

Riaz Hassan. *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. xviii + 276 pp. £12.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-579633-9.

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Comparative Sociological Study of Modern Muslim Majority Societies

It is a well-established fact that there is a great lacuna in comparative sociological studies of modern Muslim majority societies. Riaz Hassan has attempted to fill some of these gaps with his new work *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society*. The study seeks, through empirical evidence and sociological theory, to gain a more nuanced and less monolithic understanding of four distinct Muslim countries—Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia and Kazakhstan. The four societies were carefully chosen to represent different spheres of cultural and historical influence as well as divergent present-day state ideologies.

Hassan bases his study on extensive field-work undertaken in the four countries in the form of survey questionnaires focusing on religious, social and political matters. The questionnaires were administered to approximately one thousand people in each country and respondents were sought among three sectors; Muslim professionals, religious activists and the general public, although the second sector was not applicable to Kazakhstan due to the ban on religion and religious education during the Soviet era. Approximately one quarter of the respondents in each country were women.

The introduction provides a succinct overview of the four countries. The body of the text

addresses seven key issues in the contemporary discourse about Islam: the question of Muslim piety, the concept of the *ummah*, the self-image of Islam, the relationship between state and religion, gender and finally the perception of the 'other.' Each chapter, devoted to an issue, displays statistical charts of the data—organized by sector, age, education, and gender—and deals more broadly with sociological theory as well as the author's own observations and analysis of the figures. The style of *Faithlines* is clear and explicative. In fact one of the strengths of the work is that Hassan always acknowledges his sources, defends his approach by comparing them with others and is never afraid to repeat himself to underscore his main arguments.

And while both the empirical data and the author's ideas are engaging, *Faithlines* exhibits discrepancies between the statistical figures and the author's attempt to make them substantiate his theories or views. This has created some debatable assumptions and analogies. For example, in order to explain the low level of orthodox praxis in Kazakhstan, Hassan refers to Ernest Gellner's categories of "folk Islam" versus "high or puritanical Islam," maintaining that the Central Asian state is an example of the former. It is highly implausible that folk Islam, associated with sufis and saints, is comparable to the minimal practice and knowledge of Islam in post-Soviet Kazakhstan even if this was the case prior to the Soviet period.

Hassan also opines that Pakistan, due to the religious wording of its constitution, is a proxy for an Islamic state akin to Iran whose religious and state institutions remain undifferentiated, a description that may not accurately characterize the nature of the present Pakistani state structure. Other difficulties reside in the questions themselves, which by their wording or content, seem to color the outcome of the questionnaire. It is unfortunate that such incongruities exist and it might have been better had Hassan published two works, one purely statistical and one theoretical, because the author covers a great deal of material, introducing a number of interesting observations and ideas.

The chapter on piety is based on the Rodney Stark and Charles Glock premise of the multi-dimensionality of religion broken up into its ideological, ritual, experiential, intellectual and consequential aspects. Hassan clearly defines each dimension. Unfortunately, it was in this section in particular that the questions seemed slanted, although apparently they had been devised and tested over a long period of time by various focus groups. For example, of the five questions pertaining to the experiential dimension, three were about evil, fear and punishment and one seemed more applicable to Christian theology as it asked if the interviewee had had the feeling of having been saved by the Prophet Muhammad. Hassan then concludes—although not without questioning—that fear and punishment form important components in the Muslim's experience of divine reality. The fifth question concerned being in the presence of Allah but there was no request for information on positive aspects of the experiential dimension of religion such as love, mercy or grace. Some of the questions regarding the other aspects of religion, the general scoring system, and the conclusions drawn were equally problematic. For example, Hassan assumes that the Kazakhs represent non-orthodox or 'liberal' Islam because many did not or could not answer several of the questions. Despite these problems, through-

out *Faithlines*, Hassan does discuss emergent patterns and general trends in the empirical evidence.

In the next chapter, Hassan traces the origin and evolution of the concept of *ummah* in Islamic history and theology. He explains how the notion was once a means of creating a religious and cultural identity free of the state and was then transformed by modern revivalist movements into a transnational political body, potentially capable of overthrowing the yoke of western hegemony. Hassan sets out to measure the degree of "ummah consciousness" among the respondents by referring back to the statistics charting the ideological and the consequential dimensions of Muslim piety. The former applies to the basic religious tenets such as the belief in Allah, the Qur'anic miracles, the hereafter, the existence of evil and the heavenly destination reserved for only those (sic) who believe in the Prophet Muhammad. The consequential dimension denotes the effects of one's belief system on everyday life. The two questions used to appraise the latter asked if an atheist would most likely hold dangerous political views and if Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was impossible. Because Hassan defines the *ummah* as a community of believers, the premise for evaluating what he terms 'ummah consciousness' does hold. However, it would have been more apt to include specific questions on collective identity, national sentiment and/or the sense of solidarity with Muslim communities that are oppressed or in need. The questions conceived to appreciate the influence of religion on everyday life are simply too loaded to shed any true insight. Hassan often criticizes the apologetics of much Muslim literature but he has sought to avoid this pitfall by posing stereotypical questions often associated with the 'western' or orientalist critique of Islam.

The third part of the discussion is the most interesting and investigates the impact of modernization and globalization on the *ummah*. Hassan

contends that continued modernization in the Muslim world will lead to increased institutional differentiation whereby religion becomes one institution vying for legitimacy amongst many. The author proposes that the religious establishment will then be obliged to truly perform thereby gaining and preserving greater public legitimacy. The author posits that the main challenge of globalization for the Muslim world is intellectual and resides in resolving the conflict between authenticity and hybridity, a tension he regards as a root cause of fundamentalism. *Faithlines* foresees a new postmodernist-type Islam emerging if this intellectual challenge is met peacefully and successfully. According to Hassan, this Islam would consist of a set of decentralized local Islams, each one capable of embracing local and global Islamic identities.

