

Book Reviews

Kay Hafez (editor), *The Islamic World and the West: An Introduction to Political Cultures and International Relations* (Brill: Leiden, Boston & Cologne, 2000)

This book contains a series of articles written mostly by German scholars and most of which have been translated into English by Mary Ann Kenny. The first part of the book discusses basic issues, while the second part applies them to specific countries or regions.

In the "Foreword", Mohammed Arkoun and Udo Steinbach set the tone by advocating the failure of most academics in promoting meaningful dialogue between Islam and the West. They, like politicians, have used terms like "Islam" and "Muslim" in monolithic fashion to depict the "Islamic world", thereby failing to appreciate social discourse as a product of social actors.

In the "Foreword", it is contended that oversimplification of concepts has led to Huntington's baseless belief about the "Clash of Civilizations". The fluidity of relations between certain forces in the Islamic world and the West is thereby ignored. Two other factors need consideration: (a) Political Islam is also susceptible to Western manipulation; and (b) The West can only insist upon a commitment to human rights and democracy by the Islamic world if it practices these values domestically and supports moves towards their implementation among Muslims.

In the "Introduction", Kay Hafez reviews the clash of politicised perceptions between Islam and the West. The author presents examples of recent events which are commonly used to support the thesis of a cultural struggle between Islam and the West, like the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war. She then refutes the ontological argument of Huntington which alleges a rivalry "between the closed and monolithic system of meaning" (pp. 4) by supplying numerous examples of similarity between them.

The first article under "Basic Issues" is written by Schulze on "Is there an Islamic Modernity?". When viewed through the hegemonic lenses of modernity, Islamic modernity is found to be a contradiction since modernity is associated with all the material progresses of Western life. All anti-modern traditions evident in non-Western life, and by implication also Islamic life, are traditional. No amount of modernising would dispel this antiquated garb from Islam.

But when seen through the lenses of postmodernity, it is found that the binary opposites of “tradition”/ “modernity” are constructs of an elite class in all societies at a particular stage for interpreting the world. According to this view, there are two modernities: the historical period of modernity (from about 1650 onwards) and the discursive formation (that is, interpretation) of modernity, both of which run concurrently.

Gudrun Kramer, in her analysis of the “Visions of an Islamic Republic”, firstly assesses the moral supremacy debate between Islamists and Westerners. Both sides err in denying the existence of moral values among their opponents. Islamists need to realise that their canonical interpretations are not the only valid ones. Subjectivity based on life’s experiences influences interpretations.

The debate between techniques and values in an Islamic order is always interesting. Islamists feel that while techniques are neutral, values are not. This argument is especially important in the debate on human rights and democracy. Another debate revolves around the immutable core and flexible elements of Islam. Among the latter would be politics. When vested with ethical values, it would become religion. But since human judgement undoubtedly plays a role in implementing it, there will be scope for disagreement. This leads the author to conclude that the only feasible solution is secularisation. I feel that she has missed the dynamics of the sacred and the profane in Islamic thought totally. It has never been the goal of essential Islam to prescribe details for all human conduct and thereby remove the need for human judgement in relation to them.

It is interesting how the author identifies basic values which were not previously highlighted among the priorities of Islamists like freedom, equality and responsibility. She justifiably questions the extent to which they could be applied to non-Muslim citizens. The same problem applies to the classical distinction between men and women. Some Islamists urge a revision of classical jurisprudence for solving the dilemma. There are also questions surrounding an Islamic political framework which need responses.

The article by Heiner Beilefeldt on “Universalism versus Relativism” tackles human rights. It is wrong to regard human rights “as the exclusive achievement of Western or Christian tradition” (p. 48). While they are prevalent in Islam, they vary. There is a theological foundation of human rights for some Muslims which opposes the universalistic essence of human rights. So where there is a conflict between Islamic law and human rights, such Muslims grant preference to the former. This is

problematic for non-Muslim human rights observers. There also appear to be difficulties about the granting of equal rights to men and women, the right to life and the right to freedom from bodily harm. But in practice, pragmatism occurs in the application of certain laws. Modernist Muslims, on the other hand, wish to identify the spirit underlying laws. Such a step could pave the way for legal reform without necessarily abandoning the Sharia.

Irmgard Pinn writes on “From Exotic Harem Beauty to Islamic Fundamentalist: Women in Islam”. Recently, Western literature and the media have painted a very dismal picture of Muslim women. On the other hand, women are returning to Islam in many Muslim countries. Depending on their perspectives, critics have given reasons for this phenomenon. Generally, the veil symbolises an Islamic order. Misinterpretation often stems from confusing religion with tradition. Even a scholar of Fatema Mernissi’s calibre is guilty of it. The question of women’s emancipation in Islam depends on one’s standpoint: “The ideal personality in the West is an autonomous individual; in Islam it is a union of the person with society” (p. 63). Women’s social role in Islam, starting from the domestic sphere, is incompatible with Western views which imply a convergence of the sexes.

