Elite and popular religiosity among Dutch-Turkish muslims in the Netherlands

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2. Theoretical Background

The first part of this chapter addresses the main question in this research project: What forms and motivations characterize elite and popular religiosity, what are the patterns in the relationship between elite and popular religiosity, and how does this relate to the socio-economic status of Dutch-Turkish Muslims living in the Netherlands? Robert Redfield (1956) argued that two levels of culture run through complex civilizations, the “great tradition of the reflective few” and the “little tradition of the unreflective many” (pp. 41-42). Elite and popular religiosity gain their place in society and its culture. In order to understand elite and popular religiosity, therefore, we first need to explore the meaning of great and little cultures, due to the close relationship between culture and religion (Clark, 2012).

2.1. *Culture and the Concept of Elite and Popular*

Many sociologists have abandoned the assumption that a single dominant culture holds society together. They assume that societies are naturally diverse and ask instead how some groups can establish their own customs and values as normal, so that those of others are viewed as subcultural deviations from the norm (Akdoğan, 2012; Keskin, 2012; Weber, 1946).

An influential model for the study of world religions was proposed by Robert Redfield. Through a series of articles written in the early 1950s and most fully in his final short book *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (1956), he argued that two levels of culture run through complex civilizations, the "great tradition of the reflective few" and the "little tradition of the unreflective many" (Redfield, 1956, pp. 41-42).

The great tradition, the 'orthodox' form of the cultural/religious centre, belongs to the urban elite. It is the religion of the reflective few, refined in schools and temples, and is "consciously cultivated and handed down" (Redfield, 1956, p. 70). Great traditions have also been named 'orthodoxy', 'textual traditions,' 'high traditions,' 'philosophical religions', and 'universal traditions' (Lukens-Bull, 1999, p. 4). The little tradition is the 'heterodox' form of the cultural/religious periphery. It integrates many elements of the local tradition and practice. It is the religion as it is practiced in daily life by ordinary people (in Redfield's assessment, the largely unreflective majority; 1956, pp. 41-42). The little tradition is taken for granted and is not subject to a great deal of scrutiny, refinement, or improvement (Redfield, 1956, p. 70). Little traditions are also designated by the terms 'local tradition,' 'low tradition', and 'popular religion' (Lukens-Bull, 1999, p. 4).

The great vs. little tradition dichotomy emerged in response to the challenge of understanding the social organization of tradition. Richard Antoun stated that "the social organization of tradition" is an essential process in all complex societies. It is the process by which different religious hierarchies are created between the common people and the elite, through cultural brokers who act as mediators between ordinary people and the elite (Antoun, 1989, p. 31). These hierarchies shape the form that religious practices take by imposing communicative constraints (Hefner, 1987, p. 74). In addition, it is essential to know the specific relations between adherents of great and

little traditions in each local setting. Redfield agrees that although anthropology may be largely concerned with local religious practice, it cannot disregard the interrelationship between these two aspects of tradition (1956, pp. 86-98).

Although there is some criticism on Redfield's two-dimensional conceptualization of culture[6], it cannot be underestimated as an operational tool to understand the notion of culture. His ideas have exerted influence on academics and public intellectuals for a long time. After Redfield, analogous conceptualizations have been used to define dual traditions running through any of the major civilizations, such as: 'high culture' and 'popular culture' (Gans, 1975), 'highbrow culture' and 'lowbrow culture' (Levine, 1988), 'high culture' and 'low culture' (Brottman, 2005).

Cultural and Religious Diversity in Islam

Medieval Islamic thinkers have referred to the distinction between high culture and popular culture in their writings. Bīrūnī (d. 1048), who is regarded as one of the greatest scholars of the medieval Islamic era, commented on the social differentiation of society. His study of Indian culture, which can serve as Bīrūnī's contribution to the study of religion, reached its climax in his major work *Tahqīq mā li'l-Hind min maqūla fī'l-'aql aw mardhūla* (1958), known in the West as *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India* (Sachau 1910). First of all, although Bīrūnī recognized that the Indian civilization was different from ancient Greek civilization, he thought that they were similar and even that they had been in agreement in the distant past. He believed that there existed a basic "original unity of higher civilization" (Rosenthal, 1976, p. 12) between them, and he opened the eyes of educated Muslims to Indian and Greek science and philosophy, so that both could be integrated into a single intellectual worldview. Bīrūnī held that both in India and in Greece there had been - and still were - philosophers who, through their power of thought, had arrived at the idea of one God, corresponding with the message that had been revealed to the prophets. This kind of universal religious thought developed by Indian and Greek philosophers was only the possession of a literate elite, the *khawāṣṣ*, anywhere. In contrast to this, the illiterate

[6]See especially Lukens-Bull, 1999.

masses, the *ʿawāmm*, both within and outside Islam, tend to give way to the innate human disposition towards idolatry (Lawrence, 1976, pp. 24-47; Watt, 2003).

It is interesting to relate the results of the more empirical approach of Bīrūnī with the view on Indian religions given a hundred years later by the theologian al-Shahrastānī. Al-Shahrastānī discusses Hinduism in his *Kitāb al-milal wa'l-niḥal* ("Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects") in the chapter on the *Ārā' al-Hind* (the Views of the Indians). In the six sections constant attention is paid to the *Sabians*, the *Barāhima*, the three groups of the *ashāb al-ruhāniyyāt* (Those in favour of spiritual beings), the *'abadat al-kawākib* (star-worshippers), the *'abadat al-asnām* (idol-worshippers), and finally the Indian philosophers (Al-Shahrastānī, 1846). While Bīrūnī divides the Hindus into the literate elite and the illiterate masses, Shahrastānī marks them according to degrees of religious worship.

