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Magnus Marsden, *Living Islam. Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-West Frontier*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 297 pages.

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[1] This pleasure is rarely given to a book reviewer, so I shall put it simply: *Living Islam* is an important work, and this justifies assessing it in earnest and at length.¹ 'What does it mean to live a Muslim life?' wonders Magnus Marsden. Asking this basic but powerful question has perhaps never been as strong a scientific imperative as today. To be sure, everyone—from the media and think-tanks in the West to religious and political authorities in the Muslim world—claim monopoly over the answer. This is particularly true when it comes to Pakistan, a country where disputes over the right to define 'what a Muslim is' have direct political and legal consequences.

[2] Unfortunately, in the Pakistani context, this issue is, more often than not, brought to public attention through books with evocative titles but poor analytical content.² Since 2001, it has caught the imagination of apocalyptic and often conceited interpretations (based on a handful of Islamist propagandists' dreadful claims) rather than PhD candidates, the latter explaining only to a certain extent the former. Consequently, the so-called 'Talibanization' of Pakistani society—now almost a decade old, if slightly rusty—is still fashionably perceived as having been brought about by a rogue Islamic state, frozen-in-time *ulama*, so-called tribal chiefs, unthinking, *madrassa*-trained students, and submissive women.

[3] What Magnus Marsden successfully challenges is precisely the notion that Pakistan 'is a place brimming with unthinking village conformists and, thus, inevitably in the grip of Islamising fanatics' (p. 239). If only one reason to read *Living Islam* was to be given, then, it is for the book's challenging account of how people pressurized in their day-to-day life by radical reformist

¹ I am most grateful to Maheen Pracha for her help in editing this text.

² Such as, for instance, Abbas, Hassan (2005) *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism. Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror*, New York: M. E. Sharpe.

preachers perceive and interact with what they label the 'bearded ones', 'narrow-minded' or 'hardened' Muslims. The puritan form of Islamization pursued by the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA, the Islamist coalition in power in the North West Frontier Province), similar in many ways to the Taliban's as far as its fight against profane culture is concerned, is regarded by the people Marsden met, 'Ismailis, as well as many Sunnis... as a threat to their way of being Muslims' (p. 18).

[4] This is all the more important because the area on which he focuses, the Chitral region bordering Afghanistan, is known to the scientific community at best only for its widely studied Kalash valleys, and at worst, to the general public for its association with the Taliban (who mobilised there, as the author mentions it), Bin Laden (whose presence in Chitral has been alleged by 'FBI sources' since 2003), or sectarian violence against its 30%-strong Ismaili community.³

[5] There are, nonetheless, far stronger reasons to read this book carefully. Its quality is the result of an intense personal but professional involvement with the area studied. For almost ten years, Marsden (presently Graduate Officer in Research at the Centre of South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge) periodically visited Chitral, first, to teach English and learn the local language (*Khowar*) of this non-Pashto-speaking area, and eventually to conduct fieldwork for his PhD thesis. Interestingly, the subject of his thesis, on which the book is based, was suggested by companions during his discussions with them in Chitral itself. It thus articulates their own lines of questioning: exploring the reaction to and understanding of the growing influence of 'Islamizing forces' in their lives.

[6] Years of carefully observing rural and urban life, listening to inhabitants discuss their anxieties and pleasures, and building individual bonds with them, have finally been translated into this sensitive and, in many respects, highly original work. Marsden takes us on an unusual journey—scientific but also literary and poetic—towards a better understanding of the 'critical responsiveness to 'Islamization'' (p. 8) in a rural Muslim society that is nonetheless infused with a deep knowledge of Islamic doctrine and respect for Islamic practices. This allows him a wider

³ My only, and very brief, encounter with Chitral city was an unforgettable promenade in its bazaar in August 2000. In its main lane, from which women were totally absent, a couple of Westerners, both probably in their 60s, dressed in very tight, fancy and flashy biking outfits and forgetful, or unaware, of the Taliban's presence, was racing up to down, at the amusement of the well-trimmed bearded shopkeepers.

spectrum of inquiry: the multidimensional vision of what a 'world made perfect by religion' (p. 222) encompasses in this particular social setting.

