Transnational Theological Encounters: Constructing Islamic Authority in New York

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Abstract

Recent attempts at limiting the entry of Muslims into the United States, including the promulgation of the executive order "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States" and calls for a "Muslim registry" are based in ideas of Islam as a monolithic ahistorical and acultural entity which "hates us" and endorses barbaric action against non-Muslims. Fueling these images is the belief that authority to speak on behalf of Islam is vested in specific individuals, and that actions "Islam" calls for are self-evident from examinations of the Qur'an and Hadith, and from the proclamations of religious leaders. American media figures and politicians have supported their self-representation as top-down movements, in which a few leaders transmit their interpretations of sacred texts to unquestioningly obedient followers. This assumption shapes policy approaches to Islam and Muslims globally. I draw on two years of multi-sited ethnographic research on transnational Islamic movements operating in Pakistan and the United States in order to demonstrate that, despite these movements' seemingly leader-driven creation of knowledge, male and female members contribute significantly to the discourses around which they form themselves as subjects. These interjections are shaped by local ideas of good and bad as well as members' own beliefs and practices.

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Introduction

A recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that twenty-five percent of US adults think that half or more of the Muslims in the US are anti-American, and twenty-four percent said they thought some Muslims were anti-American.[1] Forty-four percent of Americans see a "natural conflict between Islam and democracy which is based in an incompatibility between the tenets of 'Islam' and democratic principles."[2] These imaginings about Islam and its incompatibility with American life are fueled by representations of Islam as a religion that is foreign, stuck in the past, and directed by shadowy religious figures "out there." These images are reinforced by many American media figures, politicians, and leaders of popular Islamic movements. This odd convergence of representations serves and fuels both US policy and the interests of several US TV news channels, as well as lends authority to the leaders of many Islamic movements who promote ideas of Islamic renewal.

Academic work on movements of Islamic renewal has described their rejection of the historically grounded authority of the ulama, or traditional Islamic scholars, in favor of lay-preachers who transmit their interpretations of sacred texts to new movement recruits.[3] Saba Mahmood points to this trend when she describes the "increasing respect for the dāʿiya and a concomitant decline in regard for the traditionally trained religious scholar, or *ʿālim*" associated with the Islamic Revival.[4] Revivalists reject their previous religious training and practice to embrace a "Pure" Islam guided by movement authorities.[5] The religious practice acquired by revivalists often calls for sacrifice and struggle; it can result in their being marked as targets of political violence.[6] Members of these movements in Pakistan, including the Jamaʿat Islami, the Tablighi Jamaʿat, and Al-Huda, among others, are depicted as rejecting lifelong religious practices in favor of an Islam based on the exegesis of movement leaders, and based solely in the Qur'an and Hadith. These members often alienate family and friends through their dramatically transformed dress practices and social behaviors, which are traced back to the leadership of Islamic movements.

Contrary to the popular belief that Islamic movements are guided primarily by movement leaders, my research demonstrates that members' contributions significantly shape the theology, belief systems, and religious practice within Islamic movements. Most Islamic movements rely on members to recruit others and propagate movement teachings. This allows members an opportunity to nest their understandings of virtuous behavior

into the beliefs and practices they present as belonging to the movement. Tracing theology and practice as it emerges from movement leaders, is transmitted to movement members, and spreads beyond them allows us to see where commonly held ideas of "the good" seep back into the theoretically culture-free teachings of Islamic movements and scholars.

My research explores differences in knowledge creation, authority, and practice among home country and diaspora populations affiliated with the Tablighi Jama'at and Al-Huda, among other revivalist movements. I draw on two years of multi-sited ethnographic research in order to demonstrate that members of these movements based in my field sites of Islamabad and New York infuse movement teachings with substantially different ideas of virtue. These interjections are shaped by local ideas of good and bad as well as members' own beliefs and practices. The contributions of members have a number of implications, one of the most important being that Islamic practice, even in revivalist movements, is shaped by the norms of the country in which it is based. My research shows that the construction of knowledge and authority within Islamic movements, and between transnational Islamic movements bases in the US and Pakistan, are substantially more complex than is represented by these movements and by the current creators of US public policy. My work demonstrates that, despite these movements' seemingly leader-driven creation of knowledge, male and female members contribute significantly to the discourses around which they form themselves as subjects.