Thomas Scheffler contributes an article on “West-eastern cultures of fear: Violence and terrorism in Islam”. His panoramic view of political violence in the Near and Middle East since 1945 reveals at least four major conflict types: uprisings against foreign rule, post-colonial military interventions by foreign powers, violent conflict between the post-colonial states of the region, and internal conflicts within the post-colonial states of the region. There were also several coups, fundamentalist efforts to subject state and society to religious laws, social mass protests against a deterioration in living conditions, and violence sparked by authoritarianism. In many cases, conflict types are intertwined. A fact that is ignored is that the greatest perpetrators of violence are authoritarian states.

But Western media concentrate on “terrorism” which only affects a small number of victims. In such acts, the effect of the acts on third parties is more crucial than the direct relationship between perpetrator and victim. Reporting highlights and even exaggerates their real potential.

Volker Nienhaus emphasises the dynamism of Islamic Economics. It is a science in which many investigations into problems relating to Zakat and interest could be made. It is a new academic discipline, promoting

review of earlier findings in its quest at reaching suitable answers. The methods employed are derived from modern economics.

In Part Two, the first article by Annette Jünemann on “Europe and Algeria” questions the former’s involvement in the latter. Paradoxically, while it supports democratisation, it fears Islamist parties assuming power through the ballot box. The only inference I can make is that democracy is a value-laden term. Any results contrary to Western desires are despised.

The Algerian turmoil in 1988 reflected opposition to the entire political system and its corrupt leadership. President Bendjedid’s actions eased the way for political democratisation and economic liberalisation which were approved at home and abroad. But the victory by FIS, which plans to establish an Islamic state, was greeted with alarm by the state. It was finally banned, notwithstanding its popular support.

Several cliques within the regime are determined to cling to power, even if that means the use of foul means to eliminate the opposition. Although the Islamic movement is heterogeneous, violence against it thwarts any solution. But some Islamists have also committed atrocities. Meanwhile, the population remains perplexed while attempts by the regime at achieving legitimacy have floundered.

Europe’s earlier silence on the undemocratic conditions in Algeria yielded before agreements by means of which Europe would like to extend its overall influence over the country. Consequently, Europe seems to be condoning Algerian authoritarianism. Meanwhile, the chances of resolving the civil war peacefully are declining.

Andreas Rieck writes on Iran. He declares: “During the last few decades, no Muslim country has experienced a swifter and more radical change in its relations with the Western world than Iran following the 1978-79 revolution” (p. 127). The mullahs perceived widespread Western influence and manipulation of the country’s politics. Ironically, they were aided by President Carter’s pressure on the Shah to liberalise. In the early days of the revolution, Khomeini maintained friendly relations with the West. They became more militant when different tendencies battled to give final shape to the new order. Meanwhile, the West aided Iraq in its war against Iran. So, Khomeini kept defying the West until his death in 1989.

Relations with the West failed to improve under his successor, Rafsanjani. They have only improved during the rule of Khatami (1997 to the present), most of whose supporters are females and younger voters. They have never experienced the Shah’s regime and are

disillusioned with aspects of “mullahcracy”.

The author observes pertinently: “Although Western governments have generally dealt pragmatically with the Islamic Republic, at least in the post-Khomeini era, the same cannot be said of public opinion and the media in Europe, let alone in the US” (p. 141).

In the “Courage to Speak Out”, Sonja Hegasy explains that countries with authoritarian regimes in the Middle East have begun to experience the development of civil societies over the last fifteen years. They tackle many kinds of problems. These societies confront religious and state groups with dignity and stress their right to espouse their views. But progress in this field has been slow and limited. Hegasy advises that such forums be identified and helped.

Erhard Franz comments on Turkey. As a reaction to Atatürk’s decrees on laicism, the public sector has been witnessing increasing Islamic influence. The Welfare Party under Erbakan won the 1995 elections with a small majority. He became the first Islamist Prime Minister of Turkey. But by 1998 the party was banned on the basis that it was unconstitutional and its leader was banned from political activity for five years. Although the author appears sympathetic to the minority Alevis, regarding them as true secularists, many Muslims abhor the nature of their involvement in public life. Unlike Franz, they contend that Muslims comprise at least 90% of the population. According to them, the Alevis have forged alliances with opponents of an Islamic order, like Israel and the West. They indulge in acts of terror on account of the high posts that they enjoy in the despotic military establishment.

Catherine Samary analyses the plight of Bosnian Muslims. Converted to Islam during Ottoman rule and having enjoyed the privilege of access to state power, they developed a unique ethnic (more than a religious) identity. During Tito’s rule in Yugoslavia, many described their nationality as undetermined. But when communism waned, nationalist parties which were eager to expand their sphere of influence, flourished. The most threatened of all were the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina since they had no territory of their own.

