

REVIEW

In a Pure Muslim Land: Shi'ism between Pakistan and the Middle East by Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, 2019. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 376 pp., \$90.00. ISBN: 978-1-46964-978-8 (hbk).

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By some estimates, the Shi'is of Pakistan, roughly around 25 million people, represent, after that of Iran, the second-largest community of Shi'is all around the world. Simon Fuchs's book is among the few scholarly works which have tried to shed light on this relatively under-studied community. His study of Pakistani Shi'is goes beyond their internal social and bureaucratic relations within the state, and concentrates more on the religious transnational trends which they have forged, especially after the 1979 Revolution in Iran. He argues how the Islamic Revolution in Iran, a watershed moment for Shi'i transnationalism, was factored in by some Shi'i scholars in Pakistan to consolidate their base throughout the community. Describing the evolution of these transnational ties, and its multi-layer interaction with the clerical authority and sectarian polemics in Pakistan, is the theme running through all chapters of the book.

The introduction of the book lays out a sensibly structured approach to underpin the transnational dynamics of Shi'ism in South Asia and the Middle East. There, Fuchs also unveils his methodology and resources, which is one of the strengths of the book: a large collection of periodicals, pamphlets, speeches, and interviews with Shi'i actors in Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and the UK. His nuanced argument is primarily built on the text produced by Shi'is themselves, which has not been available to us before. In a rather chronological order, in each of the subsequent chapters, he weaves these materials to articulate the overarching thesis of the book.

In chapter one, Fuchs describes the characteristics of the Shi'is in the subcontinent during the late colonial era. The chapter delves into the internal debates and concerns of the Shi'is while the state of Pakistan was forming. Building on unique resources, the author provides a cogent case about the Sunni-Shi'i tensions in the newly established Pakistan, land of the pure, and how the community was perceived by their exclusivist Sunni compatriots as the 'impure elements' (51). In the late colonial period and early independence, therefore, Shi'i elites, for their part, had to consolidate their authority within the community in a Hindu-dominated India, and later, in a Sunni-majority Pakistan. The next chapter touches on these internal Sunni-Shi'i dynamics during the first decades after the founding of Pakistan.

In chapter three, Fuchs further completes the *mise-en-scène* by bringing the transnational layer into this ensuing local tension. This chapter, in general, investigates the arguments exchanged regarding the community of believers' obligation of *taqlid*. It provides the reader

with a sense of how the Shi'i clerical authority, especially in its transnational form, has been contextualised in Pakistan. The author argues how espousing for the position of transnational *marja'iyya* benefitted Pakistani 'ulama' to shore up their authority within the Shi'i community, while encountering the Sunni majority. Yet the 1979 Revolution, and the establishment of a Shi'i theocracy in Iran, has dramatically changed this transnational dimension for the 'ulama' and the lay community alike. This new dimension – how the Revolution was debated, affirmed, or challenged in Pakistan – is the focus of the next chapter.

The 1979 Revolution in Iran ushered in an era filled with conflicts, more often than not tinged with Shi'i-Sunni sectarianism. The Revolution, in the eyes of its religious leaderships and their proponents, was a transnational project with the aim of ceasing the miseries of the 'oppressed' all around the globe. To champion this project, 'to export the revolution', there was a need for indigenous couriers in each and every country. Iranian 'ulama' were unable, at least as effective as a local *'alim*, to propagate the mission of the Revolution and to 'translate' its messages for the Shi'is in Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and elsewhere. In Pakistan, this became the task of personalities like Sayyid Arif Husayn al-Husayni (d. 1988) and Sayyid Javad Naqvi (b. 1952), to make sense of the revolution in familiar terms for the local community. Fuchs, in chapter four, lays out in detail the different stages of reception the Iranian Revolution underwent in Pakistan, and argues that in each of those periods there were 'complex negotiations of closeness and distance which, in turn, [were] influenced by the length of time Pakistani ulama had direct exposure to post-1979 Iran' (124).

This incessant process of loosening of and tightening up direct association with the Islamic Republic of Iran has become an overwhelming task for indigenous Shi'i 'ulama' in Pakistan and, for what it's worth, many countries across the Middle East and Africa. This has shaped the backbone of what Fuchs labels, in chapter five, as the dialectics of the local and the transnational in Shi'i-Sunni sectarianism. In the case of Pakistan, it resulted in a changing discourse of sectarianism – in some cases trapped in the broader Iran-Saudi Arabia hegemonic rivalries – for the last four decades, he argues. Fuchs concludes by shedding more light on how Shi'i 'ulama' in Pakistan have managed to carve out their position and to ward off the challenges posed at home by integrating into the Shi'i transnational (186). To this end, he calls for a more comprehensive research which denotes the bidirectional flows of religious thought between the Middle East and South Asia.

Simon Fuchs's *In a Pure Muslim Land* displays a wealthy and important contribution to our understanding of Shi'is in Pakistan, the indigenous 'ulama' and their transnational ties with other centres of Shi'ism in the Middle East. To my way of thinking, it is this transnational dimension and its impact on national identities of various Shi'i communities in South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe which deserves further elaboration. At one point, Fuchs concludes that 'the modern nation-state system have obscured from our view the intimate and competitive relationship between the Middle East and Muslim South Asia' (189); notwithstanding, I argue that the 'nation-state' and its relations with transnational Shi'i solidarity is still terra incognita and invites further investigation. Nationalist and identitarian movements are emerging all across the world, which has already unleashed unpredictable challenges. How would transnational ties impact the national identity of different Shi'i communities in the region? One cannot help but wonder how Shi'is in South Asia identify themselves. Take, for instance, the rise of Hindu nationalism orchestrated

currently by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Do Shi'is in Pakistan see themselves as more inclined towards their Sunni coreligionists in the subcontinent against the 'common threat', or do they seek sanctuary in tightening their ties with, let's say, their Shi'i 'brethren' in the Middle East? Facing this rising identitarian crisis, addressing the dialectic of national and transnational identities among different Shi'i communities seems more timely than ever. In this respect, the book provides a very important piece of the puzzle – laying the case for Shi'is in Pakistan – and stimulates further reflection on this issue.