[7] This subtle anthropological study is also important because it has a strong thesis to defend—a phenomenon exceptional enough not to be passed over in silence. Its scientific stake (*pari scientifique*) can be rephrased as follows: to understand how Chitral's people handle the pressure to Islamize them requires a 'consideration of people's conceptions and experiences of the life of the mind, intellectual activity and emotional sensitivity' (p. 11). This involves analytical variables that are still underestimated by sociological studies of Muslim societies' reaction to Islamism. The relevance of Marsden's statement goes well beyond the Chitral case study: if 'being a Muslim in Chitral involves dynamic and creative processes, that reflect a complex interaction of decision-making, intellectual energy, debate and critical discussion, and ideally balanced levels of affect and emotion' (p. 240), this is unquestionably true for 'being a Muslim' in many other parts of Pakistan and elsewhere.

[8] It remains that this scientific intuition—impressive for the 22- or 23-year-old PhD candidate that Marsden was when he started studying the region in 1995—is all the more commanding because it springs from his own empirical observations. Indeed, what initially surprised him was the important role that music, poetry, and travel played in Muslim life in Chitral. More decisively, he was struck by the level to which intellectual and emotional refinement was not only valued by people—men as well as women; urban residents in Chitral's main city, Markaz, as well as rural villagers, particularly in Rowshan; and even by the most 'extremist' among them, such as young *ulama* (*dashman*) trained in Peshawar's Deobandi *madrassa* or the Jamaat-Islami's sympathizers—but how it was also a decisive component in their questioning and debating the norms of spirituality and religious behaviour that they are called upon to change.

[9] The author defends his main thesis through a narrative choice, which constitutes, as well, a discrete but significant contribution to the anthropology of Islam. First, the book includes many unpublished or even un-translated beautiful verses of *Khowar* poetry.⁴ Second, it is written as if, and rightly so, the only way to convey the 'complex nature' of Chitrali society's 'subjectivity' (p. 7) (or that of any Muslim society for that matter) is by letting the reader 'meet' some of the thought-provoking individuals he encountered. Without either attempting to categorize these characters or filling pages with unending quotations, he gracefully suspends his analysis and lets

⁴ 'Reclining at the feet of an angel / I will say go back the day of my death / For what life is there / If your beautiful form is not to be there?' (p. 148).

his object unveil itself. In other words, Marsden belongs to the small category of researchers who take seriously the explicit enunciations of their interviewees, of people such as Israr, an uneducated caretaker of a primary school, an alcohol drinker and hashish smoker, but considered by the villagers a 'deep thinker' for his contentious but thought-provoking comments on Islam.

[10] This is also true for the striking Arkhon sahib, a Deobandi *alim* and member of the Tablighi Jamaat, committed to purifying village life from immorality but who carefully explains how and why making amulets is permissible. Marsden also introduces us to his friends' thoughts and feelings: Farhan, who educates his wife despite criticism from the other villagers, because he is convinced that his marriage will only be successful if she is able to talk about 'more interesting things than the health of her cows' (p. 101); Aftab, the clean-shaven, onetime member of the Jamaat-i-Islami who is vocal in his criticism of the Taliban for their 'surface level interpretation of Islam' (and was once humiliated by one of their zealots who smeared black soot over his face in a public bus); Majid who, on the contrary, considers the Afghan militia the only true example of an 'Islamic system' yet enjoys passionate discussions on the meaning and place of Islam with his companions.

[11] There is also Mufti, follower of an Islamist party and a musical performer who thrills his audience by imitating and mocking mullahs and super-conservative Islamists, and was even threatened by Chitral's *ulama* with the charge of blasphemy. And finally, there is the unforgettable Shabnam, the young Isma'ili village woman whose religious fervour was so strong that she braved her family's taboos and *purdah* to secretly go on a long journey alone just to 'catch a glimpse' of the Aga Khan in a nearby city.

[12] Why then do the people of Chitral, both Sunni and Isma'ili, understand a 'Muslim life' as one that has to be 'intellectually vibrant and emotionally significant' (p. 1) to be commendable? To address this particularly inventive *problématique*, and after presenting the multiple facets of village life, the book deals with the place of affection and emotions in living a moral Muslim life in a village, the pleasure taken from debating and 'the play of the mind', the shaping of new Muslim identities in musical gatherings in an urban setting, the multidimensional ways in which villagers think about the status and the role of 'men of learning and piety', and finally, sectarian relations and conflict between Sunnis and Isma'ilis. Instead of giving a summary of each chapter, I will focus on the methodological originality of *Living Islam*.