Representations of Islam as monolithic and acultural are developed by a number of American media figures, politicians, and the leaders of Islamic movements. These representations fall short of describing the construction of knowledge and authority within these movements, and the local flavors which occur in even those movements which represent themselves as standardized across geographic boundaries. Contrary to the rhetoric of movement leaders and US politicians, Islamic practice in America absorbs multiple strands of theology developed in movement-bases and combines them with local sources of authority to form a uniquely American Islam.

My ethnographic research on Islamic revivalist movements in Pakistan has been ongoing since 2009 and has encompassed more than five distinct movements. More recently, in 2016, I began research at my New York site, in which I explore the ways in which these movements and their members adapt to the United States. I employ the term "revivalist" to speak of my informants, rather than the more common "Islamist," due to the

problematic nature of the latter term. "Islamist" delineates the world into public and private spheres, and implies that the interjection of Islam into the public sphere is dangerous.[7] At the same time, I wish to acknowledge that these terms overlap, and that my informants are among those groups that are targeted by the term "Islamist" particularly when it is employed in non-academic discourse, as in the section that follows.

Representations of Islam in America: Politics, the Muslim Ban, and Those who "Hate Us"

The assumption that Islamic teachings are monolithic and oriented toward terrorism shapes US policy approaches to Islam and Muslims.[8] A number of statements made by first candidate and then president Trump regarding Islam and Muslims illustrate some widely held beliefs regarding the unitary nature of Islam and Muslims, and the hostility of Islam to American culture. In March 2016, Trump said on CNN: "I think Islam hates us. There's something there that—there's a tremendous hatred there. There's a tremendous hatred. We have to get to the bottom of it. There's an unbelievable hatred of us."[9] In an interview a few weeks later on The Today Show on NBC, in response to a bombing in Manchester, Trump said: "This all happened because, frankly, there's no assimilation. They are not assimilating. They're not assimilating in other locations either so we have a reason... They want to go by sharia law. They want sharia law. They don't want the laws that we have. They want sharia law."[10] These statements are important because they echo the concerns of ordinary Americans regarding Islam and its nature as foreign, hostile, and monolithic. Many Americans who think that Islam and democracy are in conflict say there is a "basic incompatibility" between the principles of democracy and Islamic teachings.[11] Others who see this conflict say that Islam's teachings related to gender and sexuality are not compatible with democracy.[12]

Several shared understandings are embedded in these beliefs. The first is that the content of Islam is obvious and easy to grasp. The second is that Islamic teachings and values are standardized across Muslim countries and constituencies. The third is that, bound by their religious leaders and sharia law, American Muslims are not assimilating and are guided by shadowy forces overseas. Fueling these images is the belief that authority to speak on behalf of Islam is vested in specific individuals, and that actions "Islam" calls for are self-evident from the proclamations of specific religious figures. These images are reinforced by several US TV shows and media figures. A

number of producers have noted that it is difficult to get networks invested in shows in which Muslims are not associated with terrorism.[13] Major television networks, including CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News, promote coded images of Muslims as linked to terrorism,[14] and talk-show hosts across the political spectrum make inflammatory statements about Islam which construct and reflect common ideas about Islam and Muslims.

I discuss two examples below. These are chosen for their illustration of larger trends, most notably their lumping together of different Muslim countries and constituencies, and their construction of all conservative and/or "Islamist" Muslims as jihadists, as posed against "moderate" Muslims friendly to the US and Western interests. Jeanine Pirro, a Fox News commentator, called for the United States to target jihadists and Islamists: "We need to kill them. We need to kill them…Our job is to arm those [moderate] Muslims to the teeth, give them everything they need to take out these Islamic fanatics, let them do the job, and when they do, we need to simply look the other way."[15] Pirro also claimed that Muslim "immigration [and] interfaith dialogue ... [has] co-opt[ed] our leaders into a position of embarrassment." In 2019, after making Islamophobic comments regarding representative Ilhan Omar, Pirro was rumoured to have been suspended, a move that observers noted was part of a careful balance Fox News made in order to keep advertisers while staying on brand[16] and promoting menacing images of Islam and Muslims.[17] Images of threatening conservative Muslims who believe in living according to the moral code contained in the sharia[18] (as many members of revivalist movements do) can also be seen on channels without this bias. On the opposite end of the political spectrum, Bill Maher, an HBO commentator, said, "When you take jihadists and Islamists who want Sharia law … and then you have a larger subset of conservative Muslims who may not have any alliance to jihadists they still have attitudes about free speech and the rights of women and the rights of gays that are deeply at odds with our own and we have to win a war of ideas with these people."[19]