The most influential exposition of the division between elite and popular can be found in the writings of Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), one of the famous Muslim philosophers who dealt with this issue in his books. He states that society is divided into a thinking and ruling elite, and the masses, whose affairs are entirely in the hands of the elite. Religious and doctrinal questions are left to the scholars, and worldly things and matters of state fall under the authority of the rulers. Ordinary people have no choice but to obey ([1945], 2005, p.24). Al-Ghazālī confined and restricted the scope of several of his books in order to reserve them for the elite (here, 'elite' refers to the philosophical and theological elites which we will later identify) and to withhold them from the masses. For example, he openly declared that books like *al-Maḍnūn bihi ʿalā ghairi ahlihi* ("The Book to Be Withheld from Those for Whom It Is Not Written") ([1891], 2005a) and *al-maḍnūn al-ṣaghīr* ("To Be Withheld") ([1891], 1996) were strictly meant for the elite only, and in his other important book entitled *Iljām al ʿawāmm ʿan ʿilm al-kalām* ("Restraining the Ordinary People from the Science of Kalām") ([1891], 1987) he warned against indulgence in the doctrinal absurdities of the common people.

The Arab historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) is well known for his in-depth discussions of different forms of Islam, in which he refers to the social role of religion in a way that seems to foreshadow Durkheim. Ibn Khaldūn makes a distinction between Bedouin and sedentary civilizations and describes their living conditions in the second chapter of his work *Muqaddimah* ("Introduction"). His theory

of history is based on the interaction of these two opposing and complementary forces. The culture of a 'sedentary' society is peculiar to the existence of the monarchic State, which enforces its authority on a large unarmed population, collects taxes and inspires the rise of arts, thought, education and so on. Contrary to "sedentary" society, 'Bedouin' society is not familiar with the accumulation of population and wealth from which the 'sedentary' society's progress stems. (1967, pp. 92-103).

2.1.1. *Elite and Popular Culture: Differentiations*

There are two central approaches to the category of 'popular': structuralism and culturalism. Structuralism and culturalism are two distinctive theories within the discourse on popular culture that serve to theorize the complexities of popular culture's relationship with society (Storey, 2009). Structuralism[7], a concept formulated at the Frankfurt School, views popular culture as a site where veiled hegemonic ideologies are imposed from above by the multinational corporations bred by capitalism. The theory is best exemplified via a top-down model. Structuralism considers 'popular' to be identical with vulgar: popular would be the misrepresentation or distortion of an original form, a second-class product to be consumed by the masses. According to this approach, 'popular' refers to things that are admired and consumed by ordinary people (Storey, 2009, pp. 111-133).

Culturalism[8], on the other hand, rejects the consensus that popular culture is imposed from above and views it as an authentic expression of mass society. Social structures, in this view, are shaped by human agency and the collective power of 'bottom-up' movements should not be underestimated (Storey, 2009, pp. 37-58). Culturalism understands 'popular' as a natural form specific to the subordinate groups

[7] Structuralism is a method of approaching culture via a top-down mode. Its principal proponents are Ferdinand de Saussure in linguistics, Louis Althusser in Marxist theory, Michel Foucault in philosophy and history, Roland Barthes in literary and cultural studies, Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology, Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis and Pierre Macherey in literary theory.

[8] Culturalism is a way of approaching culture via a bottom-up mode. Its principal proponents are Giovanni Battista Vico in political philosophy and rhetoric, Gottfried Herder in philosophy, Richard Hoggart in sociology and literature, Raymond Williams in cultural studies, E.P. Thompson in social history, Stuart Hall in cultural studies and sociology, and Paddy Whannel in social studies and mass media in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

or classes, and therefore capable of authenticating their cultural production (Gans, 1975; Oliveira, 1994, p. 514). Culturalists claim that social meaning can be achieved on any level, especially on the lower levels of the social structure, such as the levels of the 'masses', illiterate people or ordinary people. These scholars were often uncritically romantic in their celebration of popular culture as an expression of the authentic interests and values of subordinate social groups and classes. The philosophical justification of this perspective in Western literature can be found in the writings of Giovanni Battista Vico (1668-1744) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803). They distinguished the notions of the "*populari*" or the "*Volk*" as the basis for an alternate and new meaning of humanism, apart from the rationalizing and civilizing processes set in motion by the European Enlightenment (Long, 1987, p. 7325). The philosophical justification for this orientation can be found in the writings of Köprülü and Gökalp in the tradition of Turkish Sociology, who proposed that it is the ordinary people (*halk*) who are the carriers of culture (Berkes, 1959, p. 30). In the following section, we will discuss these conceptions in Turkish sociology.

Although both approaches broaden the discourse on popular culture and offer very interesting perspectives, the more reasonable model, according to us, lies somewhere between the two. Storey (2003, p. 51) suggests that the work of Antonio Gramsci is instrumental in conceiving popular culture as an arena of struggle and negotiation between the interests of dominant groups and the interests of subordinate groups. As will be indicated in section 2.1.3, the Gramsci model offers the continuity of the dominant social framework, but operates through consent rather than coercion in a negotiation process between those who hold power and those who do not (Miller et al., 1998).

