

A Critical Appraisal of Marshal Hodgson's View of Islam Vis-à-Vis Cumulative and Discursive Traditions

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Abstract: The article engages closely with Marshall G. Hodgson's view of Islam in his theory of Islamicate civilization. Despite his methodological consciousness and various revisions he introduced in the study of Islamic civilization, he failed to do the same in his conception of Islam. This contribution looks at three relevant aspects of Hodgson's take on Islam. Apart from explaining problems inherent in his conception of Islam, I examine the relative efficacy of the view shared in some important ways between Hodgson and Smith. To this end, first, I argue that Hodgson's every allusion of Islam breathes dualism. Even though he was indeed well aware of this dualism, he barely succeeded in accounting for it, either historically or in Islamic tradition. Second, I try to make a theoretical link between this view of Hodgson and Wilfred C. Smith. I also compliment this with a review of some of the key counter arguments posited. Third, the article ends with a brief comparative assessment of W. C. Smith's cumulative tradition, Talal Asad's discursive tradition, and Shahab Ahmed's "coherence" in the face of "outright contradictions" thesis.

Keywords: Islam, Islamic, Islamdom, Islamicate, cumulative tradition, discursive tradition.

Öz: Bu makale Marshall G. Hodgson'un İslamileşmiş (Islamicate) medeniyet teorisinde kullandığı İslam kavramını yakından incelemektedir. İslam medeniyet araştırmalarına yaptığı katkılar ve bu alandaki yöntemsel farkındalığına rağmen, Hodgson benzer katkıyı İslam kavramsallaştırmasında sağlayamamıştır. Çalışma, Hodgson'un İslam kavramsallaştırmasının üç unsurunu değerlendirecek ve bu kavramsallaştırmaya dahil olan iki problemi irdeleyecektir. Ayrıca, Hodgson ve Smith tarafından paylaşılan görüşün görece tesiri incelenecektir. Bu amaçla ilk olarak, Hodgson'un kavramsallaştırmasının ikilik barındırdığını iddia edeceğim. O bu ikiliğin farkında olsa bile, ikiliği İslam geleneği içinde veya tarihsel olarak açıklamada yetersiz kalmıştır. İkinci olarak Hodgson ve Wilfred C. Smith arasında teorik bir bağlantı kurmaya çalışacağım. Bu kısımda ayrıca ortaya konulan bazı önemli karşı argümanları ele alacağım. Son olarak, makaleyi Smith'in birikimli gelenek (cumulative tradition), Talal Asad'ın söylemsel gelenek (discursive tradition) ve Shahab Ahmed'in "katıksız çelişkiler" karşısında "tutarlılık" tezinin kısa karşılaştırmalı bir değerlendirmesiyle bitireceğim.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslam, İslami, İslam Alemi, İslamileşmiş, birikimli gelenek, söylemsel gelenek.

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Introduction

The three volumes of Marshall G. Hodgson's "The Venture of Islam" have been received with much applause and commendation among Muslim and non-Muslim academics alike in the social sciences. An American world historian from the University of Chicago, Hodgson's writings primarily included *The Venture of Islam ('The Classical Age'* (Vol. I); *'The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods'* (Vol. II); and *'The Gun Powder Empires and Modern Times'* (Vol. III) (1974); and *Rethinking World History* (1993). No doubt that Hodgson's venture into the study of civilization in general and Islamic civilization, in particular, presents fundamental challenges to the long-standing constants and legacies of "Oriental Studies" of Islam and the Muslim world (Hodgson, 1974, pp. 3-69).

By challenging Orientalism (in the words of Miriam Cook and Bruce Lawrence, "much earlier" than Edward Said's seminal work, "Orientalism") and its epistemic categories, constructs, ideas, concepts, presumptions, and pre-commitments, Hodgson made significant contributions to the study of Islamic civilization (Informal discussion, 2014). Of these contributions, the following are worth mentioning: Hodgson's reappraisal of Islamic civilization as part of world history and civilization; the effort to underscore the importance of Islam in the making of what he called "Islamicate" civilization (though much less of a success compared with Muslim thinkers engaging Islamic civilization from an insider, emic or phenomenological perspective); unlike many thinkers and historians of Islam, his insistence on the idea that Islamic civilization might have gone through "deteriorations" but not necessarily experienced "crisis"; and his "revisionism" against "admonitionist" tendencies, of the conceptual infrastructures and tools in the study of Islamic civilization, are all efforts that show the originality of Hodgson's own venture into the study of Islamic civilization. However, despite those key contributions, some of the latent and manifest gaps and weaknesses inherent in Hodgson's venture into Islamic civilization did not just simply go unnoticed. As Edmund Burke predicted early in the 1970s, Hodgson's work "likely to generate continuing debate both on points of detail and on its overall vision of the history of Islamic civilization", this article presents one humble effort in that direction (Burke, 1979, p. 241).

