



Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*

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most efforts at achieving unity and agreement, sometimes even on the minutest level. Other factors have contributed to this as well, such as the inherently decentralized organization and doctrines of Islam itself and the differing experiences Muslims across Africa have had with colonial regimes.

In the more recent past, efforts by African Muslims toward presenting a common front have come up against the predicament faced by all Africans, their ambivalence toward the postindependence nation-state, especially any that is dominated by Christians or traditionalists. Invariably, this situation has involved the overarching question of religion in the wider community, which in Africa, as elsewhere in the Islamic world, has meant the places of the Sufi brotherhoods and the *Shari'a* in national life. Historically, institutions of faith such as holy law and religious associations have provided sources and structures of cohesion in communities lacking “credible” political structures. Unlike most of the Islamic world, since the eighteenth century these two institutions have come together in jihadist movements in Africa aimed at imposing stricter conformity to the written, Maliki Law over forms and practices surviving from the pre-Islamic tradition. However, more like the rest of the Islamic world, in recent times the fundamentalist challenge has divided African Muslim communities into secularists, progressive reformers, Islamic traditionalists, and fundamentalists.

Whatever the causes, this tendency to localized forms has frustrated the efforts of Muslim Africans to link up with Islamic organizations of an international character, such as the Organization of Islamic Conferences or Mu'ammār Gadhafi's World Islamic Call Society. More to the point, as concluded by the Quinns, with Islamists representing only one element among African Muslims—and a minority one at that—local governments and Western interests are unlikely to encounter united Muslim communities anywhere in Africa in the foreseeable future.

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ZAMAN, MUHAMMAD QASIM. *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*. Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002. xv+293 pp. \$29.95 (cloth).

Most studies on Islamic religious scholarship and on the scholarly elite (the *ulama*) concentrate on the premodern period. At the same time, most studies of Islam in modernity focus on “new intellectuals” of various stripes—modernists and Islamists—and overlook the “old guard.” As a result, the student of contemporary Islam often assumes that the custodians of the classical religious tradition have been little affected by the modern period. Furthermore, one also gets the impression that the *ulama* have little influence in Muslim daily life or that, if they do, then it is in the sphere of private religious practice rather than in politics or the public arena.

Muhammad Qasim Zaman counters this flimsy image of the *ulama* and argues not only that the scholarly class has been impacted by modern sociopolitical conditions but also that they have engaged the contemporary challenges of colonialism and postcolonial nation building through focused public and political participation. Through their activities, he argues, they have both retained authority for the intellectual tradition they represent and reframed

their own authority as the best-qualified arbiters of that tradition for contemporary Muslims.

The central focus of Zaman's book is the Deobandi *ulama* of India and Pakistan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although in the sixth (and final) chapter, he offers some comparative highlights of *ulama* activism in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Each of the first five chapters analyzes the effects of colonial and postcolonial conditions on the religious discourse, self-identification, and political activities of the Indian and Pakistani *ulama* by focusing on one particular aspect: substantive legal issues (chap. 1), the textual genre of the commentary (chap. 2), madrasa reform (chap. 3), Islamic-state building (chap. 4), and sectarian conflict (chap. 5). The work as a whole seeks to show that along with modernist Islam and Islamism there is a third force in contemporary Muslim religio-political movements, that of the traditionally trained *ulama*. Whether Muslim leaders or laypeople agree or disagree with traditional interpretations of Islam, they all define themselves vis-à-vis the tradition and must contend with the gatekeepers of that tradition. For their part, Zaman demonstrates how the *ulama* have used all the tools of their trade—ranging from *fatawa* (legal opinions) to scholarly literary genres to educational reform—to assert this tradition, and their own role as its gatekeepers, in a way that is politically effective and socially persuasive.

Zaman presents his work, rightly, as complementing that of Barbara Metcalf, who focused on the Deobandis of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He distinguishes his work from hers by concentrating on the content of their thought, as opposed to her focus on their history and institutional structure, and by contesting her key thesis, that the colonial encounter prompted an inward turning among the scholarly class. I would add that Metcalf's work pays far more attention to the Sufi element of Deobandi thought and practice than to the legal, while Zaman virtually ignores the Sufi dimension of the Deobandis in favor of the juridico-political.

One central contribution to religious studies of Zaman's analysis is to show how sociopolitical context affects both the way that religious authority is constructed and the substance of religious thought. Zaman shows how colonialism worked to restrict the variegated nature of South Asian legal orthodoxy through its insistence on finding the law in the texts, creating a select canon of sources, codifying the substance of law, and rationalizing the processes of Islamic education and adjudication. At the same time, colonial efforts pushed the *ulama* to greater creativity, both to show the "usefulness" of their tradition and to use traditional discourses and technologies as sites of political and ideological resistance.

Zaman compares the Deobandi *ulama* in India with those in Pakistan, focusing on the latter. This comparative approach permits the reader to see the way Islamic law and political ideology are differently delineated depending on whether their architects are acting within a minority (Indian) or a majority (Pakistani) context. We notice, for example, that Deobandi scholars during the British period, as well as those that remained loyal to a united India post-1947, differ radically in their political stance from their counterparts in the majority-Muslim state of Pakistan: the distinction is that the former have tended to advocate for Muslims within the context of a secular pluralistic state, whereas the latter see the preservation of religion and culture as dependent on the existence of an Islamic state, where the sharia would be the law of the

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land. One cannot help but notice that the religious establishment, perhaps unwittingly, frequently ends up justifying existing state policies.