The West was guided by self-interest in its response to the crisis. It feared the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. At the same time, it was reluctant to act decisively as the region did not present any substantial economic advantage to it. The Muslims were driven into little enclaves and brutalised. This created the Christian Crusade syndrome. Originally, these Muslims only wanted to exercise their cultural identity as Europeans. Such an aim makes the author to regard help given by the

Muslim countries as politically inopportune. I pose the following questions: Did she want the Muslim countries to refrain from their action entirely when so much of it was humanitarian aid? Does she imagine that their gesture will strengthen the hand of political Islam?

In his evaluation of the Oslo accord, Alexander Flores significantly states that the Zionist movement in the early days always looked at Jewish interests before all else. "The perception of Israel as an integral part of the West" (p. 189) was later developed to win Western sympathy and support for its colonisation of Palestine.

Palestinian resistance grew in importance after the Six-Day war of 1967. For the Arabs, their forces' catastrophic defeat stood in sharp contrast to the Palestinians' staunch refusal to surrender. This enhanced their reputation. After the October 1973 war, the Palestinians adopted the idea of a two-state settlement. Israel failed to reciprocate this offer for selfish economic, military and religious reasons.

Henner Fürtig writes on contemporary Iraq, a creation of colonialists. It only succeeded in throwing off the foreign yoke in 1958. At that time, it faced two major problems: (a) inconclusive border demarcations, and (b) ethnic tension. Ten years later it had the socialist Baath party in power. It nationalised many assets to its own benefit. This trend intensified with the rise to power of Saddam Hussein in 1979. Instead of advancing the national interest, he unleashed a costly war against Iran with Western help. During a three-year lull between 1988 to 1990, Iraq managed to make economic progress. Greed led this dictator to invade Kuwait's rich oil reserves. But he overlooked Western interest in buttressing the ruling Sabah family there. For this blunder, the Iraqis have paid a heavy price with their lives and the imposition of a subsequent embargo on them.

The West's insensitivity promoted Saddam to wage the offensive against Iran in the first place. Now it appears unable to remove him from office. Whose aims does he serve apart from his own, one could ask? Is the West keen to see him as a bulwark against Iran? It is evident that only freedom and democracy can save the Iraqis from a calamity.

Reiner Freitag-Wirninghaus describes the Muslim Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and their Islamic tradition. Several unanswered questions remain like whether the region is the peripheral edge of the umma or not. Nonetheless, Russia's influence continues unabated in a region characterised by "unstable political, ethno-demographic and economic structures" (p. 219). Islamic renaissance for the roughly 60 million Muslims is tricky to prove since "Muslim" conveys

more an ethnic meaning than a religious one. It is for this reason that the author speaks of “Atheistic Muslims”. But this assertion is contradicted by discussion about the observance of some rituals and the construction of religious networks by them. Political leaders seem keen to foster a “secular Islam” as described in the first part of the previous sentence.

Notwithstanding linguistic affinity, the role of Turkey has remained minor in this region.

Oil and gas reserves give importance to this area and excite foreign involvement, if not interference, in it. These states can only consolidate their positions if they improve their economic and social infrastructures. Up to now, it seems as though political stability is tied to a ruler’s authoritarianism. How long this will endure is difficult to speculate. These states will have to gain access to the international market for selling their assets. How they can obtain Western help for this without becoming its agents is another challenge.

A section on Chechnya would have been welcome.

In the final article, Munir D Ahmed comments on “Pakistan’s Islamic Atom Bomb”. It is the first Muslim country to join the exclusive club of nations possessing this lethal weapon. The author rightly objects to this country being the only one to be given a religious epithet in this regard. Why not a “Jewish”, “Christian” or “Hindu” bomb? Besides, Pakistan has not manufactured this bomb on the instruction of other Muslim countries, nor has it shared its nuclear knowledge with them. The irony in possessing the atom bomb lies in its ability to deter the enemy (which in this case is India) from using it.

An article on Kashmir would have rounded off discussion on this region.

In conclusion, despite my objections or queries relating to views expressed by certain authors, this is a very enlightening contribution to religious and cultural studies.

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Ahmad Moussalli, *The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism and Human Rights: From Classical and Medieval Roots to Modern Discourses* (University Press of Florida, 2001)

This book stands alone among the numerous books that have dealt with the familiar theme of politics and religion in the Muslim world. It stands alone because the author, a renowned political theorist who has already refined the notion of Islamic fundamentalism to include both moderate and radical components, has now extended his analysis of Islamist discourse to include three core themes: democracy, pluralism and human rights. It stands alone because the author tackles this familiar but little understood tripod of key terms with reference to history as well as contemporary events, dedicating the entire first part of his pioneering enquiry to the assessment of classical norms of Islamic governance before turning, in the second part, to an analysis of representative contemporary Islamist views of democracy, pluralism and human rights. Finally, it stands alone because no one else has drawn a pivotal, recurrent and convincing distinction between Islam as a divine belief system and the Islamic state as a humanly evolved political system.