Before moving on to outline what I will be doing next, it would be worth noting a point objectionable to any fair-minded reader of Hodgson's assessment of Islam. The point has something to do with whether Prophet Mohammad was specifically mentioned in the Qur'an as *the* last prophet or not. Hodgson assertively claimed that "The Qur'an referred to numberless prophets and gave no clear indication that

Muhammad was to be the last of them” (Hodgson, 1974, Vol. I, p. 197). Understandably, what Hodgson was trying to accentuate here was his idea that there was some kind of “normlessness” among the Muslim communities following the death of Prophet Mohammad in 632 AD. However, it seems Hodgson failed to notice the Qur’anic verse where it is stated, or at least implied, that Mohammad was *the* last prophet (chap. 33, v.40). This *tafsir* for the word “*khatam*” in the verse is a view the great majority of *u’lema* shared for centuries. Muslim scholars with this view included, inter alia, Al-Qurtubi, Ibn Katheer, Ibn Jarir at-Tabari, Az-Zamakhshari, Hasan al-Basri, Abu Hanifah, Fakhrud-deen ar-Razi, Ash-Shawkani, and Qatadah (Cheema, 2013). Similarly, in one of the most widely accepted collections of the hadith tradition in Islam called *Sahih al-Bukhari*, there are many places where the prophet and his companions made it clear that *khatam* meant the last and Mohammed was the final prophet (Al-Bukhari, vol. 4, no. 661). To be on the safe side, Hodgson could have alluded to the text-based engagements and the coexistence, “in contradiction” as the late professor of Islamic studies at Harvard University, Shahab Ahmed would have put it, of at least two diverging views (Ahmed, 2016). The latter view may include Sufi-inspired and other views.

In either case, however, Hodgson’s claim for “no clear indication” falls short of any evidence, historical or within the Islamic tradition. Thus, if we were to follow the above orthodox line, what we would convincingly find is that Mohammed was actually the last of all prophets. In other words, contrary to Hodgson’s unfounded claim, as the aforementioned evidence implies, the Islamic tradition have largely reconciled itself with it. On top of this, this Hodgson’s claim can arguably have significant ramifications for reading the before-during-and-after life and history of Prophet Mohammed and Islam in general. I will leave this as it is, inviting others to ponder over it. Yet, in the following section, I moved the discussion one-step further and examined Hodgson’s general take on Islam. In what follows, therefore, I deal with three major issues. In the first part, I try to flesh out the dualistic nature of Hodgson’s view of Islam. In the second part, I attempt to posit Hodgson’s view of Islam in close proximity to W. C. Smith and the associated ramifications; and finally, I conclude with a comparative assessment of theoretical formulations addressing “what Islam is?” In this part, I focused on the proposals of the historian M. G. Hodgson, the famous professor of comparative religion W. C. Smith, the Anthropologist Talal Asad, and Shahab Ahmed. To effectively deal with these issues, I closely engage Hodgson’s own writings in the broader context of currently growing literature in the fields of civilization and Islamic studies.

Hodgson's Islam: From "Islam" to "Islamicate"

"Islamicate" civilization attracted much attention among many contemporary students of Islam and Islamic civilization. Among others, Bruce B. Lawrence, a self-proclaimed "Hodgsonian" and professor of history of religions, uplifted Hodgson as a "genius and visionary" having a continued importance in the study of Islam (Lawrence, 2014). In another place, he credited Hodgson for "recuperate [ing] Islamicate civilization without ignoring or misrepresenting Islam" (In Brannon, 2003, p. 65). Reuben W. Smith, who edited *The Venture of Islam*, added that Hodgson was "a lesser-known giant among better-known scholars" in the study of Islam and Islamic civilization (Hodgson, 1974, p. x). The same was Shahab Ahmed's overall impression of Hodgson's "remarkable mind" (Ahmed, 2016, p. 157). Yet, among other things, I was wondering if and whether Hodgson was actually not "ignoring and/or misrepresenting Islam"? What are his key conceptual and theoretical preconditions (and predispositions) underlying his view of Islam? Lastly, what is it Hodgson's version of Islam? These, simply put, are the principal questions that the present article attempts to respond. Now, it is generally understood that concepts and constructs one employs are very foundational in framing how we think about a given issue and subsequently structure it. In this connection, Hodgson ideally believed that,

The terms one uses determine the categories by which one orders a field-or at least all those categories that are not the immediate focus of one's inquiry. The categories one presupposes, then, necessarily delimit the questions one can ask-at least all the constants implied in the questions, apart (again) from the special point of focus. The questions posed, in turn, determine what answers will ultimately be reached when the questions, as posed, are pursued (Hodgson, 1974, Vol. I, p. 46).