2.1.2. *Elite and Popular Culture in Turkish sociology*

The differentiation between elite and popular is also seen in Turkish sociology at the beginning of 20th century. M. Ziya Gökalp's sociology is predominantly based upon this distinction. Gökalp was a highly influential thinker, strongly influenced by both the French Durkheimian sociological tradition (focused on the organization and social coherence of society) and the German sociological tradition of Ferdinand Tönnies, which insisted on a difference between culture and civilization (Alexander & Smith, 2005; Parla, 1985). According to Türkdoğan, Gökalp pioneered the concept of the

'folk' in Turkish sociology: culture, for him, was created by the common folk. He distinguished this culture, so defined, from another concept, which he called *Tehzib*, meaning 'civilized' culture. This would be the cultural production by an elite (Gökalp, 1976a, 1976b, 1981, Türkdoğan, 1998, 2005).

In order to conceptualize his ideas, Gökalp primarily used the notions of culture (*hars*) and civilization (*medeniyet)* (Gökalp, 2013). He saw modernization as a basic factor for progress. However, he argued that modernization only meant that the Turks adopted the material aspects of Western European civilization, while the cultural essence of the Turks, which according to him is the dominance of *hars*, should be upheld (Berkes, 1959, p. 159). For Western European civilization to take root, he claimed, the Turks needed to establish harmony between *medeniyet* and *hars* (civilization and culture). For Gökalp, Western European material civilization and real Turkish culture were highly compatible and, if combined, could sustain progress without undermining the true Turkish ethos. Progress therefore required social and cultural transformation to revitalize the Turkish ethos, in order for civilization to take root (Davison, 1995; Kılıç, 2008).

With his search for culture in the literature of 'popular' Islam, Mehmed Fuat Köprülü followed Gökalp's lead and proposed that it is the (ordinary) people (*halk*) who are the carriers of culture. According to him, the roots of the Turkish spirit lay not in the Islamic institutions of the elite, but could be found in myth and folklore; these were the areas that had to be explored and uncovered in order for the Turks to be able to develop their Turkish cultural and religious identity further, a prerequisite for their involvement in Western civilization (Berkes, 1959, p. 30; Dressler, 2016, p. 26).

In his first footnote to the volume *Early Mystics*, Köprülü explained that he would use the Turkish term *halk* (the [ordinary] people) as corresponding to the French "*populaire*." The term would, as he emphasized, not indicate a reduction of any sort and should not be seen as referring to a particular social class (2006, p. 1).[9] Köprülü provided much historical evidence for the antagonism between elite culture and "orthodox" religion on the one hand, and rural culture related to "heterodoxy" and

[9] Nevertheless, Köprülü was criticized for not always applying the term in such allegedly objective, value-free ways, especially when he compared matters of religious orientation, social location, and political interests. We will refer to this critique in the following section (section 3.2.3).

"syncretism" on the other. In a later article on the Anatolian *aşık* tradition, he discussed the role of the Sufi orders in the foundation and development of *aşık*. Over time, the Sufi orders adapted to the social environments in which they lived. Some of these orders, in accordance with the religious policies of the government, exhibited an "orthodox" character in urban contexts, "appropriate to Sunni dogma," but in another context, for example a tribal environment, they appeared "totally heterodox, that is, removed from Islamic doctrine" (Köprülü, 1966, p. 184).

The structural link that Köprülü posits between the socioeconomic context, culture and religious preference can be associated with Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*, which Köprülü celebrated as a "philosophy of history" and "blueprint of sociology."[10] For Ibn Khaldūn, *'aṣabiyya* (group solidarity) is a source of strength and renewal, and - although not entirely absent from the town - at its strongest among the Bedouins. He also considers the Bedouins to be generally more virtuous than the city dwellers, who follow the law instead of their instinct and got spoiled as a result of their luxurious lifestyle (Khaldun, 1967, p. 122). Likewise, for Köprülü, who kept an eye on Ziya Gökalp in this matter, Turkish culture was found in its finest, pure ways among the peripheral Turkmen tribes of Anatolia (Dressler, 2013, p. 201).

On the other hand, however, Köprülü's explanation of the relationship between urban and rural life departed considerably from that of Ibn Khaldūn. In Ibn Khaldūn's text, the dichotomy of urban and rural culture was part of a larger, cyclical conception of Islamic civilization (Dressler, 2013, p. 202). In Köprülü's work, the connection between the centre and the periphery seems more static and the differences are presented as clear-cut distinctions. The other difference is the way they evaluate the relationship between centre and periphery with respect to religiosity. Although there is no fundamental value difference between urban and rural forms of socioeconomic organization and culture in Ibn Khaldūn's text, he emphasized that rural people tend to be more religious due to the hardships of life (Baali, 1988, p. 98). Ibn Khaldūn produced extensive discussions on various forms of Islam and specified the social role of religion in a way that seems to foreshadow Durkheim. What he did not do, according to Dressler (2013), is correlate inner-Islamic differences - for example between jurists

[10] Köprülü respectfully defined Ibn Khaldun as the apex of Islamic historiography and as one of the greatest philosophers of history of the classic and medieval periods (Köprülü, 1980, p. 93-94).

and muftis [persons who give a *fatwā* (opinion on a point of law), or is engaged in that profession] on the one hand, and the Sufis on the other - with distinction according to lifestyle (urban/rural). In Köprülü's work, on the other hand, the influence of Orientalist and Islamic revivalist thought can be seen, which made him portray the cultural periphery with reference to religion as impure and inferior (expressed through concepts such as "popular", "syncretic" and "heterodox" Islam) compared to the scripture- and law-based Islamic culture connected with urban contexts.[11] In conclusion, Köprülü can be seen as an initial representative of the (Khaldūnian) idea of the opposed but complementary character of urban and rural Islamic cultures in connection with the Orientalist division between 'official' / 'orthodox' / 'high' and 'unofficial' / 'heterodox' / 'popular' Islam (Dressler, 2013, p. 202).

