

Book Review

Fuchs, Simon W., *In a Pure Muslim Land: Shi'ism between Pakistan and Middle East* 352pp., The University of North Carolina Press 2019

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At the conclusion of *In a Pure Muslim Land*, Simon Wolfgang Fuchs notes the historical, intellectual, and religious connections between the Middle East and Muslim South Asia in the *longue durée*, in which a “shared heritage of texts, institutions, and revered personalities” (189) has been cultivated and is drawn on by Sunni and Shi'i scholars, alike. For Fuchs, this shared religio-cultural heritage provides the ground for “a new research paradigm, one that pays attention to the *bidirectional* flows of religious thought between the Middle East and South Asia” (190). *Connected histories* of religious thought (and practice) among Muslims—Sunni and Shi'a—have circulated along porous and flexible scholarly networks, pilgrimage circuits, and among writers and others seeking knowledge, patronage, and fortune at courts, in seminaries, shrines, and many places between (Subrahmanyam 1997: 760). The idea of connected histories reinforces Fuchs' proposition that an attentiveness to bidirectional flows complicates the “peripheral” status of Pakistani Shi'a. In the course of the five chapters of the book, Fuchs convincingly maps out the ways in which Pakistani Shi'i scholars have creatively negotiated questions of religious authority, sectarianism, and transnational Shi'ism to articulate “unique and self-confident Shi'i visions of a Pure Muslim Land” (5).

The research for *In a Pure Muslim Land* is based on extensive archival and ethnographic field research conducted by Fuchs in Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, India, and the United Kingdom. Much of the research presented in the book is based on Urdu newspapers, Shi'i periodicals, and monographs not readily available in North American and European libraries. Especially notable is Fuchs' determined effort to gather the journals published by Shi'i scholars and seminaries in Pakistan's Punjab and Sindh provinces. Accessing these publications required tracking down collections in private libraries and visiting seminaries, some of which Fuchs describes as being in a poor state, such as Muhammad Husayn

Najafi Dhakko's library in the Sultan al-Madaris seminary that he founded in Sargodha (77-78). Between 2011 and 2013, Fuchs interviewed numerous Shi'i religious scholars, intellectuals and activists in Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and Iran. Several of these individuals figure prominently in the book's chapters, which are enriched by their perspectives and voices.

Fuchs notes “the structure of religious authority within the Shi'i community, the focus of my work, and practical concerns of access all have as a consequence an almost exclusively male-centered story” reducing accounts of women to their role in the Iranian revolution, and matters of ritual and pollution (10). Fair enough; although women are absent from the book, this is not a point on which I would fault the author since gender is not an analytic driving the project. A concern I do have, however, is the paucity of non-scholarly voices, particularly those of lay Shi'a.

The perspectives of non-scholarly Pakistani Shi'a would further add to the questions of self-perception of “periphery” and the negotiation of religious authority, sectarianism, and transnational networks from the grassroots level. In this review, the interconnection between religious authority and transnational networks will be addressed. Religious authority and transnational networks are especially well-linked in chapters two, three, and four in Fuchs' chronological analysis of traditional-reformist debates about Shi'i ritual practice and belief in the Imams (chapter two), the emergence of the *marji'* as a contested figure for Pakistani *ulama* whose authority is negotiated within the transnational Shi'i network (chapter three), and through the creative strategies engaged by scholars over the past forty years to adapt the Iranian revolution to local contexts (chapter four). These three chapters weave together questions of religious authority and the push-pull of Pakistan's role in the transnational Shi'i networks extending from Iran and Iraq.

Religious authority is a central theme running through *In a Pure Muslim Land*, which Fuchs demonstrates is multivalent, contested, and a source for the creative negotiation of power between the local communities and the seminaries in Iran and Iraq where many religious scholars spent decades studying and teaching (5). Chapters two and three trace divergent perspectives on authority, revealing tensions between traditionalist and reformist visions of Pakistani Shi'ism (chapter two), and emergent discourse among *'ulama* in 1960s and 1970s Pakistan regarding the nature of authority of a single *marji'* to lead the global Shi'i community (chapter three). In chapter two, "Theology, Sectarianism, and the Limits of Reform," Fuchs focuses on debates about reform arising in the decades after the 1947 Partition that became further amplified in the 1960s with the return of young *'ulama* from years of study in Iran and Iraq, and which were also "about radically diverging conceptions of theology that, in turn, condition different visions of religious authority" (58). In the reformist camp, Muhammad Husayn Najafi Dhakko (b. 1933) exhorted Pakistani Shi'a to cleanse their religious practice of "objectionable" customs, such as Zuljanah veneration (64), the excessive mystification and devotion to the Imams (68), and using the phrase *ya 'Ali madad* (help, 'Ali!) instead of the suitable Islamic greeting *al-salam 'alaykum* (69). Traditionalist scholars such as Muhammad Bashir Ansari (d. 1983) mocked Dhakko's reformist efforts to humanise the Imams, to overtly politicise memory of the Karbala event, and to cleanse local practices from Shi'i Muharram rituals, which had a negative effective on lay Shi'a. For Ansari, and other like-minded *'ulama*, the Shi'i Traditionalists advocated for a ranked hierarchy based on "inward" and "outward" practice. The inward scholar (*'ulama-i ma'rifat*) has attained the path of truth, while the outward scholar (*'ulama-i 'amal*) is focused solely on the collection of *khums*, and matters of purity and pollution (82). Ansari advocates that these action-oriented scholars must attend merely to the obligations (*furu'*) of religion and not try to transcend their spiritual limits (82-83). This chapter draws the reader into the messy tradition-reform debates that unfolded in the 1960s-1970s that were highly polemical in tone, focusing on ritual practice, esoteric dimensions of belief, and principles of devotion, issues which were of central concern to lay Shi'a.