It is, therefore, important to start with some of the terms, concepts, and categories he employed in the *Venture of Islam*. To begin with, for the word Islam, Hodgson saw two dimensions that one needs to understand clearly. On the one hand, there is what he called "faith", and on the other, "tradition". There are many places, in the *Venture of Islam*, where he deliberately employed these concepts in an effort to mold his version of Islam and Islam-related civilization, the "Islamicate" civilization. In one place, he claimed that "ultimately all faith is private [and] ... we are primarily human beings and only secondarily participants in this or that tradition" (Emphasis mine, Hodgson, 1974, p. 28). The same content is recycled elsewhere as "... we are primarily human beings with our personal interests to pursue, and only secondarily participants in this or that tradition" (Hodgson, 1974, p. 37). Similarly, he characterized Islam as that "... can, in some sense, be derived

as consequent upon the initial posture of Islam, of personal submission to God” (Hodgson, 1974, p. 75). Now, this dualism is systematically deployed for what he called the religion (Islam) and the socio-cultural (Islamicate) aspect of Islam. In this regard, he argued,

‘Islam’ and ‘Islamic’ too casually both for what we may call religion and for the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion ... The society and culture called ‘Islamic’ ... are not necessarily ‘Islamic’ in the first. Not only have the groups of people involved in the two cases not always been co-extensive ... much of what even Muslims have done as a part of the ‘Islamic’ civilization can only be characterized as ‘un-Islamic’ in the first, the religious sense of the word. One can speak of ‘Islamic literature’, of ‘Islamic art’, of ‘Islamic philosophy’, even of ‘Islamic despotism’, but in such a sequence one is speaking less and less of something that expresses Islam as a faith (Hodgson, 1974, Vol. I, p. 57).

Here in the above note, Hodgson may not necessarily be incorrect in considering “Islamic” less coextensive with what Islam as a “faith” entails. However, to take the argument to its logical extreme and point out that *“much even Muslims have done as a part of the ‘Islamic’ civilization can only be characterized as ‘un-Islamic’ in the first religious sense of the word”* is readily contestable for good reasons. Following Hodgson’s own formulation, although the ‘Islamic’ is less reflective of Islam in the religious sense of the word, it is hardly possible that it can be conceived in other circumstances otherwise. In some important ways, whatever ‘Islamic’ must engage Islam, and conversely, the ‘un-Islamic’ must stand in some conceivable distance away from whatever Islamic entails. In yet other words, *“much of what even Muslims have done as a part of the ‘Islamic’ civilization can only be characterized as ‘un-Islamic’ in the first religious sense of the word”* is at least in part a contradiction in terms. However, this could have been addressed in such a way that certain aspect of what Muslims have done under Islamic civilization could be *“characterized as un-Islamic”* in the religious sense of the word. Yet, again, others could still cast a doubt on this as well. For instance, Shahab Ahmed objected to this tendency of essentializing Islam, Islamic and that which is not, pointing out that art, philosophy, wine-drinking, and others as in as much Islamic as any other (Ahmed, 2016).

Interestingly, even though Hodgson believed whatever “Islamic” is not necessarily Islamic in the religious sense of the world and can even go to the extent of becoming “un-Islamic”, is reversed right after some pages down the line. This time he made it clear that whatever “Islamic” is in one way or another “must be restricted to ‘of or pertaining to’ Islam in the proper, the religious, sense ...When I speak of ‘Islamic literature’ I am referring only to more or less ‘religious’ litera-

ture, not to secular ...” (Hodgson, 1974, Vol. I, p. 59). Again, there is a great deal of unbridgeable distance between arguing “*much of what even Muslims have done as a part of the ‘Islamic’ civilization can only be characterized as ‘un-Islamic’ ... in the religious sense of the word*” and its state of being “*less religious*”. In any event, this can only be Hodgson’s own nuanced take on the relationship between Islam and his neologism “Islamicate” civilization.

In an effort to distinguish between what he called the “religious” (“faith”) and “cultural tradition” aspect of Islam, Hodgson found it convenient to disentangle Islam into two core forms. The first is the faith dimension, which he called “islam” and the second as the proper Islam. He went on to support this distinction on the basis of a linguistic meaning he deemed appropriate for the word islam and he argued that it stood for “the act of submitting to God” (Hodgson, 1974, Vol. I, p. 72). This form of Islam is deemed as “the inner spiritual posture of an individual person of good will” (Hodgson, 1974, p. 72). Furthermore, in his own words, this “islam” is something personal and in that,

... it means accepting a personal responsibility for standards of action held to have transcendent authority...it is an inward stance in individuals (varying intimately, of course, from individual to individual) that lies at the heart of all the ritual and myth. It is this elementary islam, a personal acceptance of godly ideals, which stands at the heart of Islamic religion, and from which it receives its name (Hodgson, 1974, p. 72).

