



Reforming Tradition and Traditions of Reform in Muslim South Asia

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Muhammad Qasim Zaman. 2012. *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 363 pp., ISBN: 9781107422254, £ 21.99.

Sana Haroon. 2011. *Frontier of Faith: A History of Religious Mobilisation in the Pakhtun Tribal Areas c. 1890-1950*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 258 pp., ISBN: 9780199060252, PKR 595.00.

305

Masooda Bano. 2012. *The Rational Believer: Choices and Decisions in the Madrasas of Pakistan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 272 pp., ISBN: 0-8014-5044-6, \$ 39.95.

Jan-Peter Hartung. 2013. *A system of Life: Mawdudi and the Ideologisation of Islam*. London: Hurst & Company, 320 pp., ISBN: 9781849042482, £ 55.00.

In many discussions concerning Muslims, Islam and modernity, reform and tradition are not only key words but projected as polar opposites. In these discourses tradition is associated with adherence to practices and beliefs of the past, promoting religious violence, intolerance and misogyny. This anachronistic mind set is the cause for 'failed' social and political developments in Muslim countries. The only solution to this 'crisis' would be a reform of Islamic beliefs and practices. The dichotomy between reformed and traditional Islam is not only problematic when used by policy makers; it also forces believers into rigid categories that do not allow for diverse experiences shaped by local contexts (Osella & Osella 2008).

This report brings together studies which recognise the dialectic relationship between reform and tradition, and shifting patterns of



religious authority. The dominant crisis discourse is questioned in these reviewed publications. Rather than seeing contestations as failure, the competing narratives are understood as expressions of engagement with current issues and opportunities for change (Khan 2012). Approaching Islam as a discursive tradition, rather than a set code makes it possible to analyse how demands for change have surfaced and continue to do so, how reforms have been debated and who has been involved in these discussions.

This perspective acknowledges that, depending on the power configurations and context, individuals and groups are, at times, agents of reform and, at times, advocates of tradition. The authors of the studies presented here, exemplify the diverse and constantly changing conceptions of what constitutes as reform, modernity and tradition. As it would otherwise go beyond the scope of this report, suffice it to say, that the authors work with and explain a particular manifestation and understanding of what modernity, tradition and reform means in the context they studying.

The books under review study the involvement of ulama, intellectuals and religious leaders in religious, political and social transformations in the societies they live in. At the same time, they show how these changes, together with debates on reform, have transformed religious hierarchies and notions of religious authority. The focus on the connection between actors and local settings provides valuable insights into negotiation processes between everyday life and belief (Masud, Salvatore & van Bruinessen 2009; Metcalf 2009). However, the authors never lose sight of the impact of colonial policies, prevailing currents of thought, and international events on local experiences. This framework can offer alternative understandings of reform and tradition.

Francis Robinson provides a general overview of the shifts influencing Islamic reform movements in nineteenth and twentieth century South Asia (Robinson 2008). He argues that colonialism is the main factor determining the content and rhetoric of the reform discourses in British India. Colonialism introduced alternative conceptions of knowledge that questioned established patterns of life and ways of thinking. Through this "assault on the authority of the past", the individual came to the centre of attention (ibid.: 266 ff). To initiate change the individual had to be proactive. For Robinson, the four key changes in the character of Islamic reform in British India are: the new emphasis on human will, the transformation of the self, the rational-



isation of Islam and lastly, secularisation. To engage with past and present, a strategy of “simultaneous appropriation of change and also critique” (Robinson 2008: 261) was adopted by religious leaders and intellectuals, who thus paved the way for what was deemed to be modernity. This two-tracked process of adaption and critique is highlighted in all books under review.

While Robinson points out how reform patterns were altered by colonialism, reflexivity and internal criticism are not new developments. Islam, as a discursive tradition, has to be “imagined, reconstructed, argued over, defended and modified” (Zaman 2002: 10) at all times and has required the ulama to respond to new situations through the framework of the sacred scriptures. The tradition of change has been practiced in this fashion over centuries. In some of his earlier publications, Muhammad Qasim Zaman addressed the reciprocal relationship between social change and the ulama. In his latest book, he explores the manifestations, mechanisms and the impact of internal criticism.