Ideas of Islam as an ahistorical and acultural entity which "hates us" and endorses barbaric action against non-Muslims have political consequences beyond discrimination against American Muslims. Recent attempts at limiting the entry of Muslims into the United States, including the promulgation of executive order 13796 ("Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States") and calls for a "Muslim registry" are a direct consequence of ideas of Islam as a threat to American

values. This executive order deepened Islamophobic fears and constructed images of Muslims as "other."[20] Zareena Grewal has pointed to the way Muslim American communities inspire "fear and fascination" due to the assumption that their "global sense of religious community" is a threat to the US.[21] Associated with that sense of threat is the belief that Islamic teachings are fixed, immutable, and opposed to the construction of American-Muslim lives.

The Islamic Revival and Ideas of One Islam

The Islamic revival is a movement of religious renewal associated with the response to Muslim political decline and colonialism in the eighteenth century. The Islamic revival claims authority through its promotion of a purified Islam based solely on the Qur'an and the Hadith.[22] Movements affiliated with this philosophy rely on the exegesis of movement-specific religious authorities in order to recover the Islam of the "Time of the Prophet".[23] This return to the texts is meant to enable revivalist movements to overcome the supposed decay of Islam caused by colonialism and co-residence with non-Muslim communities. According to the intellectual framework underlying these movements, the decline of Muslim political power can be traced to a decline in Muslim religious and spiritual observance.[24] The reliance on the Qur'an and Hadith, and movement leaders' exegesis, are meant to reverse this decline, and to prevent the tainting of Islam with "culture." Claims to this pure Islam filter through to the United States and other diaspora locations, where they resonate with Muslims of varying national origins. Members of Islamic movements in the US lay claim to this a-cultural Islam, as do their counterparts in home countries.

One of the Islamic revival's primary claims to authority is that Islamic practice and culture became inextricably intertwined during the ulama's guardianship of Islamic tradition. Revivalists reject the interpretive authority of the ulama, and the rich history of Islamic scholarship and disputation. The Islamic revival promotes a scripturally "pure" Islam unmoored from the chains of memory and authority that have been a fixed part of the historical production of Islamic knowledge. These movements' rejection of the interpretive authority of the ulama, along with the growth of new media carrying the messages of non-ulama preachers to far-flung publics, have led to a "a crisis of authority"[25] in which historical practice, traditional authority, and the textual corpus of the Islamic tradition (including extensive

commentaries on the hadith) are discarded in the favor of direct interpretations of the sacred texts.[26]

Most of the founders of Islamic revivalist movements are not madrassa trained, and many of them are trained in Western institutions.[27] The revival's sole justification for discarding the long-standing Islamic scholarly tradition and replacing it with the exegesis of these leaders is its claim that the ulama allowed Islam to decline over time, partly through their tolerance for "cultural" accretions within religious practice. The religio-cultural milieu of Pakistan is theologically diverse, incorporating diverse Islamic theological prespectives which include, but are not limited to, Deobandi, Barelvi, aand Ahl-e-Hadith.[28] Revivalist movements based in Pakistan claim to promote an Islam that is "pure," universal, and free of cultural modification. In theory, this means that religious beliefs and practices are standardized within each movement, both nationally and internationally.

The Tablighi Jama'at and the Al-Huda movement are transnational movements with strong presences in Pakistan and among the South Asian diaspora. Both movements originated in South Asia. The Tablighi Jama'at was founded in British India in 1927, as part of an effort to purify the religious practices of Indian Muslims.[29] The movement relies on lay-preachers who travel from door to door inviting others to come to the mosque and listen to sermons focusing on the movement's primary text, the *Fazail-e-Amal* (the Merits/Reward of Actions).[30] The Al-Huda movement was founded in 1994 in Pakistan, and focuses on educating women in the Qur'an and Hadith.[31] Unlike Tabligh, which has texts translated into the vernacular, Al-Huda introduces women to the Qur'an and Hadith in Arabic. Despite its relatively recent origin, Al-Huda is quite popular, and dominates religious teaching among middle and upper class women in Pakistan.