However, in the above note, Hodgson’s reading of Islam is objectionable on at least four important grounds. Firstly, linguistically speaking, the Arabic word Islam only refers to the state of “submission” or a peace acquired by submission. However, the direct linguistic rendering does not necessarily embody God within it. Or, even if it does “subsume” God, the implied presence of God does not necessarily entail the “personal” nature of this submission either. This approach to Islam has already been found inadequate, and above all, misleading. Among other thinkers, Jane S. Smith and Shahab Ahmed closely dealt with this shortcoming at different levels. Ahmed showed the inconsistencies and gaps of Hodgson’s articulation of virtually all of his concepts, from islam, Islam, Islamic, Islamdom, and Islamicate (Ahmed, 2016, pp. 157-175). Jane I. Smith, on the other hand, particularly objected to attempts aimed at splitting Islam into two forms, “islam” and Islam. She pointed out,

In reality, any attempt to distinguish between the communal and the personal aspects of this term, between Islam and islām, will be inadequate unless it takes into account the very fact that for the Muslim they have been traditionally indistinguishable ... Islam originally meant at once the personal relationship between man and God and the community of those acknowledging this relationship (Smith, 1975, pp. 1-2).

Secondly, what Hodgson cared too little to mention is the other most commonly recycled *hadith*-based *Sharia'h* meaning of Islam. Concepts and words in Islam, as in the study of *Qur'an* and *Hadith* traditions, tend to have at least two levels of understanding, linguistic and *Sharia'h*. If we were to understand Islam following this orthodox-scriptural line, the prophet Muhammad reported to have defined Islam encompassing the worship of Allah, testifying Muhammad as His Messenger, establishing prayer, paying charity, fasting, and pilgrimage (Al-Bukhari, Vol. 1, Book 2, Hadith 48).

Now, it is understandable, however, why Hodgson preferred the linguistic rather than its *Sharia'h* implication and meaning. As I will be dealing with this shortly, it looks as if Hodgson viewed religion in general and Islam, in particular, through W. C. Smith's thesis of "cumulative tradition", which presupposes a clear cleavage between faith and tradition. There I will comment on the relative efficacy of this vis-à-vis Talal Asad's "discursive tradition" in conceptualizing Islam. If this connection makes any sense, it will have the effect that since the latter meaning of Islam entails acts going beyond what Hodgson merely considered something "personal", it will at least show how misconstrued his theoretical projection of Islam is, and consequently, what he called "Islamicate" civilization. Again, if we were to follow the above line, we would find that almost all the major embodiments of Islam, as the Prophet reported to have put it, are carried out in collective social settings. We could clearly observe this in Muslims' daily prayers (including supplications invoking collective salvation), charity and philanthropic activities, pilgrimage to Mecca, and fasting during Ramadan. This will ultimately make the argument "*a personal acceptance of godly ideals, which stands at the heart of Islamic religion, from which it receives its names*" somewhat strange and doubtful. As Edmund Burke rightly objected to this tendency of Hodgson,

But, we may inquire, how does one select which of the numerous ideals that can be extracted from the *Qur'an* and other authoritative Muslim writings are to be regarded as formative? While the problem of deciding what constitutes 'real Islam' is put out by the door (by admitting a plurality of dialogues), it returns by the window" (Burke, 1979, p. 256).

Still, it would remain questionable even if we were to follow Hodgson's view of Islam under Smith's proposition. To arrive at a conclusion which reads: since all religions preceding Islam were based on the initial personal islam ("faith"), the Islam from prophet Muhammad was also essentially about the personal islam is also misleading for good reasons. Thirdly, even though Hodgson's distinction between faith and religion is foundational to his system in general and Islam, in particular,

he failed to unequivocally demarcate where and when the cultural/traditional (religion/Islam) starts and the faith (“islam”) ends. Although, understandably, Hodgson saw Islam as the extension, directly or not, of the primordial “islam”, the border between the two still largely remains blurred. Yet, Hodgson’s response to this would be that the “private”, “inner”, “personal”, and “individual” believers attitude about the “soul” had to be lived in actual life and that, necessarily, needed working out extended mechanisms (religion as a cumulative tradition, historically speaking) of carrying it out. This means, obviously, there is a progression from islam as a faith to Islam as a religion and the subsequent “Islamic” and “Islamicate”. This essentially makes Hodgson’s view of religion in general and Islam, in particular, very close to Smith. Directly addressing this issue, Hodgson pointed out,

The various elements of the historical religion can be seen as depending more or less directly on the act of islam of the individual believer ... Thus from a fundamental private attitude of soul is derived a concrete social body and a precise formula of belief to define membership in it. All this must be worked out in massive detail if people are to move from the general ideal to its actual implementation in the midst of the innumerable complexities of living. In the course of doing so, Muslims move still further from the inward core of personal Islam to a vast body of social conventions (Hodgson, 1974, Vol. I, p. 72).

