Hegemonic Muslim Masculinities and Their Others: Perspectives from South and Southeast Asia

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Prior to the early to mid-1990s, anthropologists and others writing about gender and sexuality in Muslim-majority settings tended to focus on heteronormatively oriented women and the discourses and practices of femininity and sexuality associated with them. Much of the literature was given over to discussions of female genital cutting, headscarves and veils, honor killings, women's experiences under Islamic law and normativity, and their resistance to variously defined structures of domination. Since that time, research on these important topics has continued but we have seen a broadening of the domain of inquiry. Three examples of the expanded scope of inquiry merit note. The first involves scholars' burgeoning engagement with Muslim women's agency and ethical self-fashioning—in piety movements, community service, and Islamic boarding schools, for example—an engagement that has led scholars to highlight the need to disaggregate notions of agency and resistance and to recognize that many instances of agency do not involve resistance and thus warrant contextualizing in other ways (Mahmood 2005; Deeb 2006; Hefner 2019). The second example involves scholarly explorations of sexual diversity and gender variance among female-bodied Muslims who transcend or transgress heteronormativity—some of whom identify as women, others not—explorations that have underscored, among other things, the importance of appreciating that the diversity and variance at issue are by no means mirror images of their male-bodied counterparts (Habib 2007; Wieringa, Blackwood, and Bhaiya 2007).

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The third example, more germane to this essay, is evident in scholars' growing interest in embodied Muslim masculinities and the ways they are represented, symbolized, and lived in practice. Some scholars who have written about these latter topics have addressed "projects of masculinity, the conditions under which they arise and the conditions they produce" (Connell 1995: 39) and the psychodynamic processes involved in "crafting masculine selves" (Chiovenda 2020). Others have engaged "emergent masculinities" (Inhorn 2012), emphasizing the socio-historical circumstances animating variants of masculinity that have emerged amidst long-prominent hegemonies; these studies draw attention to the contingency of dominant discourses, which as Sherry Ortner (1989/1990) has stressed in her work on gender hegemonies, are never absolute, all encompassing, or eternal. Still others have focused on "nurturing masculinities" (Naguib 2015), gay men and transwomen negotiating fields of biomedicine and biopolitics (Najmabadi 2014), and transnational social movements spearheaded by queer men and LGBTQ communities generally (Atshan 2020).

An influential subset of the literature on Muslim men has engaged "the nexus between Muslim masculinities, Jihadist Islamism, and terrorism" (Aslam 2012) or what is sometimes referred to as "the crisis of Islamic masculinities" (De Sondy 2014). This body of literature has been animated in no small part by the events of 9/11 and the subsequent U.S.-led Global War on Terror (though it builds on antecedents that long predate 9/11). It is congruent with contemporary scholarship on masculinities among Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and others insofar as much of this work has tended to deal with masculinities in the context of colonialism, warfare, militarization, and ethno-religious or racial strife in postcolonial settings. This latter orientation helps explain Kam Louie's (2012) call to "free the study of masculinity from the study of empire."

Most of the literature on Muslim masculinities has focused on Arab regions of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Ouzgane 2006; Aslam 2012: 116; De Sondy 2014: 4). This is understandable inasmuch as the MENA region encompasses the birthplace of Islam and has also been the locus of major post-World War II geopolitical struggles. One should bear in mind, though, that the majority of the world's Muslims are not Arabs and reside not in MENA but in South and Southeast Asia (primarily Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia). Studies of Muslim masculinities that disregard or give short shrift to this expansive region effectively ignore or gloss over masculinities among most of the world's Muslims.

We need to appreciate in any event that while there is "no discernable singular Qur'anic masculinity" (De Sondy 2014: 13), Muslims in many parts of the world draw upon a similar (but variable) corpus of symbols, idioms, norms, ideals, and understandings grounded partly in Islamic texts (including

but not limited to the Qur'an) to organize, make sense of, legitimize, and represent key features of personhood, gender, and their private/domestic and public lives. Significant cross-cultural commonalities thus exist across (differences in) the Muslim world, albeit in a theme-and-variation sense.