Both of these movements focus on da'wa, the act of calling others to Islam through education, and are explicitly apolitical, maintaining that widespread social change will occur once Muslims have been (re)educated in the fundamentals of their faith. These movements claim that Islamic practice is the same across time and space; movement practices are both divinely mandated and universally applicable.[32] Despite their claims to universality, these movements' constructions of authority through the sacred texts and vis-à-vis culture are deeply shaped by the contexts in which they operate.

Constructing Authority and Rejecting "Culture" in Pakistan

Islamic movements across the ideological spectrum present themselves as the product of movement leaders' engagement with sacred texts. They

generate authority first through the texts, and then through the reputations of and stories about the leaders of the movement. The return to the text that these movements call for is a qualified one; members are "educated" in movement-specific ways of understanding sacred texts before being permitted to interpret texts as agents of each movement. Once they have been inducted into movement-specific exegesis, they are then allowed to draw on the Qur'an and Hadith to determine their own and others' religious obligations. Each movement uses different techniques to guide members in their interactions with the sacred texts and employs strategies to standardize movement ideology across different geographic locations.

The Al-Huda movement draws authority directly from the Qur'an and Hadith. Members of this movement claim that their practice is directly based on the sacred texts. Al-Huda offers "classes" to introduce members to sacred texts. Classes in Islamabad are held at the central Al-Huda institute, and in the houses of women who have volunteered them for this purpose. All of the classes have a similar format: women learn to translate the Qur'an from Arabic word for word, and in the process of learning the translation also learn to read Arabic. My informants in a neighborhood-level class all described their education in class as a process of "learning the Qur'an" or "becoming attached to the Qur'an." While Al-Huda ostensibly leads women through a direct translation of the Qur'an and Hadith, the movement takes a number of steps to center exegesis through founder Farhat Hashmi's interpretation. Al-Huda classes are guided by cassette sermons in which Dr. Hashmi introduces students to her interpretations of Qur'an and Hadith. These cassette sermons are then elaborated on by a "teacher" who has already been trained in Al-Huda's ways of reading. Students in the movement learn to interpret the Quran and Hadith without consulting the greater Islamic tradition, and are guided solely by Dr. Hashmi's interpretation and that of their teacher.

One of the sites of my ethnographic research was the Al-Huda neighborhood "class" at Nazish's house. This class was guided by Rabia, a teacher who had learned Qur'anic interpretation directly from Farhat Hashmi. During one of the classes, Rabia paused a cassette interpretation of a hadith which contradicted the general theological knowledge[33] of her students in order to explain: "The way to do things is written in the hadith—why, then, do we elevate the interpretations of the ulama over the words of the Prophet?" This explicit break with existing Islamic theology is typical of Al-Huda's members, who draw on the Qur'an, hadith, and the opinions

of Dr. Hashmi in order to generate authority in conversations amongst themselves as well as interactions with outsiders. Members of the Al-Huda movement position their own approach to Islamic theology as superior to those of other movements. When she learned that my research included the Tablighi Jama'at, Nazish confided that she had attended a few of their gatherings: "Their problem is that they don't let women speak," she said, "I tried to teach the other women things, and some women came and stopped me. They told me that we were not supposed to preach, but just read from the book."

The Tablighi Jama'at creates authority by claiming that its mission is a continuation of the "work of the Prophet," which he entrusted to his followers upon his death. The movement's primary activity is organizing groups ("Jama'ats") to travel a predetermined national or international route and invite other Muslims to correct their own religious practice. Tours can last fixed durations of three days, forty days, four months, seven months, and one year. Participating in these tours is a significant sacrifice for men and their families. Many men leave their families without a provider when they go. The movement also discourages men from maintaining contact with their families while they are on tour lest they become distracted from the mission. The movement supports its unorthodox activity, in which members are encouraged to discard their "worldly responsibilities" in favor of preaching, by relying on hadith. The primary text of Tabligh is the *Fazail-e-Amal,* compiled with the approval of the movement's founder, Maulana Muhammad Illyas, and put together by his nephew. This book was originally known as the *Tablighi Nisaab,* or "curriculum for Tabligh." The hadith in this collection are interpreted as demonstrating that the "work" of Tabligh is identical to the work of the Prophet Muhammad and the first community of believers, his companions. This text, and other hadith-based texts circulating in the movement, are meant to drive out alternative interpretations and contribute to the construction of community.[34]

Tabligh-affiliated texts read the activities of the movement into the hadith, arguing that it is every Muslim's responsibility to propagate the faith, and that those Muslims who do not engage in Tabligh are rejecting their religious duty. The people who read these texts and act on them are constructed as being the direct heirs of the Prophet and his companions.[35] Zakiya Baji, one of Islamabad's senior Tablighi women, had been affiliated with the movement for forty years, and had been part of several tours with her husband. She explained that participating in Tabligh was an essential part of being Muslim: "This is the most important work we could do," she

told me, "until the Muslims, no other ummah had been asked to do the work of Prophets, but we have been, and we should."