2.1.3. *Complementarity of Elite and Popular Religiosity*

These discussions should suffice to indicate that both in Western and in Turkish thought, the concepts of 'elite' and 'popular' have been commonly applied. I have focused on two general approaches so far. On the one hand, those who support the structuralist approach juxtapose high culture with popular culture as having distinct differences that clearly stand out between the two. Most of them view popular culture as outdated and old-fashioned. According to this elitist view, educated people have superior cultural values. In this case, popular culture is disparaged as being of inferior taste and quality, and expressing the less desirable values of the uneducated majority. This definition of popular culture may be regarded as too narrow, because it excludes those members of the elite for whom popular culture is more or less experienced as a second culture. It may also be regarded as too broad; speaking of 'popular culture' as if it constitutes a uniform category. This way of defining suggests that popular culture is relatively homogeneous (Burke, 2009). It is observable that any layperson of any social status can potentially be either elite or non-elite, depending on the circumstances. Moreover, a person who is 'popular' in some contexts may be 'elite'

[11] Sharp changes can be seen in Köprülü's thoughts on this issue. Although in his earlier writings he argued that true literature should not take the vulgar tastes of the masses into consideration (Park, 1975, p. 364), after 1913, he changed his position and began to criticize elitist perspectives and to see the common people as the soul of a culture (Dressler, 2016).

in others. Worst, in this respect, is that this view defines 'the popular' only in a negative way.

On the other hand, by protesting against the increasing authority of high culture, supporters of the second approach, culturalism, see popular culture as an authentic culture, which can stand on its own feet. However, this view results in an equally essentialist view of culture: it interprets popular culture as the embodiment of a particular class (Bennett, 2006, p. 93).

What structuralism and culturalism have in common, is thus that they pretend that the cultural sphere is divided into two hermetically separate regions, each with its own, different logic. While this was clearly unsatisfactory, it was equally clear that the two traditions could not be forced into a shotgun marriage either. As Bennet concluded, "the only way out of this impasse seemed to be to shift the debate on to a new terrain, which would displace the structuralism - culturalism opposition, a project which inclined many working in the field at the time to draw increasingly on the writings of Antonio Gramsci" (Bennett, 2006, p. 94).

In his famous essay *Osservazioni sul Folclore* ("Observations on Folklore", Gramsci 1950, p. 215), Antonio Gramsci brought these approaches together by saying that "[t]he people is not a culturally homogeneous unit, but it is culturally stratified in a complex way" (trans. Burke, 2009, p. 29). Gramsci's conception of folklore corresponds in many respects to the more expansive category of popular culture (1971, 1991). He notes that while most intellectuals view folklore as 'picturesque' and old-fashioned, his own conception treats it as a living "conception of the world and life" which stands in implicit opposition to 'official' conceptions of the world. Gramsci's purpose is not simply to endorse folklore, for he acknowledges that much of the culture of subordinate people is conservative and fatalistic. Instead, he proposes that such 'fossilized' conceptions could be disaggregated from those "which are in the process of developing and which are in contradiction to or simply different from the morality of the governing strata" (Bennett, 2006). According to Gramsci, only by doing this could peasants and intellectuals be organized into part of a coalition in which communication could take place (Jones, 2006). Without this, Italy would, according to Gramsci, maintain a "great social disintegration", in which the intellectuals regard the peasants as bestial, cultureless 'machines to be bled dry', and the peasants,

overwhelmed by fear, believe that learning is a trick unique to the intellectuals (Jones, 2006, p. 37).

Based on a Gramscian approach, our construction of an elite and popular culture therefore necessitates a linked operation. This means that we can only approach the cultures of the elite in processes of comparison and synthesis with the cultures of the masses and *vice versa*. This makes it crucially important that we abandon any assumptions about the superiority of high culture and the primitivism of the masses. A cultural project, Gramsci wrote, cannot be some avant-garde movement imposed upon people. In line with Gökalp and Köprülü, Gramsci stated that a cultural project had to be rooted in the "humus of popular culture as it is, with its tastes and tendencies and with its moral and intellectual world, even if it is backward and conventional" (Bennett, 2006, p. 37; Crehan, 2009, p. 37).

These discussions on elite and popular culture form the basis for discussions on elite and popular religiosity. We think that this theoretical exploration will be helpful in exploring the characteristics of elite and popular religiosity and its socioeconomic and socio-cultural location. After this introduction to elite and popular culture, this study will therefore continue to shed light on the notion of elite and popular religion and its acquired meanings and content in the social scientific study of religion.

2.2. *Religion and the Concepts of Elite and Popular*

Here, I will shed light on Weber's status stratification and religious market theories to explain elite and popular religiosity from a sociological perspective. Following this, this study tries to understand the earlier usage and the meaning given to the terms elite and popular religiosity in different disciplines. In the next step, I will come up with preliminary definitions, which will be reviewed after the results of the statistical analysis of the hypothesis for this context have been discussed.

2.2.1. *Religion and Social Stratification: Weber*

In his inspiring studies on religion, Max Weber regularly referred to something called "popular religion".[12] In the context of social stratification, he evaluates religiosity in

[12] The terms Weber uses, *Volksreligiosität, Massenreligion,* and *Massenglauben,* are generally rendered in English as "popular religion".

two categories. He conceptualizes this distinction as "status stratification". Using the musical metaphor of the 'virtuoso', he distinguishes between the different qualifications of believers. According to Weber, human beings vary in their religious capacities and in the special personal attributes needed to achieve the highest religious goals. He introduces the term 'unmusical' in "*The Social Psychology of the World Religions*", stating that 'heroic' or 'virtuoso' religiosity stands in opposition to 'mass' religiosity (1946, p. 287).