Finally, notions such as “personal” and “transcendental” are found less helpful in dealing with Islam as a religion or religious tradition (Al-Faruqi, 1992; Asad, 2001; Al-Attas, 2001). It is true that Islam is not necessarily “exceptional” to any other “religions”, but being cautious of differences would help us further explore underlying conditions, and possibly come up with alternatives that are more sound and applicable. Yet, the meaning and implications of these concepts intrinsically entail different ontological and epistemological universe. For instance, addressing the inadequacy of the concept “transcendental”, Asad observed, “Actually, a pious Muslim would not use the word ‘transcending’ but probably would echo the Qur’an and say, ‘I have faith in God Almighty and in the hereafter (al-akhira)’. The term ‘al-akhira’ refers to the end of time and is often linked by the Qur’an in opposition to the temporal world” (Asad, 2001, pp. 213-214).

Hodgson’s Islam between Cumulative and Discursive Traditions

In Islamic and religious studies, Islam as a historical, religious (or philosophical), and analytical category has always been approached from various perspectives. None of these perspectives, however, comes even close to precisely settling the question of ‘what constitutes Islam?’ Thinkers in the field, inter alia, from Clifford

Geertz, Ernst Gellner, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Abdulhamid El-Zein, Talal Asad, and to the latest Shahab Ahmed, tried hard to render it understandable and meaningful. Yet, it remains as contestable as ever. However, this does not necessarily mean none of these thinkers provided working theoretical frameworks and parameters. In the broader anthropological and sociological studies of Islam, there have been three general theoretical tendencies attempting to respond to the question of “What is Islam?”

The first, but for obvious reasons losing any serious audience in these days, is the view of Islam in terms of “islams” and that there is no “universal Islam”. Of this theoretical predisposition, Abdulhamid El-Zein (1977, pp. 227-254) suggested “islams” replace Islam, implying the usual anthropologists’ etic “indifference” to felt or existing subjectivities, of “islams”. The second theoretical response concerns the Muslims’-emic definition of Islam. In other words, it is to argue that Islam is what Muslims all around the world think and say it is. Examples include the writings of Jacques Waardenburg, Michael Gilsenan, and others. The third viewed Islam through “historical totality” with alleged implications for social structure and Islam as snowballing, in both content and form, through history. Asad (2009), with a thorough analysis of Clifford Geertz’s famous *Islam observed* and Ernest Gellner’s *Muslim Societies*, suggested that these studies tend to downplay the question of what constitutes Islam. For instance, Gellner, he argued, attempted to give a picture of Islam in relation to “its” social structure under the influence of the “mirror image” of Christian history and its reversal of the connection between religion and power (Asad, 2009, p. 7).

The other part of the third tendency concerns the view of Islam evolving through history, as a cumulative tradition, from the initial faith to systematized, reified doctrine, tradition, or religion. As an important representative figure of “cumulative tradition”, I will briefly revisit W. C. Smith’s view of religion in general and Islam, in particular. I will also examine if there is any theoretical link between Hodgson and Smith based on their appraisal of Islam. To counterbalance Smith’s thesis of cumulative tradition, I will provide a succinct outline of Asad’s “discursive tradition” as well. Apart from these two, I will give a short overview of Ahmed’s latest theoretical response to the old question. However, I will conclude that Asad’s approach to Islam, despite all its deficits and inconsistencies, remains more palatable than the formulations of Smith, Hodgson, and Ahmed.

A Critical Review of Smith's Cumulative Tradition

Wilfred Cantwell Smith's magnum opus "The Meaning and End of Religion" (1991) undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the study of religion in general and Islam, in particular. Well, evidently, this is felt much less so today than before. Although it was welcomed with open hands for its anti-essentialist stand against the already running orthodox attitude, especially in the study of Islam, it has nevertheless received critical, often dismissive, reviews in the later years. This applies especially to his engagement with Islam (Abdullah, 2004; Asad, 2001). This being the case, Smith's approach to religion in general and Islam in particular broadly embraced dualism (Cameron, 1997). He focused on what he called the "faith" and "tradition" aspects of the religious experience. For him, "faith", which is defined personal ("personal faith"), has a primacy over that which is "secondary", religion (Smith, 1991, p. 56). In this connection, Smith argued, "human history might prove more intelligible if we learned to think of religion and the religious as adjectives rather than as nouns, that is, as secondary to persons" (Smith, 1991, p. 21). Here, it should be noted that this distinction between the "person" and "religion and the religious" as "secondary to persons" is an important point of intersection between Hodgson and Smith.

For Smith, faith is not only personal but also more "genuine" than the "formalities" associated with religion (1991, pp. 128-129). Like Hodgson, Smith believed that faith is a universal phenomenon and closely tied to the "transcendental" (Smith, 1991, p. 18). He elaborated that faith was "... deeply personal, dynamic, ultimate, is a direct encounter relating one ... to the God of the whole universe, and to one's Samaritan neighbor-that is persons as such, oblivious of the fact that the he be outside one's organized religious community" (Smith, 1991, p. 127). In other words, what articulates faith is the transcendental personal relation to God and the implied ethical bond between human beings. However, this ethical and moral dimension practically caste, more so than in Smith, a visible shadow over Hodgson's *Venture*. In fact, I would argue Hodgson's humanism generally outweighs his concern for the transcendental in his reconstruction of the study of Islamic civilization. In this connection, although Hodgson criticized the precommitments arising out of Judaism, Marxism, Christianity, Islam, and Western-based biases, it is hardly a safe haven for Hodgson to function within humanism, for it is, nevertheless, a precommitment like any other. As Wael Hallaq (2013, p. 1) observed, drawing from John Gray's *Straw Dogs*, "Humanism is not a science, but religion. Humanists like to think they have a rational view of the world; but their core belief ... [is] further from the truth ... than any of the world's religions". The *Venture of*

Islam unequivocally shows Hodgson's explicitly endorsed and expressed humanistic precommitment.