All students of the present day Muslim world, from academics to policy mavens to the general public, should be attracted to the arguments, and also the evidence, of this tightly constructed book. Alas, the language is very technical, especially in Part One, where the author reviews classical Islamic examples and sets forth evidence to support his arguments. For those who are either tentative or policy driven in their engagement with the Muslim world, it might be preferable to skip Part One and go directly to Part Two. The beauty of the author's approach is that the meek and/or modern minded can move from the Introduction to Part Two to the Conclusion and still benefit from a highly original rereading of contemporary Islamist approaches to limited government, individual freedom and civil society.

Students of the contemporary Muslim world are already familiar with the intellectual issues in Islamist thought raised by Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori in their collaborative and provocative work, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, 1996). The conclusion of Eickelman and Piscatori seems inescapable: though Islam may be incompatible with democracy, civic institutions can still flourish in Muslim societies, even within the most severe praetorian polities. Moussalli wants to offer still more hope

for an Islamic engagement, not just with democracy and pluralism, but also with human rights. He tackles both Ann Elizabeth Mayer's dismissive approach and Abdullahi an-Na'im's revisionist approach: even while acknowledging their merit, he opens up further elements of Islamist discourse that neither they nor anyone else has explored to date. If there can be a chorus of voices registering the legacy of Islamic political theory in the Information Age, then Moussalli's ought to be one of the louder, and also clearer, voices to be heard. It merits close attention: he speaks for a remarkable, growing cadre of modern day Muslims who are moderates but not modernists.

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John L. Eposito, & Azzam Tamimi, (eds.) *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000)

One of the greatest achievements of Western modernity has been the elaboration of a human-centred, secular worldview. Having disenchanted the world – freed it from superstition and myth – Western civilisation inspired newfound belief in an earthly utopia. Scholars like Francis Fukuyama (whose End of History thesis is an articulate expression of this faith) rendered strong support for secularism. Fukuyama's brazen thesis assumes that liberal democracy represents the pinnacle of societal development and is the model that should be adopted by any society hoping to achieve perfection. A central tenet of faith in this 'system of belief' is secularisation.

The book under review explores the responses of Muslims in the Middle East to such secularisation.

It brings together eleven academics, all very well placed to comment authoritatively on the phenomenon of secularism and responses to it in the Middle East. The central focus of this work is then the origins and growth of the movement to abolish the secularising reforms of the past century by creating a political order guided by *Shari'ah* law.

The book opens with an introductory essay by the co-editor John Eposito. He sets the tone in a succinct piece on Islam and secularism in the twenty-first century and begins by reflecting on impulses to discredit and, in some cases dethrone, secular paradigms in the Islamic world. Iran is a case in point. He then discusses the importance of religion in nation forming in the Middle East, pointing out the militant, secular fundamentalism that characterises many regimes in the region. His introduction leaves the reader with a lucid understanding of the retreat from the secular path in these countries.

Azzam Tamimi, co-editor with Eposito, takes the debate further by exploring the origins of Arab secularism. He opens with a summary of Ernest Gellner's views on Islam and secularism and proceeds to chart out the course of Arab secularism, starting with the influences of early Christian and Islamic modernists and running right through to later generation reformers. The essay concludes with an Islamist critique of Arab secularism. Tamimi's essay is followed by two pieces by John Keane and Peter Berger respectively. Keane discusses the limits of secularism and Berger focuses on the phenomenon of secularism in retreat.

These essays are followed by two essays that seek to uncover the philosophical underpinnings of secularism. Abdelwahab Elmessiri puts forward the thesis that secularism is directly linked to immanence, not only separating religion from state but also denying transcendence altogether. In his essay, S. Parvez Manzoor makes similar arguments with his claims that secularism represents a metaphysics of immanentism and an epistemology of humanism.

The four essays that then follow all deal with secularism and the Arab-Muslim condition. This is incidentally also the title of Munir Shafiq's essay. Rachid al-Ghannouchi, Tunisian activist and Head of the banned al-Nahdah party, describes the toll of secularism in the Arab Maghreb. Heba Raouf Ezzat explores the link between secularism, the state and the social bond. She explores the weakening of the family unit in light of secular developments in Arab society. The fourth essay, by Abdelwahab El-Affendi, looks into democratisation and the influence of Islamic religious traditions. It concentrates specifically on the thought of the Moroccan philosopher, Muhammed Abed al-Jabiri. The final essay in this volume is by a Turkish scholar, Ahmet Davutoglu. He explores the philosophical and institutional dimensions of secularism. It is at times difficult and demanding but makes for rewarding reading.

As is to be expected of a work by multiple authors, not all the essays are of an equal standard. Some of the articles are insightful but not ground-breaking. A case in Point is Berger's essay. It is more general in nature than one expects of an academic research paper. It will most likely still be highly regarded. In general, the book reads smoothly and there are no discernable errors. It should prove valuable not only to the academics but to lay readers as well. Although some of the essays are specialist exercises.