The study of the self-image of Islam bases itself on William Montgomery Watt's critique of the traditional Muslim worldview articulated in *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*.^[1] The questions were devised on the basis of this critique. To determine the degree of traditionalism, the respondents were asked such questions as whether the Qur'an and the *sunnah* contained all truths until the end of time and whether the implementation of *shari'ah* law was necessary. The results were surprising. For example, apparently 93 percent of Indonesians, Egyptians, and Pakistanis maintain that Muslim society must be based on the Qur'an and *shari'ah* law. The fact that even Kazakhstan was in 51 percent agreement with this statement evinces the overriding necessity for further inquiry into the definition of *shari'ah* on both a national and individual level.

Faithlines contrasts 'traditional' with 'liberal' Islam. Five questions were proposed to calculate the degree of liberalism among the interviewees. Many of the questions assessing both worldviews--traditional and liberal--were ill conceived. The main difficulty may reside in the fact that *Faithlines* tries to embrace too many topics and as

such the reader is left with yet another stereotypical image of the Islamic world. Of the five questions posed about liberal Islam, one stipulated that knowledge came from human reason based on empirical evidence rather than from revelation. The reason versus revelation debate, although part of early Islamic thought--especially Mu'tazilism and philosophy--played a much greater role in Christianity. Human reason in Muslim theology and exegesis has always been considered a divine gift from God. This does not mean that clerical and political powers have not tried to undermine and repress its agency. The point is that if one agrees with the statement, one is denying revelation while if one disagrees, one is denying human reason. It should also be noted that the proponents of modern liberal Islam human and revealed knowledge as dichotomous or mutually exclusive. On a more perspicacious note, the author remarks that the data points to a new traditionalism, one that has incorporated some liberal tendencies. This echoes much recent scholarship, for example Anne Sofie Roald, Margot Badran and Nilüfer Göle in the field of gender. Although William Montgomery Watt, Ernest Gellner and Fazlur Rahman remain excellent scholars, a clearer picture of the contemporary Muslim's self-image would have emerged had the author integrated more recent research while formulating his questionnaire.

In the chapter discussing the relationship between religion and the state, Hassan following Ira Lapidus, distinguishes two types of Muslim political formations; the differentiated where the religious and political institutions remain separate, and the undifferentiated where they do not. His objective is to identify the type of political formation in which religious institutions enjoy greater public trust. The questions were straightforward and inquired about the degree of confidence in several religious and secular institutions such as courts, television, army, *'ulama*, schools and so on. The only difficulty here lay in using Pakistan as a proxy for an Islamic state because of modern de-

velopments geared towards a greater integration of religion and state. Kazakhstan demonstrated an extremely low level of trust in all the major institutions cited in the questionnaire. Pakistan revealed a low trust level in all institutions except for the armed forces. Both Egypt and Indonesia exhibited a high level of trust in the religious establishment. Hassan analyzes these findings in two ways. He first suggests that the public's high level of trust in the religious establishment may be explained by the state's lack of popular legitimacy or its authoritarian nature. To then explain Pakistan's low level of trust in religious institutions, he puts forth Niklas Luhmann's theory, which maintains that institutions only gain in legitimacy when they are autonomous from the state. Hassan considers Pakistan, unlike other countries, an example of an undifferentiated Muslim political formation.

Hassan does not consider Islam a misogynist religion but believes that religious texts were, and often still are, interpreted from a patriarchal perspective. To observe the general attitudes towards women, interviewees were asked about the mother-child relationship of a working woman, the financial contribution of the woman to the household and male superiority as political leaders. The questions were neutral and hence the answers were informative. The Indonesians came closest to gender equality and the Egyptians last. The second set of questions focuses on veiling, seclusion and male superiority. The first question enquired whether women were sexually attractive, and whether segregation and veiling were necessary for male protection. This question is in fact three questions and would be confusing for an interviewee to answer. It also makes several assumptions about the veil, which the respondents may or may not hold, for example attributing its adoption to customary views on the female responsibility for male sexual desire. The question also implies that veiled women are necessarily segregated which is not necessarily the case, especially in South-East Asia where many professional women wear a

headscarf. While Hassan does mention the concept of 'new veiling' and condemns the "patronizing preoccupation with the veil" (p. 192), he equates the veil solely with male control of female sexuality. And although the debate over whether or not the veil feeds into patriarchy continues, perhaps enough work has been carried out to concentrate—at least in countries where it is not legally enforced—on larger and much more pressing issues.

In the last section, addressing the perception of the "other", the respondents were asked whether Islam, Christianity, Atheism and Judaism would increase or decrease in influence and whether certain non-Muslim majority governments were sympathetic to Islam. Hassan observes a general consensus in the perception that Islam will gain in influence and that many non-Muslim majority countries are unsympathetic to Islam. He questions the validity of these perceptions without probing into their causes and predicts a greater moral polarization in the Muslim worldview. Hassan concludes that political relationships with Western countries do not augur well because of this Muslim sense of moral superiority.

Faithlines demonstrates a general lack of unity—between the data and its analysis and between the stated aims of the book and the formulation of the questions. As a whole it attempts to cover too much material offering an over-simplified view of the Muslim world and sometimes presenting contradictory views. This is all the more a shame as so much energy was deployed in the fieldwork and in the study as a whole. The new statistics and the ideas mostly based on previous theoretical research may be useful for further research. However, *Faithlines*, despite its interest, does not form a solid piece of scholarship because of its methodological and theoretical weaknesses.

Note

[1]. W.M. Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1988).

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