Next, whilst faith is conceived as universal, logical, and most importantly, "real", religions or in Smith's own words, "cumulative traditions" are not. Smith elaborated that "We hold that behavior, institutions, creeds and other externalities are real and significant, but are not religion, at least they are not all of it, and particularly are not faith" (In Stevens, 1985, p. 7). For him, religion does not exist and it just only the reification of it. This means that "... a long-range development that we may term a process of reification: mentally making religion into a thing, gradually coming to conceive it as an objective systematic entity" (Smith, 1991, p. 5). The other meaning (in addition to the "mental thing") of Smith's reification, which Hodgson apparently adopted, is "that of a high degree of systematization" (Asad, 2001, p. 209). For Smith, like Hodgson, this reification of religion through "cumulative tradition" crystallized "... in material form the faith of previous generations, and it sets the context for the faith of each new generation as these come along" (Smith, 1991, p. 159). He described this further as,

the entire mass of overt objective data that constitute the historical deposit, as it were, of the past religious life of the community in question: temples, scriptures, theological systems, dance patterns, legal and other social institutions, conventions, moral codes, myths, and so on; anything that can be and is transmitted from one person, one generation, to another (Smith, 1991, pp. 156-157).

Like Smith, Hodgson's conception of Islam assumes the systematic and historical evolution of religion from the initial personal Islam to the proper Islam. However, as its societies devolved own culture and civilization, related other analytical categories and adjectives were assigned to them, as in "Islamic" activities such as Islamic art and Islamic philosophy, under Islamdom facilitating the emergence of Islamicate civilization. Simply put, Hodgson viewed Islam as the reification of the personal Islam, and in his own words, this took place by moving,

... from a fundamental private attitude of soul is derived a concrete social body and a precise formula of belief to define membership in it. All this must be worked out in massive detail if people are to move from the general ideal to its actual implementation in the midst of the innumerable complexities of living. In the course of doing so, Muslims move still further from the inward core of personal Islam to a vast body of social conventions (Hodgson, 1974, Vol. I, p. 72).

In the dynamic interaction between faith and tradition, both Hodgson and Smith appear to agree on the relatively evolutionary and systematic orientation

involved in the process. In this frame of reference, Smith believed that Islam was the most reified of all monotheistic religions and that the least reified in the continuum was Hinduism. He made this very clear:

the various religions of the world do in fact differ among themselves in the degree to which each presents itself as an organized and systematized entity. If this be so, then one of them may well be, must be, the most entity-like. One could suggest that Islam, it so happens, is that one (Smith, 1991, p. 85).

Contrary to Islam, Smith argued, “There are Hindus, but there is no Hinduism” (Smith, 1991, p. 16). He is arguing that Hinduism should be seen nominally not essentially (as it applies to Islam). If we could bring together Hodgson and Smith on this very issue, we would find that whilst Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism tended toward the *personal faith* dimension of religion, Islam tended to be “*god-ly transformative*” that it “helped to knit together peoples who otherwise might have remained remote” (Emphasis mine, Hodgson, 1974, p. 94). Understandably, it could be for this reason that Hodgson concluded *there are isolated Christian cultures but not single civilization comparable to Islamicate civilization*. In other words, both Hodgson and Smith viewed Islam, unlike any other religions, as the most systematized in doctrine or practice, or both, and particularly for Hodgson, the associated cultural and civilization-centered consequences. In spite of all these points, it seems logical that no deduction and parallel between Smith and Hodgson would worth any value more than Hodgson’s own admittance to *this* fact. He said,

Wilfred C. Smith ... has pointed out that the very notion of ‘a religion’, as an integral system of belief and practice held to be either true or false, is relatively recent as compared with the notion of ‘religion’ as an aspect of any one person’s life ... the notion of ‘a religion’ as a system was slow to prevail and has become dominant only in quite modern times. He suggests that what we generally have to deal with are cumulative traditions through which religious faith has been expressed. *I am indebted to him for sharpening my awareness here* (Emphasis mine, Hodgson, 1974, Vol. I, p. 79).

