redefined Muslim identity, bitterly critiqued popular Sufism for what they saw as its promoting of backwardness and servility. Likewise in the case of the two major Islamist movements of our own times, the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world and the Jamāʿat-i Islāmī in South Asia. As a result, Sufism and its practitioners have had to respond to these challenges, either by outright condemnation of the modernists and the Islamists as ‘un-Islamic’, as in the case of the Barēlvis of India, or, more commonly, as by redefining their own understanding of Sufism to be more in accord with the *shariʿah*, as, for instance, in the case of the Tablīghi Jamāʿat.

As a general survey of popular Sufism and how it has sought to be fashioned into a contested terrain in modern times this book excels. It is a pioneering effort to venture into a hitherto little-explored territory. It is also a timely contribution to the ongoing debate on Muslim identity, suggesting that essentialised understandings of Islam and Muslims as homogenous, monolithic entities need to be interrogated, pointing to the multiplicity of often-conflicting perspectives on what it means to be a Muslim in our own times.

Yoginder Sikand

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*Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society* has a simple but compelling message. Like Christianity, Judaism or Buddhism, Islam, as a set of beliefs and practices, comes in a variety of forms and intensities. These include: High and Low, Puritanical-Scriptural and Flexible-Folk, Traditional, Fundamentalist and Reformist, and State versus separate religion or integrated State-religious forms. While there are significant similarities among the Muslim community (*ummah*), (a sense of hostility and siege by the “West” as well as widespread disappointment and alienation from most “modern”, secularist-nationalist elites and regimes), there is also significant variation between the four countries studied — Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan — with respect to piety, gender, politics and social issues. Religion is subjective and internal, of course, but also socially “constructed” in different places by
historical and human processes. Thus it can vary and change, even as most believers strive (sometimes too hard?) to maintain continuity as a source of meaning and identity.

In particular, there is a steady, recent movement within Islam towards greater piety, observance and religiosity, by its adherents, even in Kazakhstan, despite the latter’s 80 years’ history of Communist-atheist opposition. Islam continues to inspire hope and belief in a wide range of social groups, among men and women, and to perform crucial roles for both individuals and groups in spiritual fulfilment and social identification. Most try to put faith into practice, although to differing degrees of success. How great the gap is between faith and actual behaviour, unfortunately, was not part of the current research project.

Hassan’s findings and trends significantly show no necessary link between heightened religiosity and the contemporary emergence of militant, violent, anti-Western, Islamic fundamentalism, in many, but not all, parts of the Muslim community. Paradoxically, the trend towards greater piety usually helps to counteract the spread of militant, violent forms of the religion among most believers, (although the resulting relative isolation of the militant can also make them more desperate in turn). Islamic piety, belief and practice *per se* are not anti-modern, dangerous or inherently anti-Western. Further, where Islam has been used by states or oppositions as a directly political vehicle, such as the Taliban or even in Shi’ah Iran, imposed on reluctant or hostile populations, it has been at considerable cost to the unity and obedience of the faithful and has tended to lead to weakening of the theocratic project. The image, therefore, of a tide of overwhelming and unified, implacable Islamic opposition to the “West” is largely a figment of the latter’s imagination — or of Bin Laden’s heated dreamings.

These simple empirical findings may seem self-evident, trite or even beside the point for some blasé western readers, familiar with studies of sociology on Christianity and accustomed to secularised and religiously indifferent societies, where religion plays a minor social or political role. However, within Muslim societies, these socio-religious issues are feverishly and passionately debated, invariably becoming linked to divisive, contemporary issues of world politics and foreign policy (e.g. Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Palestine, Kashmir). And since September 11, 2001, and Bin Laden’s terrorist attacks in the USA, few non-Muslims can afford to ignore what is actually happening within the Muslim world, in all its variety and complexity. In some ways, the fight is as much between different forms of Islam as it is with the “West”. More than ever, neither Muslims nor non-Muslims can afford to remain ignorant about each other, but especially about
the largely uninvestigated worldview of the second largest religious community in the world.

However, the task of overcoming our general empirical ignorance is daunting. Little social scientific research on Islam has been done, and many Islamic societies are highly suspicious of such studies, especially if conducted by foreigners. Furthermore, issues of gender and politics are highly polemical. And Muslim societies vary widely, complicating the time and resources constraints for any necessary and truly comparative research projects.

Dr Riaz Hassan is perhaps uniquely placed to meet these challenges. He is multi-talented and experienced, thus able to write an important contribution to scholarly and public debate. Pakistani-born but now Australian, Riaz Hassan has been Professor of Sociology at Flinders University of South Australia for many years. Multi-lingual, a Ph.D. trained in the USA, Riaz Hassan has shown an ability to cross cultural and state borders, to adapt to a wide variety of differing circumstances, and to empathise with contradictory worldviews while maintaining a firm sense of self, identity and roots. Hassan has taught in Singapore, Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia, and UCLA, California, as well as Flinders, in South Australia, and he has conducted research (basic and applied) throughout Australia, South and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. A widely-published expert on the sociology of suicide as well as Islam, he is uniquely placed to help fulfil the enormous and long-standing gaps of knowledge, ignorance, and prejudice that have traditionally separated Muslim and non-Muslim “civilisations”.

Despite the usual, and some unusual, field work difficulties (denunciations to the Egyptian intelligence services, initial suspicion, limited resources, lack of public registers from which to choose interviewees in most countries), Hassan successfully organised a network of local scholars and religious activists, especially in big city, male, middle-class or professional circles, to conduct two hour interviews with over 4,000 respondents (in Urdu, Kazakh, Russian, Arabic, and Bahasa Indonesia). Although the samples are not random nor representative of all Muslims in each nation studied, respondents did come from a variety of class, educational and geographic backgrounds. Although interviews were relatively recent, the results have in some ways been overtaken by even more recent events. Abdurrahman Wahid, for example, is no longer President of Indonesia (p. 232). Obviously, such studies need to be constantly updated and replicated to be totally reliable, and these are minor quibbles.

Nonetheless, for both Muslims and non-Muslims, believers and agnostics alike, this is a first attempt, and a good start for clear, well-organised, important and solidly researched, empirical research. Almost nothing else like
it exists, especially in its comparative dimensions. As part of an ongoing project, it serves to introduce us to the multi-dimensional world of Islamic societies, soon to include Nigeria, Turkey and Iran as well.

Riaz Hassan has written an important book. Like its cover, it is complex and somewhat ambivalent in its basic thrust, to help reconcile Islam and Modernity, traditional and inflexible gender roles and contemporary desires for greater affluence, progress, and freedom of thought, movement, association, and choice of lifestyles. The elegant, light brown book cover depicts a geometric set of mosque arches in an arcade, with elliptical pools of (en-) light (enment) reflected on the floor. But there are no signs of people, argument, conflict or violence. Similarly, Hassan’s study is moderate, rational, organised, and controlled. It is, like the metaphorical arcade, an elegant modern framework within which to conduct, and therefore limit and illuminate, the more vehement polemics contemporary world politics has become. It should be required reading for all scholars and concerned citizens who want to understand the complexities of the crises we are now confronting.

Hopefully, military and political decision makers around the world will read this book too, as well as the usual scholars, students and journalists. It is long overdue to have an intelligent dialogue between often antagonistic civilisations. Hassan’s research is valuable in helping that dialogue to bear fruit. The alternative is likely to be a continuing clash of arrogant ignorance and paranoid terror, to no one’s benefit.

Richard DeAngelis

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