The Tablighi Jama'at presents itself as working in concert with the ulama. Members of the Tablighi Jama'at make verbal gestures of deference to "the respected ulama" in multiple sermons. During an interview, my informant Kamila told me that if she had a theological issue she needed to consult someone about, she had her husband ask a religious scholar. Participants in Tabligh see themselves as laypeople who are not attempting to replace the ulama as a source of religious knowledge. Their verbal deference to the ulama is meant to convey that their primary engagement with religion is to invite other Muslims to correct their religious practice (not to advance theological claims of their own). At the same time, the movement's methodology is unique and not practiced by any other group. This calls into question movement claims that the hadith demonstrate that the mission of Tabligh was given to them by the Prophet himself. It also calls into question the ulama's custodianship of the Islamic tradition, if the divinely-inspired action of engaging in Tabligh was permitted to lapse until the 1927 origin of the movement.

Al-Huda and the Tablighi Jama'at are typical of revivalist movements in their move to authority though sacred texts, their centering of movement leaders' exegesis of those texts, and their claims that these practices allow them to recreate the prophetic past. Revivalist movements in Pakistan distinguish themselves from each other through their readings of the sacred text. Each movement claims that its own reading of the sacred texts is authentic, and that other movements teachings are flawed. At the same time, the members of each movement within the country promote and practice standardized religious teachings specific to each movement. While Pakistani Islamic movements compete with each other for members, they also construct authority by collectively using sacred texts to reject practices framed as "cultural," and tainted by dint of association with "Hindus" and/or "The West." Depending on the movement, these can include religious practices such as visiting saints' shrines and celebrating festival days such as the celebration of the Prophet's birth (Eid Milad-un-Nabi). Social events that the Tablighi Jama'at and Al-Huda stigmatize include many common festivities. Refusal to attend these events is contentious; attendance at weddings serves to cement social ties between extended kin groups, and birthday celebrations mark closeness within a family. Female members of these movements report being ostracized by their families for their refusal to participate in these festivities, partly because of their refusal to fill their

social roles, and partly because their rejection of these events signals that the people attending them are engaging in cultural corruption.

Another way in which revivalists reject Pakistani culture is tied to dress. Men and women who participate in Islamic revivalist movements demonstrate changing patterns of dress as well as behavior. Men in the Tablighi Jama'at dress in *shalwar kameeze* instead of pants and shirts, a move which causes some of them trouble at work.[36] Men who participate in revivalist movements often have beards (uncommon among young middle and upper class urban Pakistani men), the style and length of which can indicate movement affiliation to a trained eye. Women give up jeans and other forms of western dress in order to adopt headscarves, loose coats covering their *shalwar kameeze*, and often face-veils.[37]

Individuals' changing socialization and dress practices cause consternation among their peers, who see these moves as extreme. My female informants reported a lot of push-back from families related to their dress and their refusal to attend certain festivities. Movement leadership motivates members by drawing on Qur'an and hadith to convince them that the changes are necessary. At the same time, movements rely on members to propagate their "culture-free" ideologies, and members will often interject their own ideas of good and bad into movement discourse, significantly altering the message emanating from the movement. While they enthusiastically boycott a number of festivities and religious gatherings, the members of Islamic movements in Pakistan often soften the message that is promoted by movement leaders, and reinterpret movement messages in the light of commonly accepted ideas of good and bad. Members' contribution to movement messages is particularly visible in areas where these messages conflict with their pre-existing, culturally determined beliefs regarding virtuous practice.