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Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000)

Controlling Knowledge explores the history of the West African Muslim society of the Republic of Mali, formerly in the Soudan Français, from the early colonial period to the 1990s. Louis Brenner focuses on the evolution of Islamic schooling, particularly of modernized Muslim schools (*médersas*), as reflections of the social and political processes that have shaped Malian society in the past century. The book demonstrates how, through the intricate relations between power and knowledge, the *médersas* in post-colonial Mali contribute to the creation of new kinds of Muslim identities or 'subjectivities', different from those of the previous century, and in the context of evolving forms of power relations.

The book is divided into eight chronological chapters, headed by an *Introduction* in which Brenner defines the terms of his analysis. Michel Foucault's definition of knowledge and his exploration of the relationship between power and knowledge serve as the analytical points of departure of this work. Brenner is interested in the concept of the different levels of knowledge and their relation to power; these ideas illuminate the complex dynamics involved in the formation of the *médersas* as institutions that seek to contest established norms of 'acceptable' knowledge as well as their inherent purpose of controlling specific kinds of knowledge.

The first chapter in the book presents an overview of the relationships between power and knowledge in the pre-colonial Muslim societies of West Africa. The author presents Qur'ānic and *majlis* schools as the Muslim educational institutions prevalent before the French conquest of the region. Such schools were based on the discourse of what Brenner calls the esoteric *episteme*, or a hierarchical structuring of knowledge and its initiatic form of transmission, which tended to restrict the dissemination of Islamic knowledge to a few specialists who attained high spiritual levels. Brenner then examines different pre-colonial Islamic socio-political organizations and the complex array of permutations that evolved in West Africa between representations of Islam and expressions of political power and authority. This analysis reveals how representations of Islam both produce and are produced by the dynamics of power relations in any given context, but more specifically, how

schooling is most significant as a locus of power relations that creates Muslim subjects in the dual senses of 'subject' as a conscious self-identity, and 'subject' in the sense of being subjected to someone else's control.

The next chapter explores in detail the emergence of both French and Islamic *médersas*, as distinct educational institutions established to control Muslim education in the Soudan Français. The French administration first established *médersas* to serve the objectives of French colonial policy. Although instruction in Arabic and Islamic religious studies was offered, these institutions were meant to train African elites with the values of French culture and language while limiting and controlling the influence of Islamic education. These schools never enrolled a significant number of students and they were finally minor and peripheral colonial institutions with little historical significance. On the other hand, Islamic *médersas* born in the mid-1940s became enormously popular and ultimately threatened the goals of French colonial educational policy. These *médersas* were created by African Muslims who wished to provide religious schooling to Muslim children, employing reformed pedagogical methods and, at the same time, to give students sufficient knowledge of 'secular' subjects, allowing them to succeed in an ever-changing colonial world. Although seeking to nurture Islamic knowledge, these *médersas* differed significantly from Qur'anic schools in, among others curriculum, pedagogical methods and language of instruction.

The emergence of Islamic *médersas* threatened both the core of French educational policy and traditional Muslim education, thus attracting continued political opposition, which forms the topic of *Chapter Four*. Brenner analyses the broader social and political context of the period, resulting from a dynamic interaction between contradictory religious, political and cultural influences from the Middle East, local African society and French colonial institutions. From this situation emerged a complex religio-political contest about the 'nature' of Islam and what it meant to be a Muslim in the twentieth century. French colonial administrators usually allied themselves with 'traditionalists', opposed to the Arabization of education, and against the 'reformers' or later 'Wahhabis' who established the *médersas*. These proponents of counter-reform fought to preserve local cultural and religious heritage in opposition of 'reformist' notions of Islam coming from the Middle East, thus proposing to teach Islamic education in African languages as well as 'secular' subjects enabling students both to become 'good'

Muslims and to survive in the contemporary context.

In *Chapter Five*, Brenner specifically examines the simultaneous emergence of 'Wahhabism' and 'traditionalism' in the French Soudan, formulated through the process of colonial power relations. The term 'Wahhabism' was used as a label attached to a variety of Islamically inspired activities, doctrinally influenced by Salafism, but not necessarily corresponding to the Saudi Arabian model of 'Wahhabism'. 'Traditionalism' was in turn used to classify all critics of or opponents to 'Wahhabism', and eventually formulated to signify 'black Islam'. The author argues that whatever Sudanese 'Wahhabism' represented socially, economically or religiously, the term fulfilled a pejorative role in political discourse equivalent to 'fanaticism' or 'fundamentalism', connoting the danger of politically active Muslims. Although the political instigators of the period drew both from French and Islamic models, the French did not want to be emulated by those, such as the 'Wahhabis', who refused to be assimilated into French culture. Thus the term reflected the fears and animosities of the French towards Islam, as well as of other Muslims towards changes in the status quo.