In his writings on the sociology of religion, Weber's standard approach is to show how the substance of belief is closely associated with the class culture of believers. Peasantry, proletariat, aristocracy and bourgeoisie have different material interests and life experiences, and will therefore respond to different kinds of religious messages (Parkin, 1982, p. 52). Redfield's theory (1956) can be considered to be parallel to Weber's (1946). Weber's 'virtuoso' religiosity corresponds with the religion of the members of the 'great tradition' as portrayed by Redfield, while Weber's 'mass' religiosity points to Redfield's portrayal of the 'little' tradition in religion. In that sense, it can be argued that, with the popularization of cultural-religious elements of the great tradition, popular religiosity is the non-derivative 'mass' religiosity of the members of the little tradition.

Up to here it can be seen that there are two definitions of popular religion that contradict each other to a certain extent. 'Popular religion' *by reference to the non-privileged social or economic attributes of a group* and 'popular religion' *through its religious practice and beliefs.*

What, then, were Max Weber's criteria for defining popular religion?

In an important article, Jacques Berlinerblau suggested to accommodate the differences between these two definitions by identifying two main approaches to popular religion, based on a Weberian conception. These are (1) *the economic and social approach* and (2) *the praxis approach*.

In the economic and social approach[13], popular religion refers to the religious tendencies of strata not "characterized by a high degree of social and economic

[13] The starting point for understanding the first approach is based on Weber's section "Religion of Non-Privileged Strata" in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology.* This section contains a wealth of theoretical observations on the religious tendencies of strata not

privilege". Among the groups discussed by Weber are slaves, free day labourers, women, peasants, artisans, small traders, the proletariat, the lower middle class, and the middle class. On this basis, it could be deduced that Weber, when he spoke of 'popular religion', proposed a type of religiosity associated with a given society's economically or socially non-privileged groups, which constitute its majority (Berlinerblau, 2001).

Nevertheless, closer examination of Weber's writings on this subject shows that social and economic factors, while important, are not of primary significance when defining popular religion. In the praxis approach[14], popular religion is not defined by reference to a group's non-privileged social or economic status, but by referring to religious practice and beliefs.

Two approaches to the question 'What is popular religion?' may be identified in Weber's writings:

- 'Popular religion' is that religion, regardless of its contents, practiced by groups among the masses characterized by a non-privileged social and economic status.
- 'Popular religion' is constituted by specific types of practices and beliefs (e.g., magic, an antirational orientation, a close bond with nature, a 'this-worldly' religious attitude, increased preoccupation with salvation and saviour figures) fostered by a particular group.

"characterized by a high degree of social and economic privilege" (Weber 1978, p. 481). In the same chapter, we find references to "popular religion" (1978, pp. 488-92), "mass religion" (1978, p. 492) and "masses" (1978, pp. 487-88). Thus, it could be deduced that Weber, when he spoke of "popular religion", proposed a type of religiosity associated with the economically or socially non-privileged groups of a given society, which constitute its majority.

[14] In a different passage, however, Weber explicitly defines mass religiosity as associated with those who are "religiously unmusical" and not with "those who occupy an inferior position in the secular status order" (1958, p. 287). This use of the term contradicts many references to the religion of the masses cited above in *Economy and Society.* In one case, Weber seems to explicitly associate *Massenglauben* (mass religion) with underprivileged classes (1978, p. 492; 1978, p. 282). In other cases (cited above), practitioners of mass religion appear to engage in many of the behaviours associated with groups with a low position in the secular status order (e g., magic, inclination towards salvation religion, cults of saints and heroes). For Weber's definition of popular religious beliefs and practices, see section 2.2.3. of this study, "Some Characteristics of Elite and Popular Religiosity".

On the basis of this double and seemingly irreconcilable interpretation, Berlinerblau has built another, more reasonable, conceptualization. This will be referred to as the 'synthesis approach' and is the approach used in this study. It holds that:

"'Popular religion' is constituted by specific types of religious praxis and belief exercised by *generally* socially and economically non-privileged strata" (2001, p. 613, *emphasis added*).

From this point of view, the definition of elite religion takes shape as follows: 'Elite religion' is constituted by specific types of religious praxis and belief exercised by strata that are generally socially and economically privileged. Thus, certain objective positions within the social field generally 'go hand in hand with' certain forms of religiosity.

This assumption suggests that persons with a non-privileged social and economic status may experience elite forms of religious practice to a certain extent, while persons with a privileged social and economic status may, in turn, experience popular forms of religious practice to a certain extent. Although social and economic factors are important, they are thus not of primary significance in defining elite and popular religiosity.

In order to clarify Weber's approach of elite and popular religiosity, it is now appropriate to take a look at religious market theory.

2.2.2. *Religion and Religious Market*

Another approach that can sociologically explain cultural differences has its roots in the study of the relations between "cultural production and markets". We can better understand cultural differences by looking at the nature of these relations. Its strongest advocates, such as Rodney Stark, argue that it represents a new paradigm in the sociology of religion (Stark & McCann, 1993). It emphasises the power of the market and of competition between religious producers (Dobbelaere, 2004; Kisala, 2004; Voyé, 2004; Warner, 1993).

The main characteristics of religion in modern society, especially in the West, are individualism and the decline of the authority of traditional institutions. Modernity appears to be generally compatible with the increase of deinstitutionalised, commercialised religion (Turner, 2011). In a differentiated global religious market,

these segments of the religious market compete with each other and overlap. Under competitive conditions, the producers of religious services are forced to face the particular challenge of retaining their members and attracting new members, while at the same time responding to the needs of their clientele and offering efficient services (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Pickel & Sammet, 2012).

