Kreinath, Jens (ed.). 2011. *The Anthropology of Islam Reader.* New York: Routledge. 420 pp. Pb.: £27.99. ISBN: 9780415780254.

This collection of essays draws attention from the usual Western focus on Sufi practices and should more correctly be titled *The Anthropology of Sunni Islam* as all articles are based on fieldwork conducted among Sunni Muslims. A particular strength of this reader is its coverage of a wide range of countries, and a comprehensive range of featured issues. The introduction to Islam includes some of the most authoritative authors – Gilsenan, Geertz, El-Zein and Asad – and their seminal texts.

The section on anthropological approaches on Islam is followed by discussions of the five most important Muslim practices. I was particularly intrigued by the article by Schielke and his insistence on studying ambivalence, ambiguity and fragmentation in religion and its practices. For example, he contends that striving for purity and perfection as demanded by religion often results in fragmentation and internal contradictions because believers cannot live up to such high ideals. Furthermore, Ramadan frequently becomes a period of excessive feasts and expensive gifts, undermining in this way its central message of asceticism and quiet reflection. By the same token, Scupin writes how, by undertaking the pilgrimage, Thai *hajj* pilgrims increase their prestige, which might have favourable economic consequences for them.

This book has substantial sections on methodological issues and representing fieldwork experiences and analysis. Unfortunately, many of the criticisms about understanding and representing Islam raised in the articles of Varisco and Said apply to this book itself. Even though several authors in this collection argue against seeing Islam primarily as orthopraxy, the book is organised around discussions on the five central Islamic practices as if its sacred book and sayings – Q'uran and Hadith – did not exist. Furthermore, as this is a book about Islam as religion, there are not many examinations of 'ongoing power plays resulting in political instability, economic disparity, cultural defamation, and misplaced self-interest' (p. 325). Because of the ascribing of such primacy to religion, the reasons for any socio-economic and politics failures tend to be ascribed to Islam.

In my view, seeing Islam as an all-encompassing *sui generis* phenomenon (e.g. Ahmed in his chapter argues Islamic anthropology as a distinctive paradigm) is ethnographically dubious, theoretically unproductive and ultimately Orientalist. I agree with the arguments of Tapper in this collection and want to stress that seeing societies primarily through the lens of religion to which many or most belong implies that Islam is the most significant focus and determinant of the lives of its adherents. This might not be the case. Saying that Islam is only one of many religions that people adhere to is not denying that this religion has inspired civilisations and continue to inspire around one billion people. It means that we can study it comparatively not only with other similar Islamic practices in different countries, as in this book, but also with other similar phenomena.

For example, if the editor did include Bourdieu's chapter on symbolic capital from his Kabylie ethnography, then Cooper in her discussion of how Hausa women enhance their status by singing about hajj would not make a call to 'let go of traditional understandings of profit maximisation' (pp. 208–209). Bourdieu's argument about symbolic capital, which

has been around for the last 35 years, could help her better understand how her Hausa women turn their "audible", "moral", "spiritual" and "religious"capital into elevated social status (symbolic capital). Similarly, I was not convinced that Mahmood in her discussions on female prayer groups in Cairo mosques challenges prevailing understandings of self, agency and ritual. Instead, it appeared to me that it fits into Lincoln's theory on the rites of transformation during which the women do not gain new, elevated social status, but have to learn to internalise and love their socially prescribed roles.

I would have particularly liked to read examinations on how Islamic values and precepts are negotiated and challenged in the contemporary modern world. Werbner's article is the only one examining ritual sacrifices among Pakistani migrants in the contemporary UK. Attempts have been made to also include conceptual fields other than religion, but they are mostly tentative. Benthal discusses the politics of almsgiving in Palestine and Jordan, and Weiss Islamic voluntarism in Northern Ghana. Let us hope that future works will examine Islam in relation to societal factors in conceptually comparative perspectives. Then, all failures of socio-economic and political factors will not tend to be ascribed to Islam.

BARBARA POTRATA
University of Leeds (United Kingdom)