In *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism*, Muhammad Qasim Zaman (2012), building on his earlier argument, explores the content and rhetoric of some salient debates among scholars of Islam in modern times. Rather than examining instances where opinions converge, the author proposes to explore the topic through the lens of internal criticism of the tradition, as well as responses to these challenges. Examining disagreements offers clues how religious authority is negotiated in ever changing contexts and circumstances (Zaman 2012: 309) and can point out the “disjunction between how authority might be imagined and how it works in practice” (Zaman 2012: 30).

The book is structured thematically and chronologically. Six topics are the focal points of inquiry: Consensus (ijma), independent reasoning (ijtihad), the common good (maslaha), women’s rights and education, and the use of violence and terrorism. Zaman examines opinions and criticism on these six themes, articulated in different contexts by Rashid Rida, Obaidullah Sindhi and Yusuf Qaradawi. How they engage with these topics, in theoretical and practical terms, links the narrative and provides structure and coherence. The two-fold strategy of focusing on the intellectual debate as well as the application of these ideas to different contexts offers valuable insights into how discourses are informed and constrained by diverse conceptions of religious authority.



Each of the scholars has a unique life trajectory, having worked in very different contexts: Rashid Rida was mostly active in Egypt but visited South Asia and met the ulama at Deoband; Obaidullah Sindhi, a Sikh convert, had to leave Deoband and went into exile to the Hijaz and Afghanistan; Yusuf Qaradawi spent his formative years in Egypt and is now working from Qatar, but has the ambition to pronounce opinions with a global appeal. Responses to these three scholars have been both, highly positive and negative. Their reception and their activism across countries and regions is surely the main reason for Zaman's selection. By focusing on the 'multi-sided discourse' of these scholars, the author aims to show that the content and rhetoric of criticism (and reactions to it) is contingent upon the target audience and the socio-political configurations at the time (Zaman 2012: 1). It is therefore possible that in different contexts a scholar can express different opinions on the same subject. In the same manner, critique might elicit a strong response in one context, while it is met with disinterest in another. Rashid Rida's visit to South Asia exemplifies this phenomenon.

Rida's contribution to modern Islamic thought is usually examined in connection with his activism in Egypt, but Zaman's inquiry into his travels in South Asia opens up an interesting new chapter. Like some of his Middle Eastern contemporaries, Rida was of the opinion that schools of law and schools of thought were restrictive, confining Islamic thought to a rigid way of thinking. When he visited the Dar-ul-Uloom at Deoband in 1912, Rida advocated independent reflection on Qur'anic teachings as necessary for the continued relevance of Islam in modern times. His arguments did not receive enthusiastic feedback from the South Asian audience. The Deobandi ulama derived their authority from taqlid, the adherence to the opinions and judgements of earlier jurists, in this case from the Hanafi school of law. Hence, in their context taqlid was not a rigid practice and could accommodate, if necessary, limited ijtihad (independent reasoning). In their responses to Rida, the Deobandi ulama thus tried to demonstrate that reform through taqlid was possible. Even though Rida was not convinced by their arguments, their readiness to engage in the taqlid-ijtihad debate led Rida to respect their approach. Due to the differing social configurations and colonial experiences in Egypt and British India, distinct rhetoric and practices had to be employed to reach the same objective: reform.

Two decades after Rida's visit to South Asia, one of the most prominent Deobandi scholars of the twentieth century, Ashraf Ali



Thanawi demonstrated that reform through taqlid was possible. According to the dominant legal opinion in the Hanafi school of law, the only legitimate way for women to divorce their husbands was to renounce Islam, a tactic an increasing number of women resorted to at that time. To enable women to ask for a divorce while keeping them in the fold of Islam, Thanawi tried to reconcile the legal and theological debate with practical requirements. To do so, he consulted opinions from other schools of law, in particular the Maliki school, where women had the possibility to ask for a divorce. Together with fatwas from Medina confirming the Maliki view, Thanawi published a treatise where he recommended adopting Maliki opinions in cases of divorce instead of following established Hanafi practices. His activism led to the ratification of the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939, which made divorce for women easier.

Thanawi adopted this view because he believed this reform would contribute to the greater good of the South Asian Muslim community. Rather than evolving a new opinion, Thanawi had found a solution through uncovering practices from another school of law; therefore reform was accomplished by 'digging deeper' into the tradition (Zaman 2012: 88; *ibid.* 2008). This case tells the story of an alternative engagement with taqlid, questioning the rigid dichotomy between reform and tradition. Generally speaking though, many scholars have been more inclined to follow Rida's idea of independent reasoning as the solution to modern problems. This is how, in the twentieth century, *ijtihad* has become synonymous with reform. While earlier the discourse of taqlid maintained the integrity of the tradition, the 'discourse of *ijtihad*' now fulfils this function (Zaman 2012: 103). *Ijtihad* has become the new taqlid.