The 'religious market' approach is based on rational choice theory assumptions. Rational choice theory emerged as a major item on the agenda of many social scientists in the 1990s and its proponents have formed a section within the American Sociological Association. The impact of rational choice theory on the social scientific study of religion has been enormous in the past decades (Young, 1997). According to this theory, the individual's demand for religious goods is constant. Supporters of the market approach, particularly scholars in religious studies, suggest that the conditions of the modern age do not unavoidably cause religion to weaken but may even foster it. Religious vitality seen in modern times could be the result of competition between religious producers (Roger Finke & Stark, 1988; Iannaccone, 1991; Iannaccone, Finke, & Stark, 1997).

Stark and Bainbridge (1985, 1989) describe religious goods as supernatural, general and non-verifiable compensators. By the term "compensator" Stark and Bainbridge (1985, p. 6) mean "the belief that a reward will be obtained in the distant future or in some other context which cannot be immediately verified". Rewards are "anything humans will incur costs to obtain" (1989, p. 27). Since human beings often strive for rewards they cannot directly have, they regularly settle for a substitute, a compensator. Compensators may be secular or based on supernatural expectations. The supernaturally-based compensators can be "magic" or "religion". Examples of magical compensators are promises such as getting a good grade at school, or being cured of cancer, or winning back an unfaithful lover. Examples of religious compensators are a revelation of the meaning of existence, an afterlife, illumination or the coming of the saviour at some unspecified time (1985, pp. 7-30). It is interesting to note that compensators are the core element of Stark and Bainbridge's definition of religions: religions are "systems of general compensators based on supernatural assumptions" (1989, p. 81). Religious communities can then be seen as organizations that produce two things: on the one hand, supernaturally-based compensators, and on the other, "secular" goods (rewards) such as friendship, social ties or social identities that may

be produced by any kind of social group. In a revised version of his theory, Stark drops the term “compensator”, and talks instead about “otherworldly rewards”, which are “those that will be obtained only in a non-empirical (usually posthumous) context” (Stark, 1999, p. 268). We see that Stark and Bainbridge focus on the ultimate goals that religions often propose. In his writings, Max Weber describes the same phenomenon - the “religious market” - as “salvation goals”.

Max Weber is the most important classic author for the concept of “religious goods”. The term “salvation good” is a central one in Weber’s works such as in *Economy and Society* ([1920], 1978) and *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion* ([1920b], 1988). Weber also uses the terms “salvation goals”, “salvation means” and “promises of the religions” instead of the term “salvation goods” (Stolz, 2006).

Jörg Stolz (2006) mentions four aspects of Weber’s conception of salvation goods. (1) Salvation goods are either *goals* or *means*. Weber states that religions generate salvation goals that may be reached through certain “salvation means”. Individuals can use salvation means in a rational way in order to reach future salvation goals, thus allowing for a sociological explanation. (2) Salvation goods should not be thought of as isolated objects. Rather, they suggest *a specific worldview and specific life practices of the respective religion*. With regard to the worldview, the religious symbol system determines from which sad circumstances the group is to be saved and what the state of salvation looks like. (3) Salvation goods *satisfy different psychological and social needs*. According to Max Weber, psychological needs can be either compensatory, legitimating or intellectual. The deprivation, misfortune and suffering that is felt, cause the individual to search for compensation... These psychological needs vary depending on the historical situation and the social class in which the individual finds himself. This is why distinctive social classes tend to accept and produce different kinds of religiosity. (4) Salvation goods can be this-worldly or other-worldly. Weber states that many of the salvation goods of the different religions were not, and are not, other-worldly (such as an afterlife in paradise), but this-worldly. They can be formulated positively, as the achieving of good health, long life, happiness, riches; or they can be formulated negatively as the liberation from illness and death, unhappiness, poverty, defeat in war, slavery, etc. (pp. 18-20).

By addressing these aspects of religious goods as described by Stolz (2006), I have attempted to show how Weberian and rational choice concepts of religious goods and religious markets can be integrated into a larger theoretical framework. This structure enables us to understand possible religious forms and motivations of elite and popular religious actions. In this study, we prefer to use the concept of "motivations" rather than that of "*religious goods"* to address different characteristics of religious action and to analyse elite and popular forms of religiosity. This approach is compatible with Weber's definition of a motivation as "a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or to the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question". (Weber 1966, p. 98). Thus, by treating motivations in the way Weber advocates, we should be able to come to an explanation of the actual course of behaviour, although we do not reduce motivation to merely an actor's reasons for acting, but also take the institutional, cultural and psychological aspects into account. Religious elites, according to Weber, are mostly motivated by *other-worldly* religious goods, while those who experience popular religiosity are motivated by *this-worldly* religious goods. In section 2.2.3, I will discuss how the elements of religious orientation, namely motivation, cognitive style, and content correspond to both elite and popular religiosity, drawing on the works of Weber and other religious studies scholars.

2.2.3. *Some Characteristics of Elite and Popular Religiosity*

In this section, the present study tries to understand different meanings and characteristics assigned to the terms of elite and popular religiosity in the context of different disciplines. However, our operational definition will be particularly elaborated in chapter 3.

Above we have addressed different *religious goods* that lie behind religious action according to Weber's writings. Here we will continue to shed light on these different *religious goods* by focusing on the opinions of various scholars of religion that relate to elite and popular religiosity. From now on, in order to be consistent in the use of the concept, we prefer to use the terms 'forms', 'motivations' or 'characteristics' to indicate the various *religious goods* that lie behind religious action.