Focus on power relations in the postcolonial period constitutes the topic for the next two chapters. Although Islam and Islamic *médersas* were not central to the evolution of political events during this period, Muslim schooling played a significant role in the internal social dynamics of the country, despite the left-wing Marxist secularism of Modibo Keita and the authoritarian secularism of Moussa Traoré. At independence in 1960, the Islamic *médersas* constituted about six percent of the total primary school enrolment; nevertheless, twenty years later, despite government efforts at secularisation, the schools experienced a period of rapid expansion and accounted for twenty-five percent of primary school education. As a result, in 1980 the government of Traoré was forced to recognize the Islamic *médersas* officially as educational establishments, thus trying to take control of the situation and trying to develop a 'balanced' curriculum that would allow for teaching of both secular and religious subjects without compromising either. The success of the Islamic *médersas* can be attributed to several factors, including the utilization of oil boom money by well-placed educational entrepreneurs to finance their Islamic project; a broadening social and economic base that opened up a new domain for the accumulation of wealth in terms of jobs for teachers and administrators; and an endorsement by the *médersas* of the 'modernizing' and developmentalist pressures of the postcolonial state. Nevertheless, the *médersas*

proposed to achieve such aims in a specifically 'Muslim' way, thus ensuring a contestation of meanings and political implications.

In *Chapter Seven*, Brenner examines the reasons behind the government's decision to integrate the *médersas* into the national school system. On the one hand, corporatist political thinking, which informed the creation of the single party state in the 1970s, required that all of Mali's social constituencies should be 'represented' by officially condoned bodies linked to the structures of the governing party. Thus this was an effort to 'appropriate' Islam and to control Islamic knowledge and schooling by means of the state's institutions. On the other hand, the adoption of developmentalist ideology by the government opened up an era of interventionist policies led by the World Bank and implemented by a consortium of international aid agencies. The *4ème Projet Education* exemplifies this discourse, which was characterized by the presence of foreign 'experts' who researched, articulated and tried to implement initiatives without any input from Malians themselves. Ultimately, the actual implementation of the decision to modify the status of the *médersas* was a complex and ambivalent process through which the state sought to capture the energy and initiative of the *médersa* movement for its own political purposes. Nevertheless, the pejorative attitude of government administrators towards Islam and the *médersas* served to politicise this issue more than anything done by the *médersa* constituencies.

The last chapter serves as a conclusion and takes up the analytical issues presented in the introduction of the book. Brenner argues that the conjuncture of shifting identities with changing structures of power relations has been a catalyst for the production of new 'Muslim subjectivities'. In turn, the *médersas* emerge as key institutions in the production of these new subjectivities, as they were both subjected to and contributed to the appearance of a 'rationalist' *episteme* among Muslims. While trying to distance themselves from French secularist influence, these institutions unintentionally perpetuate many of these same influences. Therefore, the variations of Muslim expression in postcolonial Mali reflect the pluralism of Malian society itself, with its internal ambiguities and contradictions.

Controlling Knowledge is an excellent and thorough study, unveiling the complexities inherent in the social and political implications of educational changes in twentieth century Mali. Brenner has done extensive fieldwork and worked closely with Malian sources to uncover information previously unattainable. This book will be useful to anyone

interested in the social and religious dynamics of contemporary Mali, and the in transformations of a West African Muslim society in the past hundred years.

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Kathryn Kueny, *The Rhetoric of Sobriety: Wine in Early Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001)

Katherine Kueny's discourse analysis of the rhetorical processes surrounding wine (alcoholic beverages) in early Islam makes for fascinating reading, especially if one is a non-specialist in either Islamic or Arabic Studies. By looking at four distinct areas of discourse — Qurʾān, Hadith, Jahiliya poetry and mystical poetry — she shows that the prohibition against *khamr* was not a foregone conclusion: 'the Qurʾān condemns wine only when consumption takes place in contexts deemed unsuitable or inappropriate; the prohibition is hardly unconditional or absolute' (p.1). In fact, it was really only in the *ʿuḍḍiyyāt* that unequivocal prohibitions against its consumption and against direct or indirect associations with it were developed. As her discourse analysis shows, these various rhetorical deployments, as such, develop, in some ways, because of the different impulses behind the differing discourses. I want to focus on the first two forms of discourse that she investigates — Qurʾān and *ʿuḍḍiyyāt* — because although the sections on poetry are equally fascinating, considering the 'rhetoric of sobriety' in the former two discourses is more interesting given that they form the primary sources of our understanding of the place of alcohol in Islam.