Zaman uses information of the scholars' personal lives and intellectual formation to situate their work and to trace in how far Rida, Sindhi and Qaradawi adapted their conduct and rhetoric over time and in different contexts. The study is therefore, also a plea to regard the ulama not merely as "systematic thinkers articulating an internally consistent philosophy, but rather as activist intellectuals responding over the course of long careers to new and old controversies" (Zaman 2012: 310). Inconsistent opinions do not necessarily speak for intellectual weakness but are rather an expression of the scholar's ability to adjust theoretical arguments to practical circumstances, audiences and contexts. This trait is one of the main sources of religious authority.



The opinions and activism of Sindhi, Rida, Qaradawi and others close to them connect the conceptual debates in an intelligible way and permit Zaman to highlight how the three scholars were able to maintain their reputation and religious authority by dissenting, within certain limits, from the dominant opinion. Certain topics remain beyond critique. For instance, while the qualifications of those taking part in consensus-making are constantly contested, the authoritative substance of consensus itself, as a tool for interpretation, cannot be challenged. Such criticism would attack the basis of the legitimacy of the scholarly community, and is therefore suppressed by the community of scholars. Hence, in addition to those subjects where criticism frequently occurs, issues that do not seem to receive any attention by reformers might offer valuable insights into debates on tradition and reform. An exploration of these silences is beyond the scope of Zaman's book, but would be a good starting point for more research.

Through his detailed and comprehensive inquiry, situating the debates in their historical and social context, Zaman illustrates how current issues are approached and shaped by the ulama in different settings. This approach allows him to examine the targets of reform and the different manifestations of reform itself. Zaman thus draws up a roadmap how to study this constantly changing notion.

310

While Zaman focuses on a multi-sided discourse (Zaman 2012: 311), Sana Haroon (2011) in *Frontier of Faith: A History of Religious Mobilisation in the Pakhtun Tribal Areas c. 1890-1950* approaches the topic from the other end and presents a detailed study of the shifting structures of religious authority in one locality. Like Zaman, historical experience and socio-religious structures are of major importance in Haroon's inquiry. What she adds to the discussion is the relevance of the topography and geography of a region when investigating changes in the religious and socio-political system.

Sana Haroon examines the features and dynamics of religious organisation and mobilisation in the Pakhtun tribal areas, a region at the North Western fringe of British India, located along what is today known as the Durand Line, the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Due to its geographical isolation and difficult terrain, no foreign power was able to establish permanent administrative structures here. In the modern period, the region between Kabul and Peshawar has been the subject for contestations over political pre-eminence among the Afghan, British, and Russian Empires. Describing everyday practices and power hierarchies, the book traces the



transformation of the region from the Pakhtun tribal areas in British India's North West to the geopolitical Frontier province. In a second step, the implications of this reconstruction for socio-political and religious structures in the tribal society are explored.

The colonial machinery tried to extend its reach to overcome the region's "state of non-administration". To do so, the position of the tribes was regularised (Haroon 2011: 21). The formalisation of social organisation reified hierarchies, which had been fluid up to that point. This promoted a discourse of a land where the 'freedom-loving' and 'ungovernable Pakhtun tribes' lived according to the rules of 'the Frontier culture'. Remnants of this discourse are invoked until today. The Frontier thus acquired a certain fascination for those living in the heartland of British control. Emerging Muslim reform movements looked at the tribes as following an 'authentic' life because the region's state of non-administration was seen as a corollary of practicing 'the right kind of Islam'. Following this appeal, activists like Syed Ahmad of Rai Bareilly and Deobandi scholars like Maulana Abdul Hasan or Obaidullah Sindhi visited the Frontier. This land of freedom and virtue seemed the ideal ground to launch their reform movements from.