The role of women within these movements and society at large is one of these areas of conflict. Both the Tablighi Jama'at and Al-Huda officially maintain that women are as responsible for engaging in da'wa (the act of calling others to faith) as men are. The official position of the Tablighi Jama'at is that women should participate in movement tours even when this requires them to leave small children behind.[38] This is a significant departure from commonly circulating Pakistani ideals of female virtue, which tie a woman's piety to her service to her family and is one that members of the movement often find hard to accept. Sermons in movement spaces, delivered by rank-and-file male members, often modify women's responsibility to participate in movement tours, shifting the emphasis to women's respon-

sibility to support and encourage their husbands and sons to participate by taking over more household responsibilities. A typical sermon during the weekly *taleem* in Islamabad in April 2010 began, "What can women do? Be helpers, and if your husband comes home, and says there is an international Jama'at that needs a man, tell him, 'My friend so-and-so's husband has already done four months[39] and can go'; and send him to ask. If a man's wife is reluctant to let him go, you put on your burqa and persuade her to make a sacrifice for God. Send men to be in the mosque for gatherings." Similarly, although the Al-Huda movement's official cassette tape is intended to guide women's interpretation of the Qur'an and make them aware of their religious obligations to friends and family, the teacher often paused the sermon to insert her own ideas regarding good manners and behavior. Sometimes these interjections were minor, but they often significantly reframed the hadith in question to make it relevant and inspiring to its female audience. Once, a hadith about the Prophet Abraham's sacrifice of his son transformed into a sermon on the importance of pious mothers and an exhortation that women at the gathering pay attention to the upbringing of their children.

Members' contributions to movement messages modify them significantly from those intended by movement leadership and lend the Pakistan branches of these movements values drawn from Pakistani norms. These adaptations are not as visible as members' very visible modifications to their dress and socialization practices, which is why they are not readily apparent to the casual observer. At the same time, these modifications are the natural consequence of movements' use of members to propagate their messages. As members take part in the teaching and preaching within movements, it seems natural that their preexisting culturally-inspired beliefs would seep into the theoretically culture-free teachings of their movements. The impact of culture and national location becomes more visible when examining the religious practices of members of revivalist movements in my field site in New York.

Islamic Movements in America

Islamic movements in the United States are substantially different from those in Pakistan in terms of recruitment and religious beliefs and practices, given their adaptations to the very different cultural values that circulate in the US and to the diversity of beliefs among the diaspora populations that they serve. My research at a local New York mosque is at its early stages, but I have observed a significant number of instances when the theoretically

culture-free Islam promoted by revivalists has adapted to fit itself to its new home. These modifications are significant because all parties involved in constructing and depicting them—Islamic movements leaders, members, American media figures, and policy makers—would deny that they exist.

My informant Rashida is employed by Mosque X to run women's programs. Most of the mosque's congregation is affiliated with Tabligh and are first and second generation immigrants from South Asia, although there is a significant minority which come from other Muslim countries. The activities Rashida runs include a girl's Qur'an class, a women's teaching circle, and a lecture series that invites one speaker a month to address the congregation. None of these activities are ostensibly linked with Tabligh, and when I asked Rashida about her own theological background during our first interview, she was coy. It was only when I mentioned my previous research on the Tablighi Jama'at that she told me that the majority of the members of her mosque were affiliated with Tabligh. During this interview, she told me: "We try to be open to a variety of approaches. Our goal is, wherever you come from, you should feel comfortable here. Personally, my *madhhab* is Hanafi, but I have studied the Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi'i *fiqh*[40] too, and know comparative theology. We try to be open, whatever your background is, you will feel welcome with us. I am not interested, you know, in being one of the 'superstars', but I've been to Morocco with Imam Zaid Shakir and I spent some time at the Zaytuna Institute. People don't respect your knowledge unless you have a worldly education, so I have a BA in English and an MA in Islamic Theology."

Female members of Islamic movements, and leadership within these movements, often promote images of themselves as having western credentials as well as a background in theology. Islamic movements' leaders in the US tend to reference American institutions and religious scholars, like Imam Zaid Shakir and the Zaytuna Institute, in order to demonstrate their mastery of religion. Rashida's degrees and background in comparative theology make her different from movement authorities in Pakistan, whose primary religious background lies in the movement they come from. Her willingness to affiliate herself with institutions and religious leaders not based in her movement also sets her apart from Tablighi and Al-Huda members in Pakistan, who rather reference members of their movement, the founder and books of the movement, and historical ulama in order to construct authority.