The reader may have noticed that in social scientific and historical research there is little to no consensus on what 'popular religion' actually means. Terms such as 'common religion' (Towler, 1974, p. 148), 'folk religion' (Mensching, 1964, p. 254),

‘non-official religion’ (Waardenburg & Vrijhof, 1979), ‘extra-ecclesiastical religion’ (Williams, 1989, p. 5), ‘local religion’ (Maltby & Christian, 1982), and ‘popular faith’ (Brandes, 1990, p. 186), among others, have served to recast, refine, and, in some cases, outright reject the traditional typology of ‘popular religion’. Accordingly, the last quarter century of work in this area has seen an explosive increase in definitional activity, as well as a vigorous process of producing conceptual clarity.

Generally, in the scientific study of religion, the term ‘popular religion’ is used to refer to the collection of common beliefs and rites and sacred products among humans. Critical investigations of the meaning of popular culture and religion from the disciplinary orientations of the anthropology and history of religion, and the sociology of knowledge, revealed a wide variety of forms of popular religion. Long places these varied forms of popular religion in seven categories (1987, pp. 7324–7333). Of these seven definitions of popular religion, three are of great relevance to our research because of their common characteristics. These are:

1. Popular religion as the religion of the laity in a religious community in contrast to the religion of the clergy or other specialists.
2. Popular religion as the pervasive beliefs, rituals, and values of a society.
3. Popular religion as the religion of the masses in opposition to the religion of the sophisticated, discriminating and scholarly within a society.[15]

Knoblauch defines popular religion as the religious life of ordinary people who know and practice it as it is communicated and performed on a family, village, or popular level (Knoblauch, 2011). In traditional societies, folk religion is generally associated with peasant communities (Bowker, 2003), but in the modern world many of its characteristics can be found among the working class and other ordinary people

[15] The other four definitions are as follows: 4. Popular religion as identical with the organic (usually rural and peasant) form of a society. The religious and moral orders are also identical; in this sense popular religion is closely related to the meanings of primitive and folk religion. 5. Popular religion as an amalgam of esoteric beliefs and practices differing from the common or civil religion, but usually located in the lower strata of a society. 6. Popular religion as the religion of a subclass or minority group in a culture. 7. Popular religion as the creation of an ideology of religion by the elite levels of a society (Long, 1987, pp. 7324-7333).

in urban societies. In this social context it is often called popular religion (Ellwood, 2007, p. 153).

In *the Encyclopaedia of World Religions*, Ellwood describes popular religion on the basis of two fundamental characteristics. First, it is primarily 'cosmic' rather than historical in perspective, and second, it is mainly passed on orally, through the words and examples of family, community members, and spiritual leaders at the local level, whether they be imams, shamans, evangelists, priests, or others. Cosmic orientation means that those who experience popular religiosity generally have little sense of history outside of living memory, except if it is encoded in myth. A significant point of attention is how religion fits into seasonal cycles and local geography. If the practitioners of the religion are farmers, festivals of planting and harvest are important. Oral transmission means that popular religion is learned primarily through face to face encounters, from the words of people one knows locally, rather than through intense study or by learning about the way religion is known from literary sources or among elites (2007, p.154).

Weber deals with popular religion by placing it in a double category as stated above: popular religion "*by reference to the non-privileged social or economic attributes of a group"* and popular religion "*through its religious practice and beliefs"*. Berlinerblau divided Weber's definition of popular religious beliefs and practices into five categories (2001, pp. 611-612).

1. Engaging in all sorts of 'magical' practices (1958, pp. 277, 287, 288; 1968, pp. 201, 210; 1978, pp. 448, 466, 477, 482, 488, 506, 575, 609).
2. Eschewing any tendency to rationalize, putting a heavy emphasis on tradition and generally being incapable of producing rational worldviews (1978, pp. 467, 469, 512, 629).
3. Strongly motivated by the forces of nature (1958, p. 287; 1968, pp. 173, 174; 1978, pp. 401, 468, 471, 482).
4. A this-worldly orientation and interpretation of religion - illustrated by a *do ut des*[16] (1978, pp. 422, 424) or a "coercive" (1978, p. 422) and

[16] *Do ut des* refers to an ancient Latin formula used when sacrifices were made to the gods in the hope of fruitfulness and security (see Trompf, 2016).

"calculating attitude" (1978, p. 492) towards the gods, and a desire for "tangible instruments of grace" (1978, p. 559).

5. Great deal of interest in the question of salvation and heroic saviour figures (1958, p. 272; 1968, pp. 173, 201; 1978, pp. 459, 487, 488, 506, 571).

Oliviera (1994) defines popular religion through three characteristics. According to him, "popular religion" implies:

1. *Socialization of sacred "goods"* - since they are produced for self-consumption, the popular forms of religion are more accessible to the dominated classes who cannot afford their own specialists.
2. *Absence of doctrinal and theological systematization* - which is an activity of specialists - of religious beliefs and practices, which are implicitly articulated. Popular religion thus exhibits stereotyped behaviour, formalism, conventionalism and ritualism.
3. *Absence of the institutional legitimacy that only official specialists can provide* - as a product for self-consumption, popular religious forms can only claim legitimacy from tradition.

The 'popular' category, according to Oliviera, embodies different meanings. Considered from the social perspective, it opposes what belongs to the 'dominant' classes; from a cultural point of view, it is the opposite of 'erudite'; from a political point of view, it opposes 'official'(1994, p 514).

