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## Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity (with Bettina Dennerlein)

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which Prodromou analyzes the consequences of 11 September 2001 and the promotion of the International Religious Act of 1998 in terms of the new and strong relationship between foreign policy and religion. The scope of the author's analyses stop just before the new Barack Obama era, but her insights on foreign policy evoke some of the orientations upheld by the new Democrat leader; notably the intention to 'strengthen international law and global governance' (p. 31).

Scott Appleby's chapter examines three groups that have contributed to the peace effort and analyses their effectiveness and breadth of dissemination. Among the factors that limit the success of certain groups is 'the failure of religious leaders to understand and/or enact their potential peacebuilding roles within the local community' (p. 128) and 'the insufficient exploitation of their strategic capacity as transnational actors' (p. 129). The examples Appleby has studied are nevertheless successful, even if they were modest at the beginning: Buddhists in Cambodia, the Catholic movement Sant'Egidio and its international network and initiatives, and the Muslim transnational network for peace. He shows how their religious specificities and local roots are making a difference and how their theology has been transformed by their mission. Appleby also stresses the fact that professionalism and pragmatism are as important as spirituality and mysticism in their role as sources of inspiration to these groups.

Vinjamuri and Boesenecker evaluate the junction between such groups and issues related to justice. They offer a systematic typology of the dynamics or logic of action and actors – one that would be useful for further research projects. One particularly illuminating chapter offers an analysis of the roles that religious actors play in the critique of global economics and of certain problematic issues associated with developing countries. Katherine Marshall explores the interactions between development institutions and faith groups and advocates financing such groups, so long as the contributions are recognized. Among the examples included are Sant'Egidio and its fight against AIDS; the Aga Khan Foundation and Early Education in the Muslim world; Fey Alegría and Education Reform in Latin America; and the Jubilee 2000 movement in favor of debt relief. Marshall discusses both the positive and negative implications of religious groups becoming embroiled in social and peaceful causes. Among the arguments that are in favor: '[F]aith institutions have a wealth of experience, an array of instruments, infinite compassion and love, and a community of believers' (p. 224). A chapter authored by Banchoff discusses and documents some debates on bioethical issues and stresses the efforts that some religious institutions make to influence ethical debates, such as the cloning issue: 'a growing number of global issues with ethical dimensions ... intersect with religions traditions' (p. 291). If their efforts have failed, they have nevertheless influenced some aspects of the debate, but Banchoff estimates that influential religions should be aware of the impact of engaging in a constructive and collaborative dialogue with secular organizations, particularly in the field of bioethics and science. Until now, the various efforts undertaken have remained fragmented.

This book constitutes a remarkable contribution to the study of religion in the public sphere. With regard to the theoretical links between politics and religion, we would be better inclined to question a little further the philosophies of recognition (such as that of Taylor), or consensual (such as that of Rawls). As an expert in a commission on religious diversity and the state – presided over notably by Charles Taylor in Quebec – I have found that the liberal theory of consensus can lead to the conclusion that religious groups ought to be privatized, even if one insists on the rights to religious freedom and individual public religious expression. At its core, the book opens up profound discussions, not so much on the neutrality of the state, but rather on the conditions surrounding the many, essential collaborations between states, secular organizations and religious groups.

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**Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008, xii + 284 pp., \$35 (cloth), ISBN 978 0 804 75250 3.**

Focusing on Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab and Muhammad 'Abduh, two major representatives of modern Islamic thought, this book constitutes a comprehensive effort at reinterpreting Muslim reformism. It is a thoughtful and well-argued study that challenges not only fixed ideas about the origins and the failure of 'Islamic liberal humanism', but also ready-made generalizations about 'Islamic radicalism'.

The author starts with a sharp critique of the widespread image of the two thinkers as indicating opposing trends in modern Islamic thought – that is, irrational, 'fundamentalist' militancy (Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab) vs. rational, liberal humanism inspired by European thought ('Abduh). Instead, Samira Haj proposes considering both as being part of one and the same tradition of reform/revivalism/renewal in Islam – a tradition she traces back to the third Islamic century. Based on a notion of tradition inspired by Alasdair Macintyre and Talal Asad, Haj conceptualizes reform as a discursive tradition in its own terms and according to its own rationality. Islamic reform as a discursive tradition does not simply refer to the past, but rather represents a device for creating coherence over time and space with the help of references to a set of foundational texts, as well as the assistance of particular procedures, arguments and practices (p. 6).

One of the major contributions this book makes to the study of modern Islamic thought exists in the demonstration that the notion of the 'modern Muslim subject' that emerges from the writings of 'Abduh – while responding to the basic requirements of colonial modernity – is at the same time firmly rooted in a well-established historical tradition within Islam. This tradition, which makes the cultivation of the 'subjective interiority' its key concern (p. 110), has been constantly reinterpreted throughout history with respect to the methods and devices to be applied in order to achieve its goal. Thus, while Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab made the exterior domain the privileged focus for educative devices, 'Abduh opted instead for the interior domain (p. 114).