While Zaman's study presents this dichotomy within the Deobandi school, the same dualism is encountered in other Muslim scholarly activity in India and Pakistan. Although the intensity of the divergence varies, one frequently finds the same qualitative difference between them: partition-era public intellectuals, such as the pro-Pakistan Iqbal, and lay activists, such as Islamic state-oriented Mawdudi, can be contrasted with partition-era public intellectual Abu'l-Kalam Azad and Indian scholar Wahiduddin Khan, who have seen efforts to Islamize the state as morally and politically misguided. Even the Jamaat-i-Islami in India has a strikingly different political ideology than does its Pakistani counterpart. So while Zaman's key thesis—on the political activism of the Deobandi *ulama*—is true, it also needs to be emphasized that the content and strategies of their activism have been radically divergent in the Pakistani and the Indian contexts.

Another provocative theme of the book is Zaman's insight into what happened when the Western notion of "religion" met a traditional Muslim society's much older understanding of its *deen* (usually translated as "religion") in the asymmetrical context of colonial domination. We know that after the time of Hume, Hegel, and Darwin, European thinkers generally conceived of religion as developing, on the metaphor of biological evolution, alongside the progress of human societies from primitiveness to civilization, from simplicity to complexity, from irrationality to rationality, to find its end in either (Protestant) Christianity or in science. In the liberal view, religion is that which is best left to private life, separated from the public, civic sphere. In contrast, the centuries-old tradition of Islamic thought did not draw any firm lines between the sacred and the secular; it conceived the divine command as overseeing both the private and the public domains. What Zaman tells us is how the British carried their ideology of religious evolutionism into India with them, and how out of the marriage of European liberalism and South Asian tradition was born the concept, new for the indigenous Muslims, of their *deen* as a "religion." Indeed, says Zaman, the ambivalences created by the tension between religion as private and religion as comprehensive, as well as the doubt created by the idea of "religion" as that which is less than "useful," continue to express themselves in self-contradictory approaches to religious education and relations with the state to this day.

Building on a standing religious studies thesis that Islamic "fundamentalist" movements are in fact thoroughly modern in their technical and political strategies, Zaman adds that, first, the modernity of contemporary Islamic movements is reflected in their very notion of Islam as a subtype of "religion" and that, second, not only the modernists and the Islamists but also the *ulama* have inherited this new discourse of "religion." This is seen in their belief in codification and implementation of Islamic law at the statewide level and in the role of the *ulama* as "specialists" in religion. These efforts are possible, Zaman insists, only due to the reification of Islam that resulted from Muslim absorption of the European idea of "religion" as a fixed content (rather than, say, a process of moral transformation or a relationship of spiritual surrender).

My criticisms of Zaman's otherwise perspicacious and well-argued book are two. First, his portrayal of Deobandi efforts to implement Islamic law in Pakistan might at times leave the unmindful or hasty reader with the impression that such efforts had little real-life impact and were limited to abstract policies

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and religio-political rhetoric. In reality, such efforts have greatly affected the lives of ordinary Pakistanis—specifically, minority sects and women. This impression, however, is more a result of emphases within the book than of Zaman's actual analysis. Another weak point is the author's linking of socioeconomic class to Pakistani sectarianism. While Zaman's description is interesting, the reasons for such class connections remain less than clear. Why are the bourgeoisie particularly attracted to sectarian self-identification? And how does middle-class support for sectarian organizations work to increase the reach of the *ulama*? The author's political analysis of religious patterns is much stronger than his economic one and, fortunately, makes up the bulk of the work.

Zaman's writing style is unencumbered by theoretical or Islamicist jargon, making a dense work that is suited to specialist audiences and at the same time accessible to nonspecialists wishing to familiarize themselves with the ideas and activities of South Asian religious scholars in the last century. As a student of Islamic law, I am pleased to see a high-quality work on the modern juristic class enter the field.

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HASSAN, RIAZ. *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. xviii+276 pp. \$35.00 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

In *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society*, Riaz Hassan reports the results of a three-year quantitative survey (1996–98) that measures the cultural attitudes of Muslims in Indonesia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and Egypt. The questionnaire was administered to forty-four hundred participants, comprising religious specialists, professionals, and working-class people. The survey items probed “sociodemographic, educational and occupational background, social and political attitudes, confidence in institutions, religious socialization, religious beliefs and practice, images of Islam, attitudes towards the ‘other’ and household composition” (p. 248). From the resulting data, Hassan shows how a range of cultural and structural factors interact to shape a diversity of orientations among Muslims worldwide. These attitudes, he argues, have important implications for the future evolution of Muslim societies.

Several recent surveys by universities, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Program have identified a significant “human development deficit” in Arab and Muslim societies. Citing a 1996 study by Anwar Bakr and Abu Bakr of the International Islamic University in Malaysia, Hassan observes that “the total contribution of forty-six Muslim-majority countries . . . to world science literature was a meager 1.17 percent of the total output between 1990 and 1994 as compared to 1.66 percent by India and 1.48 percent for Spain” (p. 142). Hassan argues that while colonialism remains the primary historical source of this deficit, “most of the causes of the present predicament in which Muslim countries find themselves must be attributed to the cultural features and practices which now prevail in them” (p. 142). For Hassan, these features include the revival and spread of a “traditionalistic self-image” that inhibits free-ranging inquiry and the empowerment of women, a growing “moral polarization” in Muslim societies that construes secularism and the West as threats, and the failures of secular nation-states to enable a positive role for religion while nurturing an independent sphere for scientific activity.

Hassan bases these conclusions on a large and diverse data set. Various ob-