent of malleability that each Muslim actor has regarding each principle.

First, the principle of trust or requisition (*īdā‘iyya*). Abderrahmane argues that “things are deposits (*wadā‘i*) in the hands of the human” (‘Abd al-Raḥmān

2014, 98) based on the idea that the human is divinely honoured to carry the divine message in this world as a form of inheritance (*istikhlāf*). He develops this argument as a critique of the Durkhemian divinisation of 'society.' The social formulation of the secular paradigm is based, according to Abderrahmane, on a relation of domination between the divine and the human where the latter takes society as its God. Such a claim would not be refuted by Émile Durkheim (d. 1917) since "god and society are one of the same", that is, "the god of the clan [...] can be none other than the clan itself" (Durkheim 1995, 208 [1965, 236]). In addition to the dichotomy profane/sacred rooted in the Christian experience (Asad 2003), the Durkhemian conception of society has constituted a base for sociological and anthropological study of religion for a long time. Furthermore, this dichotomy, along with the Weberian rational/irrational and scientific/magical, is what would afterwards produce the thesis of secularisation or "disenchantment of the world" (See Gauchet 1999; cf. Josephson 2017). Hence the ideal type that has been used by many sociologists for a long period of time, regardless of the population studied and its worldview, is the "modern" that has at its core the separations secular/profane, political/religious, rational/irrational, scientific/magical, public/private, and of course the most encompassing one modern/traditional. The principle of requisiting does not recognise any separation between the world and religion. It goes totally against the human will to dominate things, whether individually or collectively. The witnessing Creator is the only one able to deposit things to the human, becoming therefore an intermediary between the thing and the human ('Abd al-Raḥmān 2014, 99).

Second, the *āyātīyya* (signification).¹⁷ Since there is no separation between the world and the divine/the material and metaphysical, the principle of signification conceives the relationship between religion and the world, through a "connexion of signs" rather than a "connexion of phenomena" (Abderrahmane 2014, 95). God is present through His signs, which are of two types, "formative signs" (*āyāt takwīniyya*) that concern the world, and "chargeable signs" (*āyāt taklīfiyya*) that concern religion. Both types of signs refer to the existence of a Creator, which goes in contradiction with the postulate established during the formation of social sciences, according to which any transformation happening to the material world is within the realm of the "phenomenon." Such an understanding has led to one of the most used dichotomies in social sciences when studying religion: scientific/magical, rational/irrational.

17 I am translating *āya* as "sign" although I am aware (and critical) of its use in social sciences rooted mainly in the Saussurean semiotics and the Straussian structuralism.

In the world of trusteeship, both reason and religion are signs, and they are not in contradiction with one another. This is exactly the idea defended by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 422/1038): “religion is an outward reason, and reason is an inward religion, and both are synergic, even united” (*fa-l-shar‘u ‘aql min khārij, wa-l-‘aql shar‘ min dākhil, wa-humā muta‘āḍidān bal muttaḥidān*) (al-Iṣfahānī 1988, 117). Hence, for Abderrahmane, there is no separation between inner states and outward performance, in the sense that there is not one direction in the process of *takhalluq* (self-ethicisation). They are mutually synergic because of their unique origin. Reason is a creation and *dīn* (religion)¹⁸ is a charge that the individual has to bear, and both are signs, as well as divine deposits.

Third, the *fitriyya* (innateness or natural disposition). This is one of the central concepts in Islam that we find totally absent in the anthropology of piety. For Abderrahmane (2014, 100), “ethics come from *fiṭra*.” He explains this by discussing the humanist philosophy, represented by the French philosopher Luc Ferry (1990, 1992, 2002), which is based on the materialisation of the relationship between the human and the divine since the human can also be a Creator. Abderrahmane sees *fiṭra* and materialisation as dichotomous, because the former refers to the original covenant, that is the memory in which the human bore witness that there is no God but God (*shahādat an lā ilāha illā Llāh*).

In Saba Mahmood’s work, it is easy to consider practice and habituation of bodily acts as the source of the formation of the inner state, because it is based either on the conception that the human is void of any original ethics, or indirectly on the temporal distance between the women of the mosque movement and the time of the covenant. Abderrahmane summarises this dilemma in the opposition between the temporal and the original manifestation of religion, itself rooted in a specific understanding of time. According to modern historicity, as Hussein Agrama (2010, 8) clearly explains: “there is the assumption of a fundamental rift between the past and the future, in that the future generally brings on fundamentally new situations and circumstances, not just different from past ones but always potentially containing elements that are irreducibly different.” Abderrahmane does not consider the past as “mythical” in total contradiction with the “real” present. He does not consider the difference between the two manifestations of religion as necessarily temporal (in a *developmentalist* sense). In other terms, the present practiced religion does not mean necessarily an erasure of its previous manifestation. The original Islamic message was sent to all people who can come back to the *fiṭra*, disregarding the secular time when they act.