Popular religion has similarly been defined as exhibiting stereotyped behaviour, formalism, conventionalism and ritualism (La Bon, 1896, pp. 63-70; Sezen, 2004), and as keeping a distance from profound doctrinal and theological systematization (Günay, 2002; Mensching, 1976). In this context of popular religiosity, religion represents a set of resources for the achievement of particular objectives related to health, wealth and happiness. Here popular culture appears as a *bricoleur* culture (Zubaida, 1993, p. 145). What is important for the believer at any given moment is to construct remedies out of various elements that suit the task at hand. This highlights the pragmatic aspects of popular religion. Practitioners like to keep their options open. In other words, they do

not practice a religion on a daily basis but keep religious conceptions ready in case of need. Popular religion is mostly fragmentary and *ad hoc*, and is on permanent standby for any occasion when ontological security comes under threat (Ter Borg, 2004, 2008)

As seen above, the category 'popular' embodies different meanings. By means of this chapter, our study tried to emphasize these acquired meanings and characteristics of popular religiosity in the study of religion. After this brief introduction to popular religiosity, the following chapter will focus on elite and popular religiosity in Islam. The detailed comparison between elite and popular religiosity with respect to Islam is left to the subsequent chapters.

2.2.4. *Religious Elites and Masses*

Two general definitions of 'elite' have been proposed by sociologists. The first identifies an elite as a group composed of people recognized as having reached the highest level in a particular branch of activity. The second definition describes an elite as a group consisting of those who occupy the highest position in a social organization equipped with an internal authority structure (Bottomore, 1964, pp. 1-3; Giddens, 1973, pp. 119-20). When applied in the field of religions, a distinction can be made between those who are recognized as embodying the highest values of the religion and those who hold the highest positions of formal authority in religious organizations or institutions (Sharot, 2001, p. 11).

In this study, however, the term 'elite religiosity' does not necessarily refer to the religion of elites who have reached the highest values of the religion or who hold the highest positions of formal authority. The present study proposes to add a different definition of elites based on the *synthesis approach*: an elite is a group that generally exercises specific types of religious praxis and belief. This assumption suggests that persons with a non-privileged social and economic status may be viewed as elite in virtue of the forms and motivations that shape their religious practice.

In this study, 'popular religiosity' *primarily* refers to the religion of those who are religiously 'unmusical'; by this term we do not mean to refer to those who occupy an inferior position in the secular status order. In other words, in the way it is used here, 'popular religiosity' does not necessarily signify the religion of the masses. 'Popular' refers to a group that exercises specific types of religious praxis and belief. What

makes our respondents elite or mass in this study is not their position in a secular status order but rather the forms and motivations that shape their religious beliefs and practices. However, we will be monitoring the effect of population characteristics like social, economic and cultural conditions and will assume that certain positions in society have a strong effect on the ways people believe and practice.

2.2.5. *General Evaluation*

An evaluation of elite and popular religiosity necessitates some defence against criticism of these concepts and similar or overlapping concepts such as great and little traditions. One criticism of these distinctions is that they create the impression that the religions of the learned and the masses are static and unchanging, and can be divided into separate compartments in a clear-cut manner, each invulnerable to the effect of the other. The dichotomization is seen as leading to a concrete devaluation of popular religion as magic, oriented solely towards practical and materialistic ends, without any ethical, philosophical values. In contrast, the religious elite is exclusively associated with the spiritual, removed from worldly matters (Sharot, 2001, p. 13).

Based upon the Gramscian approach explained above, this research project rejects an interpretation of 'popular religion' as if it were the very antithesis of 'elite religion'. The following remark taken from J.B. Segal's article "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel" may be understood as an illustration of this pejorative approach that is rejected in this study:

> There were two levels of Israelite religion. The one... is that of established sanctuaries and of established dates, a formal religion, in short, which followed lines clearly defined and precise in detail. The other is less easy to characterize... Outside the borders of the established cult lies the shadowy region of popular superstition, of actions that arise from the vague, half-conscious feelings of fear and anticipation that have been summed up in the not ill-chosen term of 'Nature religion' (1976, p. 1).

As Sharot rightly notes, these depictions misrepresent the complexity of people's religiosity and disregard the historically dynamic and complex relations between social groups that result in religious overlap and integrations. Where one group is assumed to have an influence on another, Sharot points out, this is frequently supposed to run in a downward direction, from the learned to the unlearned. Specifically, the peasants are often regarded as taking a passive stance (2001, p. 13).

In many works, ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ spheres are imagined to be exact opposites as seen above. In recent research, however, this monolithic conception of popular and elite religion has been re-evaluated. As Ellen Badone points out, “rather than viewing elite and popular religion as monolithic entities, immutable and distinct, it is more fruitful to focus on the dialectical character of their interrelationship” (1990, p. 6).

In Conclusion

The use of the terms elite religiosity and popular religiosity in this study refers to the patterns of religious action of social actors (religious elites and laity, especially the peasant population, i.e., the ‘masses’). Popular religion is not seen as a secondary version of an elite archetype, nor is it assumed to be cut off from elite religion or to be necessarily opposed to it. Popular religiosity is understood here as referring to the conventional, extrinsic, and consensual elements emphasized by the non-elite for their own religious life. Elite religiosity is understood here as referring to the internalized, intrinsic, and committed outlooks that have been generally produced by spiritual elites primarily for their own religious life and tradition. In chapter 3, this study examines the operational definition of elite and popular religiosity in greater detail.

As Bulaç (1995) indicates, these categorisations are only valuable as long as they are used as a descriptive and analytical tool to comprehend the multidimensional structure of society. These divisions are helpful to measure to what extent elite religiosity and popular religiosity overlap, differ, and conflict. Moreover, these concepts will help us to understand, by way of empirical investigations, comparisons, and explanations, to what extent religious dimensions vary from society to society and affect the socioeconomic landscape of the community.