American Muslim religious leaders often mention a variety of religious traditions in order to demonstrate the breadth of their knowledge and un-

derstanding of Islam. Rashida referenced a variety of Islamic schools of theology and Islamic movements with the stated goal that all should feel welcome. This awareness and mention of the breadth of the Islamic tradition is very uncommon among Islamic movements' leadership in Pakistan. In Pakistan, movement leaders barely acknowledge the existence of other strands of Islamic thought, and subtly promote their approach to Islamic theology as the only correct one. In contrast, movement-affiliated religious figures in the US are subject to strategic considerations unique to Muslims in diaspora communities, primarily the existence of individuals from a wide variety of religious backgrounds within the same community. While Pakistan is also theologically diverse, most Pakistanis follow the Hanafi school of thought, and all of my Al-Huda informants had been unaware of the other schools of thought prior to attending Al-Huda classes. American Muslims are very aware of the breadth of the Islamic tradition due to the mixing of individuals of different national origins and theological backgrounds. This means that movement leadership must accommodate a wide variety of theological backgrounds in order to maintain large memberships.

Unlike Pakistani revivalists, who tend to embrace a movement's approach to the exclusion of others, American Muslims seem to affiliate broadly with religious movements; the women I have encountered who have studied Al-Huda cassette sermons see these as one activity among many that keep them spiritually connected. Several of the women who attended Rashida's weekly gatherings also gathered at the house of Fatima, one of their neighbors, to listen to Al-Huda tapes and work on their Qur'anic recitation. When I asked her why she felt the need to listen to Al-Huda tapes with her neighbors, Fatima told me, "It is important to take the good things you find from everywhere. I think Farhat Hashmi's focus on the Qur'an is very good, but I also like Rashida's gatherings, and my husband likes it that I take my daughters there."

Another very visible difference between revivalists in Pakistan and the US is in their dress practices. In Pakistan, both the Tablighi Jama'at and Al-Huda ask their members to dress in distinctive clothing; Al-Huda and Tablighi sermons stress the importance of women's veiling their faces as well as their hair and body, and Tabligh calls on its male members to wear the Pakistani *shalwar kameeze*. In contrast, sermons focusing on women in revivalist circles in the United States might emphasize the important of veiling hair, but unlike Pakistani gatherings, the veiling of the face is almost never mentioned, while in Pakistan sermons emphasize that no other form of veiling is complete or acceptable. None of the women who attend Rashi-

da's events at the mosque veil their faces; while sermons at the mosque call on women to veil their hair and wear loose clothing, they too do not ask them to veil their faces. Women who have moved to the US from Pakistan often eventually discard the veil. I met Amina, a recent immigrant, at Rashida's mosque. She and her husband had both been active in the movement in Pakistan, and her husband participated in tours in the US. She told me that she had gradually stopped veiling her face after moving: "My daughter started asking me not to come pick her up from school because she was embarrassed," she told me. "Now I cover my face when we go home to Pakistan, but I don't do it in the US." America-based revivalists dress in western clothing when in the US, something which would be frowned on in all Pakistani revivalist circles. While there is an emphasis on modest clothing, women do wear jeans and pants, both of which are stigmatized and seen as against revivalist values in Pakistan. Women who move between countries code-switch effortlessly, adopting or discarding the face veil and *shalwar kameeze* to suit their surroundings. However, I have never heard any of these women discuss differences in their clothing practices except when I asked them direct questions related to their dress.

America-based revivalists' relationships to culture are deeply shaped by their location. When speaking of rejecting "cultural" practices, revivalists in the US focus on Christmas and other holidays associated with religious traditions, like Halloween. In the US, where ties between members of a diaspora community are valued, revivalists do not boycott the same festivities they would in Pakistan. Revivalist women commonly attend birthdays and wedding-related festivities which members of the same movement would not attend in Pakistan. Amina's daughter Inaya, for example, told me that she had learned to dance after moving to the US: "At home, my grandmother[41] did not like it when we danced, even when it was just us girls, but here my friends and I dance in the women's section at weddings." Even American holidays are not automatically rejected by revivalists; while some Tablighi and Al-Huda affiliated families do not celebrate Thanksgiving, a wide variety of them do. This makes American revivalists significantly different from Pakistani ones, who mark out all festivals not authorized by their reading of Qur'an and Hadith as impermissible.