[13] Marsden embarks on an ambitious yet beguiling three-layered scientific task. First, he aims to show how the interplay between intellect, the emotions, and body informs people's moral judgements and ideas of what a 'Muslim life' is or should be. As he puts it, 'in order to understand the full complexities of Muslim thought and identity, it is not possible to simply ask how Muslims think about the claim of faith: what is needed, rather, is an appreciation of the ways in which Muslims engage—intellectually and emotionally—with different classes of religious knowledge, and, importantly, to recognise that they often do so in deeply critical ways' (p. 241). This thread leads to an important finding: the conventional way of classifying 'types of Muslims' (Islamist, traditionalist, fundamentalist, neo-fundamentalist, strict, modernist, liberal, Sufi, anti-Sufi, etc.) is simply untenable as far as Chitral's Muslims are concerned. The people we 'meet' in Marsden's book are, as mentioned previously, revivalist Deobandi scholars who make love amulets, reformist Jamaat-i-Islami supporters who cultivate their reputations for being Sufis and love poets, musical performers (such as *The Nobles* band) who not only play and pray in the same space but also try to 'civilise' their fellow Muslims by 'broadening their minds'. It is undoubtedly refreshing to be called to recognise that 'Islamization is something other than a one-dimensional process of purification or standardisation' (p. 155).

[14] In fact, the division that makes sense, as far as Rowshan villagers' conception of the different ways of being Muslim is concerned, is not 'reformist' versus 'liberal' but 'open-minded' versus 'narrow-minded'. This crucial distinction, which transcends other systems of categorization (educated/uneducated, young/old, men/women, Sunni/Isma'li, etc.) is complex and subtle, and analyzed beautifully in Chapter 4. To be 'open-minded' is not to conform to a set of standards and by no means synonymous with 'Westernization'. Its sense is precisely shaped by the importance and value people give to the 'play of the mind', to genuine yet balanced emotions, and to tactfully yet cleverly expressive bodies. Therefore, those who are able to engage in critical conversation (and as such, to show a 'momentary indifference' towards 'personal religious belief'), to write moving and thought-provoking poetry, or to sing and dance to it, are viewed as closer to Islam than 'folks who have low thoughts about women and purdah, /.../ read too many religious books, and /.../ are over-emotional about religion' (p. 120).

[15] In other words, living a mindful Muslim life means being 'intelligent' and this, in the view of Rowshan's residents, 'requires not only a fast mind /.../ but also a heightened sense of bodily feeling and intuition [and being able] to go beyond the surface-level words and get the sounds of the heart, for it is in the hidden depths of the heart that true thoughts are to be found'

(p. 121). This perception results from the strong influence Sufism enjoys in Chitral ('Islam is the knowledge of the heart', says a Chitrali man working in a carpet shop in Karachi to the author, quoted on p. 34), but it is also linked to a lesser known dimension of Islamic morality. Its exploration constitutes the second scientific task of *Living Islam*, namely how the interplay between mind, emotions, and body is itself determined by a firm but variable distinction between the open and the hidden.

[16] This includes an analysis of the difference between the home (ideally, the locus of affection and security) and outside environment (a place of tension and anxiety) (Chapter 2). However, the analysis goes beyond this common distinction, especially in Chapter 3, which addresses the village's moral and emotional landscape. Here, Marsden offers a remarkable anthropological examination of children's role (his account of the 'devilish' children who can turn villagers' relations 'upside-down' by disclosing secrets to which they have access in private homes, or who can become 'scoundrels', is an intellectual gem). He also discusses parental love, women's moral evaluations, illicit cross-gender friendships, education, and migration. The way people make moral valuations about these issues is structured by the necessity to maintain 'proper levels of emotion and affection' and by constantly negotiating the division between the hidden and open, secrecy and revelation, the inside and outside. Indeed, the hidden and open offer two sets of moral standards. This explains why a 'true Muslim' is commonly perceived in Rowshan not as someone who practices his religion regularly, but as someone who is sincere, compassionate, and self-sacrificing.

[17] If the experience of undisclosed thoughts and emotions, secret knowledge, and the 'everyday tactics of concealment' (p. 22) is an ongoing feature of Rowshan's moral life, how and what to reveal or hide requires a constant decision-making process. This brings us to the third noticeable dimension of Marsden's anthropological exploration: how the complex triangle between the mind, heart, and body shapes not only moral valuations but also many practical dimensions of people's lives. Indeed, how to behave with the opposite sex, interact with neighbours and other religious communities, protect and enrich friendship, enjoy a satisfying family life, acquire an education (and what kind), conduct business (which could also be religious), and entertain are all crucial aspects where the meaning and the quality of a 'Muslim life' are not only put to the test but also thoroughly pondered on by Chitral's people.