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter One ('The Islamic Reform Tradition') outlines the theoretical and historical background of the study. Chapter Two ('Rethinking Orthodoxy') is devoted to the historical setting of 18th century Arabia to help contextualize Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab's reinterpretation of the discursive tradition of Islamic reform. Haj gives a succinct summary of his life story and emphasizes the

importance of the tribal background in order to understand the impulse and the impact of Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab's thinking. More or less in line with another recent study on the subject (Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), Haj maintains that Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab's activism cannot be considered an expression of his 'violent and radical temperament', but was rather inspired by his 'duty as moral critic and muslih' (p. 54). His major concern, according to Haj, has been to effectively establish the link between belief in the oneness of God (*tawhid*) and moral obligations demanded by God (p. 43). In Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab's view, disciplined virtues are components of worship itself (p. 44). The author states 'Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab conceptualizes *tawhid* as embodied practice through three interrelated principles: utterance (*qawl*), performance (*'amal*), and inner conviction (*iman*)' (p. 46). Reinterpreting the distinction established in orthodox Muslim thought between the inner and the outer realms of human behaviour, Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab considered the outer realm of correct utterance and performance indispensable to inner faith (*iman*) (p. 48), hence his radical critique of and open attacks on practices he considered contrary to orthodoxy.

The third chapter ('An Islamic Reconfiguration of Colonial Modernity') outlines the historical background of the life and work of Muhammad 'Abduh (pp. 67–108). Again, Haj stresses the fact that while 'Abduh's understanding of reform was strongly influenced by colonial modernity, it was also deeply rooted in the discursive tradition of Islamic renewal. Haj criticizes authors who have depicted 'Abduh as a liberal humanist, a liberal salafi or even an agnostic for having missed this dimension of his thought (pp. 68–71). She also criticizes the widely held assumption that 'Abduh's project of Islamic reform has failed. She insists that 'Abduh's understanding of reform and its particular rationality must be evaluated according to 'their own standards of coherence' (pp. 73ff.). These standards, according to Haj, are not only incompatible with, but clearly opposed to the values of Western liberalism. Haj positions 'Abduh in the intellectual and political setting of turn-of-the-century Egypt. The problems that dominated debates among Muslims at that time were, according to Haj, the following three: rethinking Islamic orthodoxy in the light of colonial modernity, redefining the relations between civic power and religious authority, and, finally, designing a Muslim subject more attuned to modern forms of discipline and power without relegating religion to the private sphere (p. 113).

Haj stresses the pivotal role played by the concepts of *taqlid* (consensual precedence) and *ijtihad* (reasoning independent of precedent) in 'Abduh's writings (pp. 77–86). While recognizing the long-standing history of both concepts, she points to their changing meaning and significance over history. Thus, *taqlid* and *ijtihad* have by no means always been regarded as being antagonistic. Rather, this opposition must be considered a particularly modern one (p. 81). In the same vein runs her juxtaposition of 'Abduh and Abu Hamid Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111), whom she considers one of the main representatives of the Islamic reform tradition (pp. 86–90): whereas al-Ghazali defined orthodoxy as attaining the equilibrium between 'undue difficulty (*'usr*) and extreme ease (*yusr*)' and as the balance of all virtues in order to respond to the challenge posed by Greek philosophy, 'Abduh's use of the same notions aimed at reconciling orthodoxy with a selective appropriation of colonial modernity (p. 90). Analyzing 'Abduh's disputations with the French historian and politician Gabriel Hanotaux, as well as with the Arab Christian Farah Antoun, Haj depicts 'Abduh as a kind of a precursor to the idea of *multiple modernities* (pp. 90–99). On the one hand, he relegated Western secular modernity to its own particular historical context (p. 93). On the other hand, he formulated an alternative Islamic understanding of modernity. According to 'Abduh's vision, religion was not opposed to rationalism and progress, but rather lay at the very heart of both (p. 96). 'Abduh's molding of a particularly Islamic modernity goes along with the drafting of a modern and, at the same time, a Muslim subjectivity.

Chapters Four ('Governable Muslim Subjects') and Five ('Love and Marriage') are devoted to a detailed discussion of the modern Muslim subject. They focus on how the long-standing Islamic tradition of cultivating the inner self is reconfigured by 'Abduh with respect to different social fields. From her analysis, Haj concludes that 'Abduh's approach to subjectivization through the inculcation of a set of disciplinary practices, while being indebted to al-Ghazali, also seems to be analogous to Foucault's 'subjectivization of truth' (p. 115). 'Abduh reacted to the challenges of colonial modernity by partially adopting new techniques, institutions and disciplinary measures. He advocated centralizing and modernizing education as well as the modern vision of the family based on companionate marriage, love and mutual respect (pp. 128 ff.). The family was considered by him as well as by other reformers as an important site for moral development – especially the development of children. A theme of major import here was to produce self-regulated and self-reliant individuals with a strong concern for the common good (p. 127). In opposition to the liberal understanding of subjectivity existing in contemporary European thought, the private/public relations in 'Abduh's understanding were '(...) more nebulous than distinct, more hybrid than binary' (p. 118). For 'Abduh, the moral self was not conceivable outside a Muslim community of believers.

Haj's innovative and lucid study represents a most welcome theory-based contribution to the growing revisionist literature that tries to underline the complexity of reformist thought in modern Islam and to explore its diverse historical roots – even if the author regrettably does not engage in a systematic discussion of this literature. More particularly, the author has not taken into account studies like Mohamed Haddad's analyses of 'Abduh's theological thought and of the compilation and editing of his work (for example, Haddad, 'Abduh et ses lecteurs', *Arabica* 45, 1998: pp. 22–49; and 'Relire Muhammad 'Abduh', *Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes (IBLA)* 63, 2000: pp. 61–84) or, for instance, Thomas Hildebrandt's study of the impact of Muslim philosophy on 'Abduh (Hildebrandt, 'Waren Gamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī und Muhammad "'Abduh Neo-Mu'taziliten?', *Die Welt des Islams* 42, 2002: pp. 207–262). Thus, Haj leaves it to the informed reader to join the results of these more clearly philological and text-based studies with the theoretically well-versed insights exhibited in the present book.

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