Already familiar with Obaidullah Sindhi from Zaman, we learn more about his stint in the Frontier from Haroon and can observe how Sindhi adapted his activism to the specific context. The complimentary information only goes to substantiate Zaman's argument. Among other reasons, Sindhi left Deoband because of his openly anti-British stance. The colonial administration classified the migration of religious scholars with anti-colonial sentiments to the Frontier as a potential threat. As a consequence, the movement of people and information to the Frontier was restricted. This strategy, however, had an adverse effect: the isolation encouraged the discourse of the mythical land of freedom and enhanced the appeal of the region for outsiders. Paradoxically, the main reason why most of these reformers did not receive a positive response in the tribal areas was because they were only interested in Islamic reform and did not have actual knowledge of the local conditions and needs, thus alienating the tribes (for Syed Ahmad of Rai Bareilly cf. Metcalf 2008; Jones 1989; Schimmel 1980).

The impact of these events on the role and status of religious leaders in the Tribal Areas is the main subject of the book. Entanglements of foreign policy, geopolitical interests and imaginations can only be understood through a detailed description of the local social and religious structures. Religious leaders in the Tribal Areas derived



their authority and legitimacy from initiation into the secret practices of a pirmuridi line and provided the foundation for religious mobilisation. Contact and exchange with reformers from South Asia and the Middle East induced the idea that mediators between the individual and God were not necessary anymore, rather each believer should gain direct access to the teachings of Islam. Gradually, the role and status of religious leaders was transformed. Believers no longer sought, and diligently followed, the advice of the religious intermediaries, but only required their assistance for the performance of religious rituals and practices such as Friday prayers, marriages and funerals. Instead of akhund or pir, religious leaders came to be called mullah. This change in title signified a shift "in the religious pedagogy towards a more generalized and dispersed, village-based form of religious practice" (Haroon 2011: 60) of the kind advocated by reform Islam. Thus, over the course of the nineteenth century, the influence of the pirmuridi line waned and patterns of authority became less tangible.

Through the isolation of the region due to British restrictions on the movement of people and information, mullahs acquired more importance. As the administrator of the local mosque, the mullah would be the first to receive news from within, and without the Frontier, the possession of such knowledge gave him political clout. Once religious leaders had consolidated a certain degree of religious and political authority, foreign powers became interested in sponsoring the religious leaders to push their own agenda. The Afghan Amir, for instance, made donations to local mosques in the Frontier. While such a pious act was tolerated by the colonial administration, financially supporting the maliks, the local village leaders, would have seemed like political interference in colonial affairs. With regards to ambiguous foreign policies today, this argument is indeed quite intriguing.

Sana Haroon takes the reader through the different dimensions and stages of religious mobilisation in the Pakhtun tribal areas. Her perspective is refreshing because she does not resort to stereotypical understandings of tribal culture to explain current socio-political changes in the Pakhtun region. Her detailed description of local structures enables readers to develop a nuanced understanding of the factors involved in changing social, religious, and political structures in this particular locality. At the same time, the approach offers insights into the links between local and international dynamics. Even though the book does not look at developments after 1950, only tracing the emerging dynamics of the tribal areas in the Pakistani state and



leaving the reader to hope for a second volume dealing with the post-1950 period, the study can show quite plainly that the discourse evoked today heavily relies on the nineteenth century construction of the region as a frontier. Nonetheless, this image of the region elicits much interest.

Apart from militant insurgencies in Pakistan's North West, another 'crisis' discussion centres on madrasa education in South Asia. While Sana Haroon adds an alternative perspective to the former, Masooda Bano is trying to dispel established perceptions of South Asian madrasas as abodes of indoctrination and militancy. Demands for the reform of religious education have echoed throughout the past decade as the solution 'to fix' religious violence and sectarian tensions. In *The Rational Believer: Choices and Decisions in the Madrasas of Pakistan*, Masooda Bano (2012) wants to disprove the assumption that lack of choice due to poverty, leads young people to study at madrasas and, eventually, puts them on a path of violence. The author sets out to demonstrate that most madrasa students make a conscious and rational choice when deciding to attend a religious seminary. Employing new institutional economics as her framework of inquiry, Bano aims to explain decision-making processes of Muslims in South Asia to illustrate why, despite much critique, madrasas have continued to play an important role in society.