[18] The proper balances between mind, feelings, and body, as well as between the seen and the unseen, are key variables at play in making these day-to-day decisions. However, this is

also a highly anxiety-provoking (*anxiogène*) process. A wrong decision, and especially one in small settings such as Markaz and Rowshan, can dramatically upset individual as well as social harmony, bringing shame and disrespect at a personal level or arousing sectarian tensions. The emphasis on anxiety is one of the most innovative and interesting topics of the book, although regrettably, it is discussed more implicitly than explicitly.

[19] The book's methodological choices are of particular significance: because they focus on dimensions other than religious practice, and on spaces other than the mosque or *madrassa*, they enable its author to challenge brilliantly the usual assertion that Islamic morality is, above all, about piety. Debates in courtyards, buses, orchards and shops, musical gatherings, children's playful walks in the street, teachers' addresses in schools, men's greetings to each other at the bazaar, are among the many unusual sites from which the 'bodily experience, creative intellectual activity and sensory modes in contexts that appear to be something other than 'religious' are explored to illuminate the full complexity of the ways people construct Muslim personhood, and create and respond to revivalist visions of the Islamic tradition' (p. 156).

[20] *Living Islam's* reading of sectarian conflict also brings forth valuable observations and innovative analysis (Chapter 7). The issue is tackled from an unusual angle: how can the 'value of social harmony as well as discourses of difference' (p. 17) take shape simultaneously? In the first instance, sectarian violence in Chitral can be explained by tangible factors, that Marsden analyses in chronological detail, such as land disputes and individual politicized preachers (such as one of the provincial leaders of the Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam [JUI]). However, this is an inadequate explanation and the author recalls that violence grew out of underlying tensions between Sunnis and Ismailis regarding conceptions of women and *pardah*, religious education, and the status of the Sunni *ulama*.

[21] Actually, it is Marsden's anthropological focus on open/hidden dialectics and the normative evaluation of emotions, which offers the most interesting hypothesis regarding sectarian violence. This can be read as a useful addition rather than an alternative (as the author claims) to reading sectarian distinctions as being mainly fuelled by modern styles of education and mass literacy, which have 'objectified' and transformed Islam into a 'system' of different 'doctrinal clusters'.⁵ *Living Islam* shows that sectarian violence in Chitral has less to do with standardized education than with 'underlying anxieties about inner dimensions of life and self

⁵ See Eickelman, Dale (1992) 'Mass education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies', *American Ethnologist*, 19 (4).

shared by both Ismai'lis and Sunnis' (p. 248). This is so because not only is the division between open and secret knowledge at the heart of doctrinal differences between the two communities but, more importantly, because it is a critical dimension of the way in which the boundary between Ismai'lis and Sunnis in the village is constructed and maintained (p. 201).

[22] Indeed, Marsden maintains that many Sunnis in Rowshan and Chitral are torn between their conception of the village as one moral unit and pressure from Sunni authorities to display stronger religious commitment and feelings (even to convert Ismai'lis to the Sunni tradition). This is a crucial issue: such pressure means not only demarcating stronger boundaries between themselves and their Ismai'li neighbours but also being forced to constantly situate themselves in terms of the place that this boundary occupies in their lives. It implies, for instance, being compelled to make, again, stressful decisions regarding such routine activities as eating each other's food, attending each other's weddings, inviting or not inviting one's best friends to a religious event when s/he belongs to another tradition, etc.

[23] Yet, *Living Islam* also shows that 'many Chitral Muslims negotiate religious difference through skilled mindful work on a daily basis, and one result of this is the generally peaceful nature of Ismai'li-Sunni relations in Chitral' (p. 246), notwithstanding episodes of terrifying violence. Insisting on factors that have the potential to prevent or diffuse violence, in settings where strong Ismai'li minorities cohabit with Sunnis, is another very valuable scientific as well political contribution of *Living Islam*. It reminds us that, at the village level (still widely conceptualized as a single moral unit), Ismai'lis and Sunnis join together in shared sources of faith and value as well as in the common pleasure of the play of mind and creative musical and intellectual performance. More strongly, Marsden underlies that Rowshan's concern about 'a thoughtful life of plurality' and 'the danger of excessive displays of inauthentic emotion' can act as a safeguard against sectarian violence (see pp. 193 and 222).

