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*Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism.* By Muhammad Qasim Zaman. Cambridge University Press, 2012. 363 pages. \$32.99.

Few books will shape the subfield of Islamic studies in the manner that Muhammad Qasim Zaman's refreshing interpretation of traditional religious thought in the modern period promises to do. The reader encounters a select number of religious actors and authors, intellectual cohorts, and a multitude of themes derived from modern Islamic thought and practices spawned in South Asia and the Middle East in a tightly knitted narrative. Counterpoint bridges regions and scholars in different locales, a style that fruitfully engages a reader's interest, just as the author's rigor and attention to detail are impressive features of the narrative arc. Readers already familiar with modern Islamic thought will recognize some of the *dramatis personae* of this book, but those unfamiliar can comfortably rely on Zaman's skillful introduction to better known characters as well as lesser known figures. Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan (d. 1898) of India, Rashid Rida (d. 1935) of Ottoman Syria but who resided in Egypt, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926) of Egypt but now resident in Qatar are familiar names for those who follow debates on modern Islam. Tradition-oriented Muslim scholars-cum-political activists in prepartition India like 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi (d. 1944) and his mentor Mahmud Hasan (d. 1920) or Hifz al-Rahman Seoharwi (d. 1962) and Ashraf Ali Thanawi (d. 1943), to mention but a few, are arrayed in Zaman's pantheon of Deobandi scholars who have yet to attain name recognition in the fields of Islamic and religious studies in the Western academy. Deoband is a Sunni school of thought founded in 1866 that has spawned a franchise of madrasas, seminaries that follow its distinct theological orientation. For delivering the ideas of a host of traditional scholars with a historian's care in measured factual detail, thematic coherence, and in pellucid prose, we are indeed in Zaman's debt.

The heroes of this book are clearly Rida, whom one of his Indian admirers described "as the greatest religious scholar (*'alim*)" (7) of Egypt and Syria; Sindhi, a Sikh convert to Islam and pan-Islamic activist whom Zaman describes

as “the most vocal internal critic the Deobandis have ever known” (17) of India, and Qaradawi, the Qatar-based but Egyptian-born contemporary traditional scholar affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood who vocally supported the uprisings during the Arab Spring and severely chastised those who undermined political change in places like Egypt and Syria.

Zaman’s goal is to discern the patterns of authority in contemporary manifestations of traditional Islam and the internal criticism as well as diversity evident among the traditional religious scholars, the *‘ulama*. In part 1 of the book, he treats theoretical issues in Islamic law such as consensus (*ijma’*), debates about interpretive authority (*ijtihad*), and questions about the common good (*maslaha*). As he does throughout the book, his key interlocutors Rida, Sindhi, and Qaradawi as well as others provide him with substantial material in order to engage in a contrapuntal historical conversation among scholars within the *‘ulama* tradition. So, Zaman can, for instance, successfully show how some scholars deemed the consensus-derived authority of past scholars as binding but then also points out how several contemporary traditionalists have recast the meaning and place of consensus in modern Muslim jurisprudence in order to make the construct more malleable to the contingencies of contemporary societal needs. Here figures like Qaradawi and his European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) have utilized a variety of scholastic methods to unwind preexisting strict consensus positions. Of the many cases discussed, one involves the question whether a woman who converted to Islam could remain married to her spouse belonging to another faith. Conversion, under classical Islamic law, of especially the wife while the husband remained in his non-Islamic faith tradition, triggered a requirement to separate the spouses, since a Muslim woman was not permitted to remain married to a person of another faith. Qaradawi and a few contemporary scholars have rethought this issue for a European context by revising the goal, purpose, and meaning of this rule in the context of the conversion of the wife. The spouses need not be separated according to the interpretation of scholars affiliated to the ECFR. Needless to say, Qaradawi and the Sudanese scholar Hasan al-Turabi who advocated a similar view but who did not restrict the previous marriage taboo to instances of conversion have now gained many *‘ulama* detractors who charged them of violating the tradition and for effectively undermining the hallowed epistemological “constants of the community.” Zaman demonstrates how the *‘ulama* navigate the internal tradition in a world shaped by forces that are antithetical to tradition. While his gaze is on the main tradition, he does concede that Muslim modernists and Islamists who contest the *‘ulama* tradition also qualify as “internal” critics. One should note, however, that the *‘ulama*, especially the South Asian ones, have in the past relentlessly delegitimized the reformist and interpretive efforts of non-*‘ulama* scholars and one wished that Zaman explained how he reached the conclusion that such groups qualify as “internal critics,” at least in the view of the *‘ulama*.