The influence of the Pakistani Shi'i *'ulama* is observed in chapter 3, "Projections and Receptions of Religious Authority: Grand Ayatollahs and Pakistan's Shi'i 'Periphery,'" in which the question of succession following the death of the *marji'* Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim in 1970 indicates the ill-defined criteria and hazy process by which a *marji'* is selected, and the complex negotiations that happen at the regional and local levels to convince a community to accept the religious, political, and spiritual authority of a particular *mujtahid* (pp. 104-105). In this relatively brief chapter, Fuchs presents two case studies that call into question Michael Fischer's observation that awareness of the office of the *marji'* was limited to only top-ranking scholars in Lucknow, India (118). Through close analysis of the

journals *al-Hujjat*, published by Mirza Safdar Husayn Mashhadi (d. 1980), Syed 'Ali Naqi Naqvi's (d. 1988) magazine *Payam-i 'Amal*, printed by the Lahore Imamia Mission, and the Lahore-based *al-Muntazar*, Fuchs shows shifting allegiances Pakistani scholars pledged for various *marji'*, including Muhsin al-Hakim, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Abu'l Qasim al-Khu'i, and Sayyid Muhammad Kazim Shari'atmadari. Pakistani Shi'a embraced the leadership of Shari'atmadari because of his awareness of Shi'ism beyond the Middle East, exemplified by his "leading role in the founding and running of the mission-focused Dar al-Tabligh-i Islami (House of Islamic Preaching) in Qum" (115). Shari'atmadari was hailed for his determination to "revamp the religious educational sector in Pakistan" (117), pointing to transnational linkages between the *marji'* and local religious leaders.

In chapter four, "Khomeini's Perplexed Men: Importing and Debating the Iranian Revolution since 1979," Fuchs traces the multiple stages of reception of the Iranian revolution in Pakistan. According to Fuchs, reception of the revolution happened in three distinct waves. The first wave, from 1979-1984 was largely an internal event with Pakistani Shi'a focused on domestic issues. The second wave, began in 1984 and was concomitant with the youthful Sayyid 'Arif Husayn al-Husayni taking leadership of the Tahrik-i Nifaz-i Fiqh-i Ja'fariyya (Movement for the Implementation of Ja'fari Law, TNFJ). The third phase began in 2009 and continues to the present, and is exemplified by the activist teaching, preaching, and politics of Sayyid Javad Naqvi, founder of the Jami'at al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa (Firmest Bond University). Naqvi is notable for his cultivation of Iranian sartorial style, theology and politics, drawn from the more than twenty-five years he lived in Qom (124-125). Although different concerns and needs conditioned the responses of Pakistani Shi'a to the Iranian revolution in all three time periods, Fuchs points out that we must also be mindful of the impact of time and exposure to the events of 1979. According to Fuchs, "By emphasising personal and robust ties to their revolutionary neighbor, Pakistani clerics could hope to siphon off some of Khomeini's luster for themselves... Yet they also felt the need to control the import of Iran's messages and adjust them to the needs of their society" (124). The revolution was not imported without qualification, repackaging and in some instances, translation of the Iranian message to a subcontinental form. In the first wave, for example, Safdar Husayn Najafi, endeavored to portray Khomeini as a religious scholar and reformer who transcends all sectarian boundaries, labeling him the renewer (*mujaddid*) of the fifteenth Islamic century, which "quite conveniently, began on 21 November 1979" (132). Taking a Sunni concept, Safdar Husayn Najafi revised this title to fit Khomeini because he had "shown that Islam as a religion was distinguished by its broad horizon and was concerned with both practical and theoretical issues" (133). More important, by linking Khomeini with the title of renewer he was separating the individual from the Iranian revolution (133). Such strategies show the creative moves by which Pakistani *'ulama* sought to simultaneously identify with the

message of the revolution while adapting it to the needs of their society.

In a Pure Muslim Land makes a major contribution to the study of Pakistani Shi'ism. Fuchs' presentation of these difficult-to-access sources mirrors the process by which Pakistani *'ulama* have used translation of Persian and Arabic sources to "speak seemingly authoritatively about certain issues while in fact adapting and modifying their sources" (15). This book adds to a growing body of scholarship on different trajectories of Pakistani Shi'ism (Schubel 1993; Pinault 2008; Rieck 2015; Zaidi 2015), contributing a much-needed perspective of post-Partition Shi'ism in which *'ulama* are complex individuals whose stances on tradition, authority, and the Subcontinent's relationship to Iran and Iraq are worthy of our attention and understanding. *In a Pure Muslim Land* will be of interest to scholars and graduate students in religious studies, South Asian studies, Islamic and Shi'i studies, political science, history, and sociology.

References

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