Like Zaman and Haroon, Bano emphasises the study of the local context. Moreover, the author argues that religion and belief can be studied like any other institution. To understand the basic structures, the author provides a description of the development of, and hierarchy within, the religious education system in the subcontinent and then evaluates state attempts to reform madrasas. What follows is an analysis of reasons and variables influencing an individual's choice to favour religious over public/secular education. The third part traces the reasons and logic behind joining militant groups. To analyse choice patterns and intervening variables, new institutional economics and rational choice theory are employed. Community and social pressures are however conspicuously absent from the range of variables used in this analysis. Mixing knowledge of the local context with theories of institutional change enables the author to explore stability and change of the madrasa system.

Speaking from an economics and developmental perspective, Bano argues that the appeal and power of ideas and religious beliefs should be seen as a value in itself. Therefore believers make rational choices



and exhibit strategising behaviour. Based on these premises, informal institutions like religious belief can be studied within the framework of institutional theory, with new institutional economics providing the best tools for this task. Here she relies heavily on the work of Douglass C. North and Mancur Lloyd Olson. Adapting the framework to the particular needs, the author proposes a disaggregation of those features that constitute utility, where utility does not only encompass material benefits but also religious or spiritual rewards (Bano 2012: 170).

Taking this lens, the author invites students of international development, the target audience of the book, to rethink conventional approaches to explaining militancy and violence in South Asia by taking personal decisions of the religious believer into account. The language of utility maximisation and transaction costs in the context of the study of religious education seems unfamiliar at first for researchers trained in other disciplines; it is an interesting foray into alternative approaches to institutional analysis.

As Bano is mainly interested in applying the institutional framework, examples from her extensive field work in South Asia play a supporting role. Every chapter is so replete with material and innovative arguments that each could easily be expanded into a book in its own right. The presentation of such an amount of data is admirable and speaks for careful selection and meticulous work, though it comes at the expense of in-depth analysis, often leaving the reader wanting more. For a detailed analysis of the author's ethnographic material collected in Pakistan and Bangladesh one might have to turn to other, previous, publications (e.g. Bano 2007).

The book begins with a comparison of the evolution of madrasas in South Asia and Oxford University. Despite a common mission, i.e. the transmission of (religious) knowledge, setting religious standards and the 'production' of trained religious scholars, Oxford became a centre for innovation, while the madrasa system in South Asia produced little innovative scholarship after the decline of the Mughal empire. These divergent routes, Bano argues, can be explained by the incentives for development offered in both contexts. Therefore "differing context, and not different recourse to reason" (Bano 2012: 40) explains institutional change. All further inquiries are based on this premise. While Bano presents various arguments to justify her decision to compare one university in England with the entire madrasa system of South Asia, assuming that all South Asian madrasas function according to the



same logic does not seem convincing. The generalisation seems to counter the author's own demand to pay more attention to the local context.

If the ulama are making rational choices based on utility, why have they resisted madrasa reforms which would entail financial support from the state? Bano searches for an explanation in the socio-political development of South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh. Here again, the sheer amount of information is admirable, the reason for presenting certain arguments (e.g. madrasa reform in Bangladesh) and the correlation to the main topic (Pakistani madrasas), are not always apparent. In order to implement reforms successfully, the author concludes, incentives have to be created for the ulama and, even more importantly, for the elite sustaining madrasas. Rather than striving to secularise religious education by incorporating the seminaries in the public school system and thereby, endangering the job security of the ulama, policy makers should focus on raising the standard of religious education itself, so that "more enlightened scholars" can be educated. For madrasa reform the rational choice is gradual transformation instead of abrupt change.

Despite resistance against government reform, the religious educational system itself is not stagnant. Bano cites two recent examples to demonstrate that reform is constantly taking place: the re-organisation of religious hierarchy within the madrasa system due to the foundation of wafaqs and the emergence of female madrasas. A wafaq is an umbrella organisation representing the interests of madrasas from one school of thought. Masooda Bano's discussion of the hierarchical patterns of the five wafaqs (Deobandi, Barelwi, Ahl-i Hadith, Jama'at-i Islami and Shia) in Pakistan gives rare insights into their working procedures. She explains the organisational characteristics of the wafaq system and the setup of its 'religious hierarchy'. This information helps to understand how the state's demand to negotiate with the ulama is increasing the power of wafaqs that act as representatives of diverse ulama groups. As we have learned earlier, the majority of ulama have successfully resisted government reform efforts mainly because they fear intervention in their affairs. The decision to subordinate a madrasa to a wafaq thus seems paradox, is, however, deliberate and strategic. As soon as a madrasa joins a wafaq, the seminary can benefit from the negotiation powers of the umbrella organisation (and the more members an umbrella organisation has, the more influence it can yield). In this case because the wafaq is led



by ulama, the loss of autonomy in exchange for political clout is tolerated (Bano 2012: 64 ff).