Zaman also dwells on the differences among the *‘ulama* and then tries to reflect on broader theoretical issues from the vantage point of the interventions made by Alasdair MacIntyre on tradition and Jose Casanova on public religion.

While Zaman is reluctant to adjudicate how the *'ulama's* discourses would fit with MacIntyre and Casanova's conceptions of tradition and public religion, respectively, he notes that "whatever their particular claims to authority, the *'ulama's* discourses must contend with rival positions within and outside their ranks" (139). Further theorization as to how the *'ulama* could accomplish this toleration is certainly needed. For the question remains, in at least the view of this reviewer, whether the *'ulama* discourse can indeed undo some of the theological strictures embedded in their paradigmatic epistemological formulations that in turn govern their methodologies without losing the monopoly and power to interpret Islam. This is a theme one wishes the author would address more gainfully as he continues his work on the *'ulama* and the making of a tradition. Absent a paradigmatic theological reconstruction, it would be hard to imagine the *'ulama* being in a position to find even a *modus vivendi* in order to further a genuine intra-Muslim value-pluralism, beyond mere questions of manageable differences and ethical toleration.

In part 2, Zaman addresses a plethora of interesting topics with admirable subtlety and meticulous detail. They range from debates about knowledge formation and tradition within the madrasas of South Asia and their counterparts in the Middle East; women in law and society; a very rich chapter on socioeconomic justice where the views of a select number of Deobandi *'ulama* are ventilated in engaging ways; and, finally, a review of the justification of religiously sanctioned violence in claims made by advocates of jihad and suicide bombings as well as the views of those who refute such practices. It would be impossible to summarize any of these debates since they involve multiple and complex angles and the reader ought to relish those arguments first hand. In fact, the strength of this book lies precisely in its rich and textured detail, where Zaman surveys as well as analyzes valuable aspects of Islamic law and theological practices that were not previously available in English.

What Zaman has successfully accomplished is to present multiple themes and contentious debates with a critical resonance by highlighting the tensions in the arguments of the various contenders. In his view, the inherent paradoxes, ambiguities, silences, and difficulties in making sense of the discourses of the *'ulama* also amount to the strength of their tradition. Paradoxes and contradictions, in his view, invite rival discourses and these, in turn, shape the public discourse. Seeking coherence in *'ulama* discourse, one understands the author to be saying, might be an overrated virtue. What this reviewer seemed to have grasped, among many other things from Zaman's learned study is that the *'ulama*, as both collectivities and individuals, occupy discrete life worlds. And despite their claim to adhere to a tradition fully equipped with its constants, in the end, it is the lived reality or the facts on the ground that determine the values that are nurtured and made possible by material conditions and lived reality. Those multiple contexts are riddled with different macro-political and economic tensions, together with contestations of power over knowledge. Inspired by Zaman's example, future scholarship dedicated to Islamic law and society will render the field a great service by also taking the hermeneutical battles to some of the

narratives generated by macro-political and economic conditions that impact Muslim practices and ideas. For in my view, not only would the sociology of knowledge help us to understand the 'ulama tradition in greater complexity, but we are also challenged to understand the multiple types of reasoned discourses (*logoi*) that shape and determine 'ulama discourses, some of which Zaman has helpfully identified in this important study.

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