Now, I move on to some of the criticisms directed at Smith’s proposal, particularly those of Talal Asad and Shahab Ahmed. Apart from this, I will also critically summarize their respective proposals to the question of “what constitutes Islam?” Talal Asad published an article titled “*Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith’s “The Meaning and End of Religion”*”(2001) wherein he criticized, from root-to-branch, Smith’s conception of religion in general and Islam, in particular. This was especially focused on Smith’s views pertaining to faith, tradition, and Islam. Asad posited that Smith’s demarcation between faith and cumulative tradition was unclear, and thus, blurred. By making faith “transcendentally personal”, the latter as “its collective ex-

pression”, and accompanied by his “lack of interest in the formalities of worship and behavior, the difference between the man of faith and one who has no faith virtually unobservable” (Asad, 2001, p. 214). He continued, in Smith’s conception, a man of faith is split between “on the one hand, in a pressured, imperfect, and particularized world, and on the other hand, always linked through his or her faith to another world transcending this” (Asad, 2001). Contrary to this, Asad argued, “Faith is inseparable from the particularities of the temporal world and tradition that inhibit it”. Furthermore, unlike Smith’s formulation, faith is “not a singular act but a relationship based on continuous practice, a trusting attitude toward (not being mistrustful of) another” (Asad, 2001, pp. 115-116). Smith’s articulation of faith was also found inadequate and misleading (Livingston, 2003; Ahmed, 2016).

The other important criticism posited against Smith was concerning his conception of tradition. He argued that it was “a synthetic shorthand to a growing congeries of items each of which is realm itself but all of which taken together unified in the conceptualizing mind, by processes of intellectual abstraction” (Smith, 1991, p. 168). This conception, for Asad, reduces tradition to “a cognitive framework, not as a practical mode of living, not as techniques for teaching body and mind to cultivate specific virtues and abilities that have been authorized, passed on, and reformulated down the generations” (Asad, 2001, p. 216). Lastly, Smith’s overall venture was found heavily influenced by his western experiences and Christian worldview. For instance, Asad observed that Smith’s notion of religion was largely based on “the long-range development of religion in the West” (Asad, 2001, p. 7). The same was Shahab’s (2016) evaluation of Smith’s use of faith, which, according to him, reflected Smith’s own faith condition. Finally, Asad observed that Smith viewed Islam as a “violent religion” and was “biased ... against Islam” reflecting a certain degree of Orientalist cling (Asad, 2001, p. 210).

Asad’s Islam as Discursive Tradition

Asad’s proposal for responding to question of “what Islam is?” was his “Discursive Tradition”. To understand Islam, unlike the earlier attempts of Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner, it should be studied “in discourse, and not in social structure, or political style, that one finds the unifying principles of Islam (Asad, 1986, p. 11). This discourse-based approach to Islam should start “as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur’an and the Hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition” (Asad, 2009, p. 20). An important element in Asad’s thesis of discursive tradition is the

concept of tradition. It stands for “essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history” (Asad, 2009). For Asad, discursive tradition has three temporal dimensions. It has a *past* as to “when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted” and a *future* as to “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* as to “how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions (Asad, 2009). In other words, it is a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present.

Unlike many attempts aimed at tackling the question of what constitutes Islam, Asad’s discursive tradition begins with what he called “instituted practice”. This practice is, in his own words, “set in a particular context, and having a particular history into which Muslims are inducted as Muslims”. He further elaborated that a practice is “Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims-whether by an ‘alim, Khatib, a Sufi Shaykh, or an untutored parent” (Asad, 2009, p. 21). Another important element in Asad’s discursive tradition is orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is not simply one essential element in Asad’s discursive tradition, but also and most importantly, “crucial to all Islamic traditions” (Asad, 2009). Unlike the conventional attitude, Asad’s view of orthodoxy involves “a distinctive relationship-a relationship of power to truth” (Asad, 2009, p. 22). If and when “Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy” (Asad, 2009).

Interestingly, as orthodoxy involves the relationship of power to truth, it essentially allows for “argument and conflict over the form and significance of practices”, which are “a natural part of any Islamic tradition” (Assad, 2009, p. 22). However, Asad cautioned that “the process of trying to win someone over for the willing performance of a traditional practice, as distinct from trying to demolish an opponent’s intellectual position, is a necessary part of Islamic discursive traditions as of others” (Asad, 2009, p. 23). Another relevant point, often misunderstood and understated by Assad’s critics of his discursive tradition, is the possibility of orthodoxy allowing heterogeneity. The presence different Muslim practices do not necessarily lead one to conclude the multiplicity of discursive traditions, in this case, “islams”, but something important-the discursiveness of the Islamic traditions. He argued, “the variety of traditional Muslim practices in different times,

places, and populations indicate the different *Islamic reasonings* that different social and historical conditions can or cannot sustain” (Emphasis mine, Asad, 2009). He concluded, “Although Islamic traditions are not homogeneous, they aspire to coherence, in the way that all discursive traditions do” (Asad, 2009).