[24] The book offers other important empirical findings of interest to a wide range of researchers on Islam. Those working on Sufism will learn that the Sufi tradition in Chitral, surprisingly, 'focuses on intellectual and emotional engagement with Sufi texts and ideas, rather than ecstatic worship at shrines and affiliation to formalised Sufi lodges and brotherhood' (p. 241). Those studying *madrassa* education will be interested to discover that, while it is valued by Chitral's people, it is also critically judged for its potential to upset 'young minds' balance between reason and emotion' (p. 170). Social scientists studying 'jihadism', - and already suspicious of either the simplistic equation between poverty, lack of education, and the call for armed *jihad* or

the assumed parental authorization that jihadist organizations claim they get before sending their recruits onto the battlefield -, might be satisfied with the following tale of an uneducated woman from Rowshan. Worried that her younger son, studying in a Jamaat-i-Islami *madrasa* in Lahore, could go off to become a suicidal martyr in Kashmir, she sent her elder son to reason with him. What she was thoughtfully trying to do was redirect the young *madrasa* student's mental process towards his mother's love and care, fully aware that 'pernicious religious emotion' could lead him 'to deny family affective ties, act thoughtlessly and unreasonably' (pp. 169-70).

[25] Brilliant as it is, *Living Islam* has, like any other first academic work, certain shortcomings. There are recurring editorial mistakes (reprinted sentences or misspelled proper nouns, a disconcerting feature for a book edited by Cambridge University Press). The book's outline is also a little confusing: we go back and forth between the village of Rowshan (not even located in the only given map of Chitral district) and Markaz city. If this distinction is important enough to determine the plan of the book, then a comparison of the difference and similitude between rural and urban 'ways of being Muslim' is surely lacking. One also wonders why the author felt compelled to include such an encyclopaedic bibliographic and footnotes' apparatus. Its actual utility is doubtful as most of the references mentioned are brushed aside in footnotes as mere comparative elements.

[26] At the content level as well, some critical observations can be made not so much on the book's empirical findings (only an anthropologist working on Pakistan's NWFP region could seriously evaluate these) as on its methodology, tone, and some analytical fault-lines. Although the work is otherwise methodologically very strong, the level of analysis remains strangely undefined and ambiguous all through the book. It seems that Marsden has not really been able to choose between the individual and the collective agent; the passage from one to the other is taken for granted. This leads to self-contradictions. While he, somewhat condescendingly, calls upon his peers to recognize the importance 'of the independent self as a category for anthropological analysis' (p. 262), he often makes generalizations about 'the Rowshan people', 'the Chitral people', 'Sunnis', 'Ismailis', and 'Muslims', on the basis of a dozen individual cases. Generalizations are almost unavoidable and, in fact, welcome, but they should be based on a middle ground: in between isolated cases and 'the people', there are certainly distinct groups that can be identified by anthropological, sociological, political, or psychological indicators.

[27] The methodological mist is thickened further by abrupt explanations concerning certain crucial choices such as the decision not to explore the role that status distinctions play in

the everyday religious and social lives of villagers; this is a critical component one would expect, even more so as it is presented as a 'source of considerable tension in present-day Rowshan' (p. 45). However, we are not only told that it was 'difficult to do so', but that, 'for ethical reason[s]', the author has decided not to focus on it (p. 47). Without further explanation, one can only wonder what these 'ethical' reasons are.

[28] *Living Islam* also has, at some points, a tendency to *essentialize* its object. While Marsden is fully aware of the risk, when he states that a question of central importance for his book is 'how far ... the striking levels of intellectual vibrancy documented here [are] a reflection of Chitral's location within a unique frontier zone, or to what degree ... they challenge assumptions about the nature of religious thought and identity in rural localities in Pakistan and, indeed, other Muslim countries generally' (p. 24), he gives only an implicit answer, and one is left with the impression that the 'Chitrali Muslim' is an exclusive case compared to what is referred to in the book as 'down Pakistan'.

[29] It is certainly not expected of the author to test how far his main findings are valid or typical for the entire country (a claim methodologically indefensible), but interacting with Pakistani society in other parts of the country or at least comparing his observations with other anthropological works on Pakistan would surely have helped him realise that many kinds of behaviour and opinions that he attributes to Chitral's peculiar geographical, social, and intellectual set-up are indeed very much in evidence elsewhere in the country. Anyone who has spent a significant amount of time in Pakistan (or in any other Muslim country) is not likely to be particularly impressed by the repeated and predictable assertion about the 'complex and multi-dimensional ways of being Muslim'.