Through her innovative approach, Bano draws attention to the fact that individuals in all societies act according to their logical reasoning abilities. To avoid explaining processes and outcomes through the correlation of faulty variables, Bano emphasises the importance of knowledge of local hierarchies and settings as, "what is rational means to attain an end and is contingent on understanding the context in which the decision is shaped" (Bano 2012: 203).

Masooda Bano, Sana Haroon and Muhammad Qasim Zaman show that religious scholars and believers do not operate according to an exceptional, inherently 'Islamic' or 'Muslim' logic. Each actor or institution has its own way to reason with what they understand as modernity. Instead of denying traditional actors the engagement with and access to modernity, one should therefore rather ask, in what manner and through which channels and tools they get involved. As Francis Robinson (2008) and Faisal Devji (2013) suggest, religious actors approach modernity through a process of repudiation and preservation. In short we can ask, what are the rules of reform? What are the ways of engagement? The authors' studies visualise the flux of the system and point out alternative ways of activism, thereby questioning established dichotomies. All actors, ulama, religious leaders and reformers, have an interest in conserving tradition.

316

If Modernity is the yardstick for measuring civilisational worth and development, a certain definition of the counterpart, tradition, has to be maintained. Someone who mastered the art of walking the tight rope between dominant orthodox understandings of Islam and reform discourses was Maulana Abu A'la Mawdudi, one of the most popular Islamic Revivalist thinkers of the twentieth century. His legacy is based on his work and the party he founded, the Jama'at-i-Islami (JI). The JI's continuous activism in South Asian countries, as well as among the diaspora, has kept the interest in Maulana Mawdudi alive.

Many of his biographies, particularly those published by the JI, read more like a panegyric, re-hashing the same few and well-known facts. *A system of life: Mawdudi and the Ideologisation of Islam* written by Jan Peter Hartung (2013), examines Mawdudi's life more critically, and reconstructs the currents of thought and historical events, which contributed to Mawdudi's intellectual formation. Reaching beyond mere life facts this approach can show how Mawdudi was able to evolve Islam as a system. While the first few chapters of the book focus on



Mawdudi's life and the development of his thought, the second part of the book presents an account of the practical implementation of Mawdudi's theory by the JI in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This two tier approach, mixing theory and practice, also employed by Zaman, permits to evaluate Mawdudi's impact in a broader framework and allows for tracing Mawdudi's strategic claim to authority.

Using a deductive theory approach, Hartung reconstructs the model Mawdudi laid out for an Islamic way of life. For a more thorough study, Hartung proposes to explore and use the parameters Mawdudi used to define his core concepts. How did Mawdudi define tradition? From his inquiry the author concludes, that one reason for Mawdudi's persistent appeal is his ability to combine reform and tradition in a distinct way: first, Mawdudi proposed reform through selective re-interpretation of some classical concepts, for instance *ijma* or *shura*, cloaking them in the language of the time. Concentrating on a few axioms made it possible to draw up a definite outline for further action (Hartung 2013: 123 ff.) or an ideology: "a consistent and self-referential system of life" (*ibid.*: 83). This organisational framework was also easily understood by people who were not well-versed in religious vocabulary. It was detailed, yet abstract enough to appeal to many people without raising inconvenient and detailed questions about its actual implementation. Through the deductive theory approach, the scholar's adaptation strategy becomes apparent. It can show that even though Mawdudi promoted a so-called Islamic revolution, it was intended to be a revolution within the limits of classical interpretations of the tradition. What renders him authoritative and what sets him apart from other scholars is this mix of contemporary methods and rhetoric, access to traditional authority and the ability to quickly adapt to new contexts.

In the decades prior to Partition, the atmosphere of departure and renewal provided the ideal backdrop to maintain the authority of the reform discourse. Mawdudi presented himself as the only person capable of constituting and implementing reform in the face of this new situation. With an *ijaza* from a Deobandi madrasa and connections to the Deobandi ulama through his work as an editor for the *Jama'at-i Ulama Hind's* newspaper, Mawdudi could take up the role of an *alim*. At the same time he criticised the ulama for their blind imitation (*taqlid*) and promoted *ijtihad*. Through the *ijtihad*-reform discourse it seemed as if he could relate to the modern setting, a task the ulama, isolated in their mosques and seminaries, were not capable of.