Anyone familiar with the Qurʾān (see also '*khamr*' in the Encyclopaedia of Islam) will be aware that Islam's text of revelation equivocates around *khamr*: it is good (Sura 16:66-69, 'al-Nahl'), it is bad (Sura 5:90-91, 'al-Ma'ida'), it is both good and bad (Sura 2:219-220, 'al-Baqara'), it is paradisaical (Sura 47:15, 'Muhammad'). The discourse of the Qurʾān, firstly then, is concerned repeatedly with defining and distinguishing between a cosmic order and a world order. Often, however, there is no anchoring frame of reference and so it may 'employ[...] items and objects of the everyday to elicit certain truths about God.... An object or an event can be meaningful on both a cosmic and mundane level; an ethical exemplar and a cosmological truth' (p.2). The ambiguity of Qurʾānic references to wine can then be understood along this model. On a cosmic level, wine is a reward in Paradise, while on the worldly plane it may divert people from God. More interestingly, though, is Kueny's idea that the Qurʾān, given this overlap between the cosmic and the worldly, is not wholly concerned with the nature of wine as

intoxicant. So, for instance, the strongest Qurʾānic prohibition against wine is in Sūra al-Māʾida where wine is prohibited by association with other aspects of *Jahiliya*: gambling, idol-worshipping and, indirectly, pagan sacrifices. A lesser prohibition is not to drink before prayers, implying that at other times intoxication is not prohibited. Instead, Kueny argues, wine is used as part of the rhetoric that would reveal truths about the divine. So, in the earthly realm, wine is treated ambivalently — either as bad because of association with *Jahiliya* or because it interferes with prayer or community — or as good since it comes from fruit of the earth. Thus, when wine may point out the qualities of the divine — ‘and in the fruits of the date palm and the grape-vine/ you obtain an intoxicant and good food’ (‘al-Nahl’), even earthly wine has positive attributes. The ambivalence around wine is thus explained: because of the Qurʾān’s method, because of its discourse built on an overlap of referential frames, wine is a rhetorical device which may be used at different points:

Depending on the frame of reference that is privileged at any one point, each revelation on wine provides an essential clue or insight into the many ways in which believers can determine, as well as adhere to, the true path of the one God. (p.4)

The *ʿuḍḥ*, on the other hand, contains no such ambivalence. Its prohibitions against wine are striking for the lack of equivocation and Kueny suggests that this is in part due to early Islam’s quest for order and the perfect world:

Although [the *ʿuḍḥ*] still find wine to be an ambiguous substance, they no longer treat this ambiguity as having any positive qualities, rhetorically or otherwise. Instead, wine - and more specifically the intoxicating effects of wine - become a source of danger that must be contained. (p.26)

The specific form of these prohibitions holds a lot of interest: the *ʿuḍḥ* rely heavily on lists and wine is almost always part of a list of items prohibited. As Kueny then goes on to say, lists speak of an underlying ordering principle and it is this, the ordering principle, that cannot tolerate ambiguity. The *ʿuḍḥ* then can be understood as that impulse to ordering the world as a divine projection and, more importantly, as projecting the divine will that is confirmed by the order of the world.

This surely makes for fascinating reading, but I want to point out two problems I found with the book, the one stylistic, the other perhaps disciplinary. Stylistically, the book tends to repeat and hammer some points. I understand, sometimes, that because of the knotty subject matter, this may not be helped, but at other times I feel that perhaps the book was indeed aimed at non-specialists and therefore felt the need to drive home its insights.

The other problem I have is perhaps with the strictly formalist nature of the exercise. While the discourse analysis in itself is interesting, I waited with bated breath for some insight around the historical and political forces operating at that time, especially when considering the *ūadʿth*: what social impulses to control and contain, for instance, can illuminate even more the radical difference in the treatment of wine between the Qurʿān and *ūadʿth*?

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Francis Robinson, *The >Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (London: Hurst & Company, 2001)

Among the manifold signs of intellectual vigour that permeated various parts of India's Muslim society in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the family of the Farangi Mahall holds a deservedly outstanding position; this not only because of the outstanding scholarly achievements of its members (which stand out against the rapid decline of Muslim political power on the subcontinent following the death of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1707) but also - and perhaps more so — because of their ability to maintain and perpetuate a tradition of the highest intellectual standards over almost three centuries. From the last decade of the seventeenth century onwards, different branches and members of this large *Ashraf* family (which claims descent from Ayyub Ansari of Medina through the authoritative sufi Shaikh 'Abd Allah Ansari of Herat (1006-1088 AD) have continued to represent a trademark both of intellectual achievement and the transmission of knowledge down the generations according to that parameters of Sunni orthodoxy remembered with respect and admiration throughout the subcontinent up to the present day.

Spread over eight thematically connected chapters, Francis Robinson's monograph offers for the first time a comprehensive treatment in English of the tradition surrounding this renowned family of scholars, teachers, religious leaders and spiritual authorities known as 'Farangi Mahallis' (so called after the former residence of a European merchant allotted to them by the emperor Aurangzeb in the city of Lucknow in 1695). In the process, it highlights one of the predominant intellectual trends of the Muslim elite in India and represented in the eighteenth century by the schools of Lucknow and Delhi (the other major one having developed around the family of Shah Wali Allah (1703-1762) and the *Madrassa Rahimiyya* founded by his father 'Abd al-Rahim); more importantly, it points out the strong influence the rationalist scholarship imported from Iran had exercised on the Farangi formation. We are thus provided with a fascinating insight into traditional scholarship that focused on the delicate balance between the *manqulat* and the *maqulat*, that is the transmitted and the rational sciences which have formed the core of Islamic learning since the early centuries.