[30] The exemplary cases that the author analyzes are, in fact, an easily observable reality in Pakistan, from amulet-making Deobandi *ulama* encountered in Karachi and children playing cricket in a *madrasa* courtyard in Gujranwala, to a Lahore-based Islami Jamiat-i-Tulabah (the Jamaat-i-Islami's student wing) celebrating the *urs* of his *pir* once back in his family's village. Thus, if Marsden is absolutely right in criticizing the conventional classification of 'Muslims' (Islamists, liberals, etc.), he is wrong in assuming that only his case study proves how untenable they are. These rigid categories have indeed badly spoiled our understanding of the syncretistic traditions and the ambiguities of reformism in South Asian Islam as a whole. Imtiaz Ahmed, Barbara D. Metcalf, Vali Reza Nasr, and Yoginder Sikand, among others, have already made this point quite strongly.

[31] There are other analytical conclusions that could have been usefully enhanced by a comparative approach, not with Mali or Lebanon as Marsden does, but with other parts of Pakistan. One case in point is his analysis of sectarianism. For instance, the concrete factors that he identifies as being at the root of sectarian violence—land disputes and politicized preachers—have indeed already been emphasized in other studies of sectarianism in Pakistan.⁶ They also account for many acts of violence against Christians in Punjab.

[32] Another case in point is *Living Islam's* discussion on the place occupied by the body in Chitrali people's perception. Again, in many other regions of Pakistan, it is also seen as 'something that bears the imprint of thought' (p. 262). To limit myself to a place I know better, I often heard in Punjab that a disobedient daughter is *ziddi-patli* (stubborn and thin), as if her flesh was to be eaten by her 'selfish' thoughts. Similarly, women's dress and body language, men's gaze, and learned men's beard, are all the subject of 'stimulating discussion and emotional response' in which, and as much as in Chitral, Islamic morality is evaluated as a matter not of disciplinary practices but rather of the sincerity of one's intention (is the girl's *niqab* a disguise for meeting a lover incognito? is the *maulwi's* beard a cover hiding a big belly filled thanks to the devotees' money?).

[33] It is also surprising that Richard Kurin's work, one of the rare sources available on the subject Marsden focuses on, is not even mentioned,⁷ although it shows how, in a central Punjab village during General Zia's time (and one that probably had a much lower level of literacy than in today's Chitral), what a valuable yet practicable 'Muslim life' could and should be. This was the focus of lucid discussion, as much as the relationship with religious authorities was subjected to funny tales. Actually, people's multidimensional perception of 'men of piety', on which the book rightly insists (Chapter 6), is a general feature of any society where commitment to one's faith remains a central dimension of public life and is subjected to outsiders' moral valuation. To be sure, there are still hundreds of popular jokes in today's Pakistan about rigid and hypocritical displays of religious piety or licentious *maulwis*, which echo the amusement of

⁶ See Abou-Zahab, Mariam (2004) 'The Sunni-Shia Conflict in Jhang, Pakistan', in I. Ahmad & H. Reifeld (eds), *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptations, Accommodation and Conflict*, Delhi: Social Science Press.

⁷ Kurin, Richard (1986) 'Islamization: A View from the Countryside', in Anita Weiss (ed.), *Islamic Reassertion in Pakistan. The Application of Islamic Laws in a Modern State*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, pp. 115-128. Only a 1993's article by Kurin is shortly mentioned, but not used it seems, in a footnote.

Rowshan's people on observing the change in the young *dashmanan*'s (learned man) bodily comportment (p. 172).

[34] Valuing intellectual creativity and the ability to sound the truth of the heart is far from being a distinct feature of a Muslim life only in Chitral; it is the strongest repellent to authoritarian, puritanical, and Wahhabi-oriented Islamization in many other parts of the country. Twenty years ago, Kurin was already asserting that the ability of Pakistani rural society to defy attempts to be 're-Islamized' was informed by people's perception of Islam as more of a core symbol than a specific theology or body of practice. Indisputably, Marsden stretches the argument much further and to deeper spheres; intellectual creativity, for instance, is an analytical variable, which was totally absent from Kurin's work. Yet, his focus on people's resistance to government-sponsored Islamization in Pakistan's rural areas is not as pioneering as he claims it to be.

[35] In some parts of the book, a certain lack of intellectual humility also tends to damp the intense pleasure of reading its otherwise extremely fine analysis. This is not only confirmed by repetitive mention of the author's name in interviewees' quotations but also by lines such as 'I was able to make broad arguments about religious life and morality' (p. 256) or 'my account of Muslim life in Chitral differs, then, in striking and substantial ways from other treatments of the nature of Islamic tradition in contemporary Muslim-majority settings. Thus, this book's findings pose significant questions concerning /.../ how it is possible to account for diversity in the contemporary Muslim world' (p. 253). Is the author really the first anthropologist to reflect upon 'diversity in the contemporary Muslim world'?

