

manifests itself in quantifiable data may not necessarily include learning activities that allow for the formation of a community, which raises the following contradiction: reforms to schooling systems that are located in impoverished neighborhoods are made possible by those who occupy the upper echelons of America's economy. Tompkins-Stange shares ample ethnographic data to suggest that these contradictions are not merely philosophical but rather shape the contours of U.S. democracy. However, her insights on the evolution of education reform during the 20th century raise the following question: How has the religious influence on education reform altered in the contemporary period which differs so markedly from late 19th and early 20th centuries, a time when Catholic migrants relied so heavily on charities funded by the church to look after the schooling of their children? Future studies could build on her work by examining how minority groups such as American Muslims navigate the contemporary educational landscape marked by the professionalization of social welfare. Such studies would give insight into how privately operated religious schools have not declined in the absence of charities and to the contrary increased in numbers, with women drawing on the managerial practices that transform K-12 schools into a corporation to exercise religious authority that they may otherwise lack within legally classified religious institutions.

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*What Is a Madrasa?*

EBRAHIM MOOSA

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Western intellectuals often ask, "What went wrong?" when trying to unravel or demystify the Muslim world. When asking this question, many of them also seek to take their own understandings of Islam, Muslim practices, and cultural milieu and contrast them with the post-Enlightenment West. They also adopt this approach when explaining the growth of democracy in the West and its ongoing deficit among Muslim-majority countries.

This is the starting point of Moosa's analysis of the madrasa. However, the locus of this detailed and personal study goes beyond this simplistic question. He points out that it is a monastery-like Muslim seminary that dots the educational landscape

of South Asia, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Iran. This is not an all-male institution, for “Young adult males study in the South Asian institutions but there is a growth in segregated madrassas dedicated to the education of females” (p. 2). Gender segregation is the norm in South Asia but not necessarily in Southeast Asia, where young men and women may be studying in the same classroom.

Moosa starts the book by describing his own experience of entering his alma mater, Darul Uloom, located in Deoband, northern India, where a clean-shaven man inquired if he was looking for terrorists. The fact that a right-wing government led by Hindu nationalists is in power in Uttar Pradesh—the state in which Darul Uloom is located—makes this question even more accusatory, given that these nationalists’ worldview paints Muslims as the eternal “other,” even if they have lived in India for centuries. The memories of Partition and the ongoing religious divide that exists in the minds of these people make such questions very dangerous.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I, “Lived Experience,” deals with the students’ daily practices and routines. The author’s detailed exposition includes a closer examination of such practices as *wuḍūʾ*, the ritual washing of one’s hands and feet that must be performed before saying the salah (prayers). Here, he points to the *niyyah* (intention) of every act as key: “Lurking behind the apparent simplicity of the ritual of washing before prayers is the profundity of Islam’s ethical and moral philosophy, which is centered on the concept of intention” (p. 36). Moosa goes on to explain that intentions are the crux that determine if an action is rewarded for its piety or not.

Some of this portion seems to have been written for a non-Muslim audience, as it details how the salah is performed and other basic matters. The routine of a madrasa with classes is similar to that of any school or college, Moosa informs us. The rhythms of the day as well as of the year follow the Islamic calendar for prayers, celebration of festivals, and other events.

Part II, “History and Contexts,” describes how the modern madrasa came to be and how it has evolved. This portion deals with the struggles that institutions such as Darul Uloom have gone through to incorporate “secular” social sciences into their religious-based curriculum. The author points out that such efforts have been, for the most part, “stillborn.” Subjecting Muslim religious thought to newer modes of query, such as critical thinking through the lens of theology, sociology, and philology, has not occurred. However, he seems to suggest, such an incorporation is absolutely necessary to help graduates find meaningful and fulfilling careers outside the confines of a mosque.

Part III, “Politics of Knowledge,” deals with the dynamics of learning and teaching, intertwined with the idea of faith and belief and with the tensions that manifest themselves when studying the hadith literature (the prophetic traditions). While some scholars in India and elsewhere seek to reinterpret these traditions to suit the modern world, others are uniquely traditionalist in a conservative sense, meaning that they seek to avoid modernist interpretations. He describes the processes of arriving at interpretations of hadith and fiqh (Islamic law) and why

those interpretations often differ among the various *madhāhib* (jurisprudential schools).

Part IV, “Madrasas in Global Context,” analyzes how these institutions have come to be seen by policy makers and those in the position to create discourses about them. Moosa points to the “vocabularies of difference,” (p. 209) as when Americans and Europeans use “madrasa” along with other terms such as “Islamic fundamentalism.” In terms of removing minarets or other aspects of Muslim culture from mainstream Europe, this anti-Muslim bias has gone mainstream. “All madrasas have suffered from this whiplash at the hands of media campaigns fomented by a diverse range of actors,” (p. 209) Moosa contends. He calls for greater nuance and a more impartial examination of these institutions, which have been vilified for decades.

Not many people know that the oldest Muslim institutions of learning were madrasas. During my own 2014 visit to the mosque and learning complex of Qarawiyin in Fes, Morocco, I witnessed this century-old institution in action. As the faithful prayed, dozens of young men recited the Qur’an melodiously and in unison. The placed reverberated with the ancient sounds of Qur’anic recitation while staying in touch with the modern. Scholars of education have pointed out that this is one of the oldest models of what we can consider a “university.” The role of madrasas in educating millions of young people and providing them with a direction in life is often ignored.

Moosa states that a “barrage of Islam hating media assaults systematically violated and dehumanized me, and millions of other fellow believers, in a reckless, prolonged campaign of guilt by association that has, amazingly, not run its course” (p. 7). This book represents a scholarly and sensitive response to that. As such, it is a must-read book for anyone who is curious about the madrasa as an institution. It offers a close and deep look at this important institution that has survived for centuries and continues to provide education. “Learning, teaching and moral training are and always have been at the core of Islamic Life,” Moosa claims (p. 9), and this book reveals how these activities take place.

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