The book consists of a collection of essays and articles previously

published (with the exception of ch. 6) over the past twenty years, reflecting the author's longstanding fascination with the old world of this Muslim quarter situated in the heart of the old capital of Awadh. The author provides a framework set by the circumstances in the wider world of Perso-Islamic culture, that culture's specific nature and its relationship to Indian society (especially in the Mughal period [early sixteenth to mid-eighteenth century]), and the extent of shared systems of knowledge in the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires by comparing the curricula taught in the madrasas of the three regions up to the end of the seventeenth century (ch. 8, pp. 211-39). He points out the main characteristics of this successful line of 'men of learning and cultivation', their code of conduct (*adab*) and their activities in the difficult moments of change and challenge to Indo-Islamic society and to the Muslim world at large.

This latter aspect is dramatically exemplified in the account of the figure of Maulana 'Abd al-Bari, the leading intellectual of the family in the twentieth century, whose premature death in 1926 is emblematic of the tragic events that characterised the four-and-a-half decades of the life of this scholar, teacher and political activist, and which was to announce the end of the glorious history of Farangi Mahall scholars. In this most personal and original of all chapters, based on personal observation and a number of primary sources consulted during the author's repeated and prolonged stays with the surviving members at Lucknow from the late sixties onwards, we are introduced into the world of a man whose struggle for the preservation of Muslim self-identity remained deeply rooted in its traditional values vis-a-vis the impact of the modern world. Robinson's style here and in other parts of the book falls perhaps consciously in line with the classical pattern of description adopted in the many traditional biographies (*tadhkirat*), recorded oral teachings (*malfuzat*), and scholarly treatises (*risalat*) produced on the subcontinent over the centuries and hence evokes the atmosphere that surrounded this seat of learning.

Other chapters (ch.2 and ch.7) focus on the fundamental importance the 'inner', spiritual dimension of *tasawwuf* represents in complementing the 'outer', scholarly role of the Farangi Mahallis, at a time when the validity of these links were seriously challenged by the numerous reform movements that sprang up almost everywhere in India. This element is documented via the family's intimate tie with two of the spiritually most fertile *turuq* present in the Ganga-Yamuna plains of Hindustan during the centuries in question, i.e. the *Chishtiyya* and the *Qadiriyya*, through

Shah Muhibbullah Ilahabadi and Sayyid Shah ‘Abd al-Razzaq of Bansa (1636-1724). Both authorities are renowned for their defence of the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* formulated by Ibn al-‘Arabi between the twelfth and the thirteenth century, which had remained for many centuries the dominant feature in spiritual guidance, but which had been seriously challenged by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi’s (1565-1624) *wahdat al-shuhud*, a reformulation of the wisdom of the spiritual realms in a fashion more suitable to Islamic orthodoxy. Following in the footsteps of the spiritual tutors of their ancestors, the teachings of the scholars of the Farangi Mahall reflect throughout their adherence to this vision of *Wahdat al-wujud* and culminate in ‘Abd al-‘Ali ‘Bahr al-‘Ulum’s commentary on the verses of Maulana Rumi’s *Mathnawi* in the light of Ibn Arabi’s metaphysics.

Robinson duly mentions the Farangi Mahallis’ core contribution to Indian learning, i.e. the formulation and adoption of a new curriculum known as *dars-i nizamiyya*, so called after Mulla Nizam al-Din, the founder of the Farangi Mahalli tradition who had played a significant role in the elaboration of this new curriculum and which was to find widespread acceptance all over India. Nizam al-Din’s emphasis on the rational sciences, a tradition that had gained increasing importance on the subcontinent since it was introduced there by the great Iranian scholar Fadl al-Din Shirazi (d.1589) in the times of Akbar, proved successful in revitalising Indian scholarship and made the Farangi Mahall a centre of learning, attracting many scholars from inside and outside India. So popular was it that Shibli Nu’mani referred to this institution as the ‘Cambridge of India’.

There is a certain amount of overlap and repetition (admittedly acknowledged by the author) which detracts from, rather than strengthens, the thematic thread. As it collects previously published work, one can forgive some repetition and this book remains a valuable contribution to our understanding of Muslim scholarship during the transitional period from feudalism to modernity. It follows the initiatives set out recently by Western scholars, such as Barbara Metcalf’s study of Muslim revivalism and the school of Deoband (Princeton, 1982), C.A. Bayly’s analysis of North Indian Muslim society in the age of British expansion (CUP, 1982) and the research by Gail Minault on women’s education and social reform in colonial times (OUP, New Delhi 1998).

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