18 Again, I am cognizant of the tensions around the use of this term and how it does not fit in easily when talking about Islam due to its genealogy in opposition to the secular (See Asad 1993).

Fourth, the *jam'īyya* (wholeness). This is one of the main principles on which the whole critique of the modern secular continuous actions of disgregation and separation is based. This principle refers to the global dimension of ethics: "The revealed *dīn* in its wholeness is ethics" and "ethics prevail all human actions" ('Abd al-Raḥmān 2014, 103). This joins what I have discussed earlier: all aspects of human life are connected, the body/senses and reason, the internal and the external, the ethical and the everyday. The divine commandment is not a set of apparent duties that the individual has to fulfil, but an internal commitment towards the "correct model."

The principle of *jam'īyya* derives from the concept of "original unity" between *ta'abbud* (worship) and *tadbīr* (management) ('Abd al-Raḥmān 2012b, 509), hence between ethics and politics, ethics and aesthetics, ethics and economics, and so forth. Therefore, the separation between the ethical and the everyday has no place in the world of trusteeship. This does not mean that all Muslims do not believe in any of these separations, but it means that they are looking within the discursive tradition to achieve the "apt performance" located in the world of Trusteeship.

Finally, the *shāhidiyya* (Testimony/Witnessing). Through Abderrahmane's "trusteeship paradigm," we can understand how the "divine testimony" (*al-shāhidiyya al-ilāhiyya*)—which refers to a divine witnessing of the Muslim's deeds and spiritual states that might engender divine protection and closeness—is neglected in the anthropological inquiry. Abderrahmane makes the point that despite the strong relationship between the "human ethicisation" (*al-takhalluq al-insānī*) and the "divine testimony," we pay almost no attention to the latter and great attention to the "divine commandment" (*al-āmiriyya al-ilāhiyya*). Since becoming Muslim is about witnessing the unity of God, acting within a world of trusteeship requires the faith in/ embodiment of/ feeling of the divine testimony. Moreover, Abderrahmane develops this idea further by explaining the line of difference between a person forgetful of God's testimony and a person who remembers that. He says that the latter "abides by the commandment while evoking—testifying to his heart—that the Almighty is witnessing him; and the attachment of the individual's testimony to the testimony of God raises his ethicisation a degree, because the Almighty who does not miss anything witnesses this testimony related to His testimony and testifies it, hence it becomes for the person a purification over the purification of his action" ('Abd al-Raḥmān 2014, 94).

Some anthropologists of the "everyday" consider any ethical Muslim action during which the person does not evoke its ethical origin or objective an action that belongs to the "everyday," or to "grand schemes" other than "commitment to Islam" (Schielke 2010, 14; 2012). For them, any contradiction in performing

is an opposition to the norm (see Fadil and Fernando 2015) or an indicator that “norms and boundaries are not absolute” (Schielke 2009, S28). Lara Deeb’s medium position that we must “think piety and the everyday together” (2015) is not resolving this dilemma since it is still based on an opposition, or at least a parallelisation, between the ethical and the everyday; this contradicts Asad and Abderrahmane’s portrayal of Muslims as seeking coherence. As Mittermaier observes in her fieldwork: “my interlocutors are not capitalist subjects at one moment and pious Muslims the next. Capitalist modes of being-in-the-world merge and converge with states of piety” (Mittermaier 2013, 279–280). Hence, the contradictions that a Muslim can have in his practice are not outside the world of trusteeship since it starts for Abderrahmane with the *shahāda* (*there is no God but God*), and it is not outside the discursive tradition since, for Asad, Muslims are looking to reach the “apt performance.”¹⁹ Furthermore, Abderrahmane makes the difference between the ordinary divine testimony applied to all creatures and the specific one attributed to some people, and according to which the relation between the human and the divine becomes a relation of “proximity” within which striving to abide by the divine commandment becomes enjoying the divine love (‘Abd al-Raḥmān 2014, 94).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to propose a new theoretical ground for the anthropology of Islam through, on the one hand, the scrutiny of the works of Asad (1986) and Mahmood (2005), and on the other hand, the reading of the current debate between proponents of the “ethical” and those of the “everyday.” Beyond the opposition ethical/everyday, this chapter is a starting point to develop theoretical frameworks derived from the five principles of the “trusteeship paradigm” in which the divine is central for Muslims. Taha Abderrahmane’s philosophy offers a rich conceptual toolbox that could help anthropologists to study Muslims’ practices and subjectivities. In addition, it offers a new theoretical ground rooted in the “emic,” i.e. in the Islamic tradition, that can draw off the dichotomic discussion around the ethical and the everyday which is originally based on a secular understanding of reason, self, body, and virtue.

19 According to Shahab Ahmed, it is not even *unislamic*, because the legal represents only one paradigm within the realm of *Pre-Text*, *Text*, and *Con-Text*, and because separating Islam and Muslims serves only to “posit Islam as an un-interpreted Neo-Platonic ideal beyond the sphere of human activity” (Ahmed 2017, 150).

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