[36] The reader is also led to believe, especially in the book's introduction and conclusion, that Marsden has succeeded in challenging, and putting back on the right track, this impressive list of disciplines: the 'anthropology of religion', 'of Islam', 'of Islamic education', 'of sociality in Pakistan', 'of emotion, thought, the intellect, personality and morality', 'of ethics', and 'of cross-gender relations', as well as 'broader philosophical and political concerns about morality, political violence and religious tolerance', without omitting 'social sciences debates' on 'political Islam', 'so-called religious conflict', and 'the post colonial development state' (all statements extracted from the book). This can probably be explained by the fact that *Living Islam* is derived from a PhD thesis, an intellectual exercise whose introduction is generally bound to make catchy yet unattainable claims. Obviously, the demonstration cannot do, and could have never done, justice to over-ambitious promises spread through so many academic fields.

[37] *Living Islam's* approach to the state is a case in point. While the author promises to contribute to a better understanding of the role played by 'the state and the machinery of state level politics' in communal violence and 'as a source of moral norm in South Asia' (pp. 25-26), these dimensions are in fact absent from his analysis. The state 'appears' here and there in the shape of a local policeman or a soldier, but it is not discussed in any serious and systematic manner. This is regrettable because, undoubtedly, the state has to be 'brought back' into the study of sectarian conflict, not just as an instrumentalist policymaker (consider Zia's policies) but in implementing 'harsh regimes of political and religious subjection',⁸ in the way it represents 'minorities' (in textbooks and censuses), labels political tensions, represses its discontents, and implements conflict management. This approach could have been usefully articulated to the local and personal level on which Marsden has invaluable empirical material.

[38] The book's treatment of morality and emotion is similarly frustrating. Both are key variables but neither are theoretically discussed nor defined, merely taken as given. Consequently, moral categorizations regarding Islam (*sahi*, *ja'ez*, *haram*, etc.) are quoted as being interchangeable, although they are not. Similarly, if anxiety (*pareshani*), a feeling mentioned an innumerable number of times, is rightly understood as informing the very praxis of Chitrali Muslims, this is asserted, not demonstrated. How does anxiety not simply accompany, or colour, judgement and reasoned decisions, but is, actually, at the heart of the very process of shaping one's aspirations, defining choice, and constructing moral preferences?

[39] This critical question is not answered, perhaps because addressing it would have inevitably pushed the author towards an interdisciplinary dialogue between anthropology, sociology, and psychoanalysis, one that he would prefer to avoid (as most social scientists persist in doing) even though another method of including the emotional variable in social science, without being tautological or merely descriptive, has yet to be invented. This is all the more regrettable as Marsden's ambition is, as he puts it, to 'demonstrate how it is possible to present an anthropology of the embodied experience of thought' (p. 28).

⁸ See Nosheen Ali's analysis on sectarianism in the Pakistan's Northern Areas: 'Contesting Texts of Rule: The Struggle for Religious Representation and Political Rights in the Northern Areas, Pakistan', *SAMAJ*, 2 (forthcoming, 2008). This paper has been presented at the *South Asia Council sponsored Panel on Minority Rights and the Meaning of Citizenship in the Himalayas*, Association for South Asian Studies, San Francisco, April 2006.

[40] This light treatment of the emotional variable is particularly manifest in Marsden's analysis of sectarianism. It emphasises that 'heightened states of religious emotion'⁹ (p. 237) and 'shared anxieties' are 'at the heart of the Sunni-Isma'ili conflict' (p. 248). This is an enticing hypothesis. But, although emotion and stress are made causal variables, the causal link is nowhere explained. For instance, we are told—and this is a decisive point—that it is not pressure from the radical *ulama* as such that people identify as the main root of sectarian violence, or even their inflammatory speeches in mosques, but instead the listeners' inability to control their emotional state or to maintain their critical intellectual activity so as to be able to see the 'real motivations behind the making of these speeches' (p. 221). This is a useful reminder of the urgent need to include the individual subject in our understanding of 'Islamization' in Pakistan - of the need to articulate the macro to the micro level, a missing link in current theories of Islamist militancy – but, unfortunately, the thesis further is not stretched further. Therefore, Marsden succeeds in studying how people perceive sectarian tensions, rather than he explains what really generates them.