One of the criticisms, which I have alluded to above as undue criticism, posited against Asad was by Shahab Ahmed. He argued that Asad’s discursive tradition makes Muslims “hopeless orthodoxizers whose individual subjectivity is constituted in the inability to recognize the validity of the individual subjectivity of other Muslims” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 276). However, as Bigelow (2016) rightly observed, “Ahmed overstates Asad’s discursive tradition construct by characterizing it as entirely orthodoxizing and prescriptive”. Understandably, what Ahmed could see in his latest work, *What is Islam? The Importance of being Islamic* (2016), was only two general tendencies in the general efforts to defining Islam, those with orthodox tendencies and those with “plurality” of “islams” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 115). His proposition, however mismanaged as I will note below, opted to take a middle course by squeezing straw man out of the above two categories. Unfortunately, as noted above, one casualty of this, obviously, was Asad’s discursive tradition.

Ahmed’s latest project, which set out to respond to the question of “what constitutes Islam?” and Islamic, essentially aimed at deconstructing what he considered the general restraining, scriptural, or orthodox tendencies by resorting to and/ or embracing an approach that restrains the pluralist, “islams” perspective. Drawing from the Islamic traditions, from the “Balkans-to-Bengal complex” and through the “Philosophical-Sufi amalgam”, Ahmed attempted to establish the “Islamicity”, instead of being part of the cultural, of wine-drinking, art, philosophy, other Sufi-inspired ideas and practices, and the various hermeneutic practices involved therein. Here, Ahmed readily rejected Hodgson’s dualism, of the faith and tradition, religion and culture (Ahmed, 2016, pp. 157-175).

In any event, being aware of the possibility of different “Islam”, from the Arab-centered orthodox Islam, that this may result (which he actually believed took place in the “Balkans-to-Bengal complex” in the years between fourteenth and nineteenth centuries), he suggested “coherence” in contradictions. In his own words, “in relation to Islam, we are actually talking not so much about conceptualizing unity in the face of diversity, but rather about conceptualizing unity in the face of outright contradiction” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 72). The coherence, for Ahmed, is more of processual and in “mutually intelligible language in which they are able both to agree – and to disagree meaningfully” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 72). Simply stated, his proposal to tackling the question of “What is Islam?” conceptualizes,

Islam as meaning-making for the self in terms of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muḥammad as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text—that is, with the entire phenomenon and matrix of Revelation, rather than just the Text of Revelation—we are able, once and for all, conceptually to account for, accommodate and understand the relationship between variety and unity in human and historical Islam—and thus to conceptualize Islam in terms of coherent contradiction. Contradiction emerges into view as inherent to, arising directly from, and coherent with the spatiality of Revelation as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text—that is, as dimensionally-and spatially-differentiated expressions of the Truth of Revelation (Ahmed, 2016, p. 405).

Conclusion

In short, even though the discussion seems interesting and moves on, it did not put the perennial question to rest. While Hodgson's taken on the issue arguably interacts and resembles that of W. C. Smith, as much as I have attempted, it appeared to Ahmed as "Hodgsonian emanation" (Ahmed, 2016). This emanation begins with islam and goes through Islam, Islamic, and culminates in Islamicate (less religious, more cultural, and thus, Islamicate civilization). Unless it is a matter of semantics, the idea seems to point to a direction, the historical development of Hodgsonian religion in general and Islam, in particular (and its consequences, intended, anticipated or not for what he called Islamicate civilization).

Unlike Smith's cumulative tradition, Asad's discursive tradition appears more logically coherent and its theoretical inadequacy much less apparent than those of Smith, Hodgson, and Ahmed. As he succinctly put it, the dualistic and cumulative tradition based view, which articulated movement between faith and tradition, failed to grasp that "Faith is inseparable from the particularities of the temporal world and the traditions that inhabit it" (Assad, 2001, p. 214). By the same token, while criticizing Geertz's notion of "religious belief", readily applicable to Hodgson and Smith, I argue, Asad pointed out that the underlying idea is "a modern, privatized Christian one because and to the extent that it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind rather than as constituting activity in the world" (Asad, 1993, p. 47). Thus, Asad's nuanced take on the issue presents dynamic, often indistinguishable and inseparable, interaction between faith (and belief) and tradition (and practice).

As for Ahmed's selective historicity, we could have a different picture of Islam if we were to look for alternative narrations from different spatiotemporal contours. This will, ultimately, demand conceptualizations yielding similar to or different from Ahmed's essentialized competing narratives, including his own. This may not

necessarily cause any significant theoretical disequilibrium to Ahmed's formulation. However, as Burke (1979, p. 256) rightly argued, "While the problem of deciding what constitutes 'real Islam' is put out by the door (by admitting a plurality of dialogues), it returns by the window". For this supposed plurality of Ahmed, the plausibility of attaining theoretical coherence out of "outright contradictions" through "dialogues" and "language" is more than (a) thin and unsustainable-for-tification. It is for this very fundamental problem that Asad's discursive tradition presents more sound and intelligible configuration.

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