To understand Mawdudi's thought, his upbringing, education and intellectual influences are taken into consideration. Unlike other biographies, Hartung takes up only those events which exemplify Mawdudi's development. Setting these milestones in relation to his surroundings permits Hartung to examine them critically. This method, does not allow the author to dwell on every single detail of Mawdudi's life story. Therefore familiarity with the basic facts of Mawdudi's life is of great advantage when reading the book (cf. Nasr 1994; Moten 2006). Most biographers present Mawdudi's proficiency in Arabic as a fact. After all, his commentary of the Quran is one of the most widely-read in South Asia. Hartung finds that Mawdudi's educational background does not suggest that Mawdudi ever took classes in advanced classical Arabic. Moreover, the author presents hints that, in the 1920s, Mawdudi had needed extensive assistance from ulama to translate some of his articles into Arabic. Instead of accepting the carefully cultivated image of Mawdudi as it has been constructed by the JI, facts are put into question. Due to this critical approach, the study is a welcome addition to the literature on the JI founder.

Apart from the evaluation of Mawdudi's life, Hartung simultaneously searches for links between the main features of Mawdudi's system of thought and global intellectual debates. Rationality and the scientific method are as important influences as ideas and conceptions taken from communist, capitalist and fascist thought. Growing up in colonial India, Mawdudi synthesised these impulses with local ideas and conceptions. The Bolshevik revolution, the foundation of the Turkish Republic and the Indian independence movement turned Mawdudi's attention to the central role the state would play as a vehicle for the common good and in creating a space for the re-negotiation of established values. Rather than guidance, the state would provide governance; achieved through democracy, where the individual citizen and the state collaborated.

The direct connection between state and citizen was also mirrored in religious structures where this trend had emerged decades earlier. As Sana Haroon reminds us when examining the changing demands religious leaders have to face: the guidance of religious intermediaries became obsolete because the focus had shifted to the direct connection between the individual and God. In order to remain relevant, religious leaders in the Pakhtun tribal areas concentrated on new tasks. Faced with similar transformations in the political realm, Mawdudi developed a state-centric and action-oriented approach grounded in Islamic tradition.



In the last part of the book, Hartung investigates how Mawdudi envisioned his theories' application and compares these findings with the actual implementation by the JI in South Asia. This brings us back to a point Zaman raises: the inner coherence of a scholar's oeuvre is a weak criteria for measuring their intellectual capabilities because scholars, and those implementing their opinions, often have to respond to immediate challenges and concerns. This is also true for Mawdudi's case. Despite Mawdudi's claim to the universality of his system, JI experiences in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka show that his theory had to be reformulated and adjusted to the respective context in order to appeal to people. Scholars have to walk a tightrope between tradition and reform, theory and practice.

Hartung and Zaman show that reform should be seen in relative terms. For criticism to become heard and accepted, scholars have to propose changes within the limits of the established order. As soon as they leave this space, e.g. when their propositions become too radical, they forfeit their religious authority and their criticism becomes invalid in the circle of religious scholars. Therefore, religious authority, membership in the elusive community of Islamic scholars, is a highly sought after attribute. Because it is a characteristic others concede to an individual, strategies to attain this status are manifold. While this report focused mainly on the reform activism of ulama and intellectuals, the scope of inquiry should be opened up, e.g. by looking at the ulama's interaction with pirs, Sufis, individual believers, state bodies, women, political parties and the media (for women cf. Ahmad 2013; for political parties cf. Ullah 2013). Especially negotiations between individuals and religious authorities deserve more attention.

With these observations it appears that we have come full circle. Through their different approaches, the authors of the books under review give us a glimpse of how Islam is practiced in a given context. As Islam "is always processed through human eye" (Metcalf 2009: xix) responses to both, theological dilemmas and everyday concerns, are devised and framed by human beings. Answers are thus conditioned by the individual experience of the interpreters. Bano, Haroon, Hartung and Zaman remind us that seemingly contradictory behaviour or statements are not proof of lack of intellectual engagement and irrational behaviour, but rather an expression of multisided discourses. This is why the scholars' arguments should be read in the context where they were articulated. The books provide thought-provoking impulses for how to reflect on this multiplicity in our research.



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