[41] Finally, what is proclaimed as being a strongly critical appraisal of available studies on political Islam is indeed the weakest part of *Living Islam*. This is because the book fights the wrong enemy: Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy are virtually the only references discussed, although they are neither specialists on Pakistan nor anthropologists. One wonders why, for instance, in a critical appraisal of the assessed role of *madrassa* education in Pakistan, only Kepel's opinions are quoted, rather than Jamal Malik's or Muhammad Qasim Zaman's (social scientists who are surely far more recognized authorities on the subject).

[42] It is also a little odd to criticize Roy's main thesis, namely the failure of political Islam, on the ground that it does not 'appreciate the extent to which religion and politics have fused even in the Western political entities' (p. 250). In the same vein, why accuse him of failing to understand that the political and cultural diversity of Muslim societies explain the neo-fundamentalist movements' inability to bring about a homogenization of thought and practice (p. 252)? Roy has never claimed to look at the societal response to Islamism but at its intrinsic ideological failure (much as Marsden chooses to focus on the former and consciously ignores the

⁹ This is, in passing, a relevant aspect of Sunni-Shia tensions elsewhere in Pakistan. It is common to hear, in Lahore for instance, some Sunnis reproaching to Shias not to have a distinct tradition as such, but to purposefully trying to provoke them by an over-display of 'insincere' emotions during the month of *muharram*.

latter). Therefore, reproaching him to ignore the 'voices of Muslims who are themselves critical of emergent styles of Muslim thoughts and identity' (p. 250) is quite irrelevant.

[43] Unsurprisingly, therefore, Marsden's own analysis of Islamism or fundamentalism is quite disappointing. Firstly, he contradicts himself: after strongly criticizing Kepel for stating that *madrasas* 'brainwash' students and give them 'retrograde' worldviews (p. 159), he himself explains that the very limited number of boys from Rowshan studying in *madrasas* is based on the villagers' perception that these institutions create 'narrow-minded' and 'brainwash' students (p. 167). Secondly, 'Chitral's extremists' remain not only an elusive scientific category but also a faceless figure all through the book.

[44] It is indeed surprising that the author, who seems to have conducted a lot of interviews and informal discussions, does not include any talks with the young *dashmanan* he mentions so frequently. This would have helped us grasp the perceptions held by local proponents of the need to politicize Islam (or Islamize politics). Instead, they are approached by default or in absentia through the many ways that people perceive them or, at best, through the comments of a young *madrasa* student's brother. The voice of only one local supporter of the Jamaat-i-Islami is heard briefly, and that too, only on poetry and music; a strict old Deobandi *alim* is cited, but again, only on amulet making. Moreover, being a Jamaati or Deobandi *alim* is of course different from being an active supporter of the Taliban! For this reason, Marsden's statement that his 'book is also a contribution to the anthropological understanding of the form taken by the so-called 'Islamic revival' in the contemporary Muslim world' (p. 250) is hardly tenable.

[45] The author could have been content enough to contribute—which he unquestionably does—to two very important fields of research: one, the anthropology of rural Islam, and two, Muslims' responsiveness to reformist movements. As he rightly points out, the intellectual life of village Muslims has very rarely been the focus of anthropological research and, as far as Pakistan is concerned, has never been explored until his own attempt to do so. In addition, this is the first extensive anthropological work on societal responsiveness to 'Islamization' in Pakistan.¹⁰

[46] 'I have shown', writes Marsden 'that /.../ the Chitral people I know all felt that the life of a good Muslim is a mindful life, in which the play of refined and emotionally sensitive thought

¹⁰ A theme on which important insights are also, but only, given in Ayesha Jalal's historical study: *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*, London & New York: Routledge, 2000.

processes is and should be a critical element of everyday human interaction' (p. 263). This is indisputably a crucial input to our understanding of 'Muslim personhood' in a world where, as the author rightly recalls, faith counts. Anyone interested in Pakistani society should also pay close attention to one of the book's main findings: the perceived deficiencies in village morality, something local people lament so deeply, are rarely accounted for in terms of 'failure to conform to Islamic values' (p. 68). Lack of parental care or suffocating parenthood, poverty, unemployment, and boredom are all blamed for this. The present study of people's 'normative assessments' regarding Islam is, therefore, an extremely important reminder that Islamic morality is not only a much more complex and intricate sphere than the Taliban's programme of 'preventing vice and promoting virtue', but also that many Muslims are fully aware of it.

[47] For all these reasons, *Living Islam* undoubtedly joins the very selective group of groundbreaking academic books recently published on Islam in Pakistan. It deserves to become a 'classic' and I sincerely hope it will be.