Islamic movements based in the US should, according to revivalist ideology, be identical to their Pakistani counterparts in teaching, preaching, and practice. The culture-free nature of revivalist Islam is one of its primary claims to authority, and variation in movements' different national branches call that claim into question. An examination of US-based revivalist

practices demonstrates that these movements (including their leaderships) do deviate significantly from their home-bases in Pakistan, modifying themselves to fit their cultural context. These alterations to revivalist practice and ideology might not be visible to an American audience unfamiliar with these movements but are nonetheless essential adaptations that these movements have made to their new context.

Conclusion

That Islamic practice is different in different locations is not a new insight to anthropology; the early Anthropology of Islam spent a great deal of time attempting to reconcile the differences in Islamic practice across geographic locations with the universality of Islamic texts and with Muslim beliefs that there was only one Islam. This debate was resolved by Talal Asad's conceptualization of Islam as a "discursive tradition," which refers to the Qur'an and Hadith, and ties itself to the history of Islamic practice.[42] Islamic revivalist movements' geographic variations in practice are not covered by this previous conversation for two reasons: first, the Islamic revival's claim to authority explicitly lies in its representation of itself as promoting a standardized form of Islam based solely in Qur'an, Hadith, and the guidance of movement leaders; second, variations in Islamic practice across movement location are unacknowledged and are not justified through the Qur'an and Hadith, but are subtle modifications informed by local culture and discourse.

As the Islamic revival's authority lies in its claim that its readings of the Qur'an and Hadith are evident from the text, movements within the revival cannot acknowledge the difference of movement teachings in different locations. Despite the very visible differences of their religious practices from those of Pakistani revivalists, my research subjects in America still claim that they, and their movements' Pakistan bases, are engaging in the same religious practices. They are supported in this claim by movement leadership, who play a significant role in modifying movement practices to fit into American life. Unlike in Pakistan, where modifications to movement messages are made primarily by members, in the US movement leaders participate in altering movement messages to fit local cultural norms. The active participation of senior movement members in modifying teachings to fit into an American context means that many members are unaware of the tensions between ideas of universal Islam and local practice. Nazmin, a young woman who attends Rashida's *halaqa*, told me that she did not like going "back home" to Pakistan because she had to veil her face and prac-

tice gender segregation in her village. At the same time, she told me that Rashida's *halaqa* was useful and important because it taught her the basics of correct Islamic practice, which were the same everywhere.

Peter Mandaville has suggested that a focus on the binary "Islam" and "the West" has served to obscure contestations and negotiations within Islam.[43] One of these negotiations is the adaptation of Islamic practice to diaspora locations and values. The Islamic revival's ostensible hostility to culture and local values causes consternation in diaspora locations like the US, where fears that Muslims are not assimilating paint them as threatening and foreign others. Symbolic differences through which revivalists mark themselves as distinct lead Islamophobic politicians and media figures to take their claims of promoting an acultural Islam at face value. Images of Muslims as foreign and distinct serve to mark them as frightening "others" who are a threat. Muslims who have been raised in the US are not exempted from these images, and visions of the "home-grown" threat are common in Islamophobic discourse. These images lead to ideas of "Muslim Internment Centers" where the foreign threat can be contained. Muslim registries proposed by President Trump have ranged from those including only Muslim immigrants to ones containing lists of all Muslims in the US.[44]

Factors that have been identified by US government sources as contributing to "radicalization" include adopting "conservative" views of Islam and listening to "radical sermons".[45] Contrary to these representations, research funded by the Department of Defense, in which researchers resided in Muslim American communities for two to three months, concluded that increased piety and enhanced religious literacy contributed to the stability and integration of American-Muslim communities.[46] Observing the ways in which Islamic movements in the US fit themselves to their new cultural context points to the ways in which affiliation with these movements cause American Muslims to (unknowingly) modify their religious practice.

Anthropological literature demonstrates that members of Islamic revivalist movements globally possess considerably more flexibility in terms of belief and practice than popular US media gives them credit for.[47] American revivalists are part of this trend, in which their participation in Islamic movements accommodating themselves to US norms leads them to shift closer to American values. A close reading of movement practices points to significant differences in the way in which movements in home countries and the diaspora create and maintain authority, and the differences in the influences on their construction of theology. Revivalist Muslims in the US are aware of and interact with a much wider range of theological opinion

than revivalists in Pakistan, lending them a significant degree of ideological flexibility and resulting in their modification of revivalist practices to form a uniquely American Islam.

Endnotes

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