One objective of this essay is to enhance our understanding of the diversity of Muslim masculinities by engaging the relevant literature from South and Southeast Asia, especially the Muslim-majority nations of Pakistan and Malaysia, each of which illuminates broad trends in the region.[1] This involves a "controlled comparison" (Eggan 1954) insofar as Pakistan and Malaysia, despite substantial differences, share certain similarities. They are both situated in "monsoon Asia"; they both have Muslim majorities who identify with Sunni Islam; they were both subjected to British colonialism; and the postcolonial leaders of both nations have been strongly committed to developmentalist agendas, with Islam figuring prominently in politics, public spheres, contested moral orders, and contemporary self-making in both instances. A second, related objective involves contributing to the literature on heteronormative masculinities, which even in a single national, ethno-religious, or more narrowly defined setting tend to be characterized by their plurality and the hierarchical relations among them. Some are hegemonic in Gramsci's (1971) sense, others are counterhegemonic, emergent, or simply Other.[2] These masculinities continue to suffer from the "taken-for-granted"

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[1] Due to limitations of space, I focus on masculinities among phenotypic males and do not engage the important literature on female-bodied masculinities (e.g., Wieringa, Blackwood, and Bhaiya 2007).

[2] Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony in the decade preceding his death in 1937 to explain that the domination of one social class over others is made possible not only by rulers' deployment (or threat) of brute physical force (involving guns, tanks, etc.) but also by subordinate social classes' "'spontaneous' consent" to their domination. The acquiescence ("consent") in question, he argued, was "'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (1971: 12). He went on to suggest that what we might term a "thick" civil society—characterized by extensive networks of associations, organizations, communities, institutions, and so forth that are inflected by the values and interests of the dominant group—frequently gives rise to internalized but not necessarily conscious or overt acquiescence, rendering it and the domination at issue simultaneously natural, commonsensical, even God-given, hence both immutable and sanctified. Consequently, except in times of crisis (e.g., of legitimacy), physical coercion may not be necessary to maintain and reproduce the class-based social hierarchies that were Gramsci's chief concern, though he also underscored that in many contexts of domination we see both coercion and consent. Because he wrote under extremely difficult circumstances (while imprisoned and suffering from debilitating medical conditions), his development of the concept of hegemony was fragmentary and incomplete, neither systematic nor altogether consistent. On some occasions, for example, Gramsci uses the term "hegemony" as more or less synonymous with "widespread" and/or "dominant" (albeit never total or absolute), without implying the previously noted meanings. Partly because "hegemony" does not appear in Gramsci's work as a single, monolithic, undifferentiated "it entity," generations of scholars have debated both the meanings of the concept and the range of its applications. Some have contended that the concept does not refer to "a particular form of power" per se, and that it is best understood instead "as a way of approaching the problem of

syndrome, especially in relation to the robust literatures bearing on women and on sexual diversity and gender variance among male-bodied individuals (Peletz 1996: 4–7; Gutmann 1997; Aslam 2012: 115–16 et passim).

My comments are organized into four sections. The first section following these introductory remarks provides background and context. The second, which centers on Malaysia, engages colonial and early postcolonial discourses on masculinity promulgated by British colonizers and Malay elites that depicted Malays (all of whom are Muslims), especially Malay men, as "lazy natives." It also examines a counterhegemonic narrative that emerged in the development-oriented decades that followed, that of "the new Malay" (*Melayu baru*), which was pressed into service to create a middle-class led by "new Malay men" committed to entrepreneurialism and neoliberal corporate capitalism. The third section of the essay is primarily concerned with Pakistan, whose independence involved a painful and bloody separation from India in 1947 (Partition) that fueled discourses highlighting the violent nature of Pakistani (and other) men. I thus consider the contemporary manifestations of these gendered narratives along with some of the ways they contrast with their Malaysian counterparts. The bulk of my comments on Pakistan concern how Muslim men in two different communities have positioned themselves in oppositional relation to hegemonic discourses of Muslim male violence. As such, my discussion of Pakistan (in terms of content and trajectory) differs somewhat from the ways I engage Malaysian material— as do the sources I draw upon[3]—though my concern in both instances lies with the plurality and hierarchy of discourses bearing on Muslim masculinity. The concluding section of the essay summarizes and briefly addresses a few comparative and theoretical implications of my arguments that masculinities, femininities, and notions of "the good life" and "a life well lived" are typically cast in multiple registers, and that the multiplicity at issue is usefully viewed in relation to the locally and regionally variable confluence of processes keyed to

how power is produced and reproduced" (Crehan 2002: 166), particularly in the context of class relations and the material forces entailed in such relations. Others take a more expansive and arguably less "materialist" view (e.g., Williams 1977), some of them illustrating that the notion of hegemony can be usefully deployed with reference to classless societies, to help us understand power, prestige, and axes of difference and inequality associated with gender and other variables (Ortner 1989/1990). Suffice it to add that in referring to "hegemonic masculinities" in this essay I draw on my reading of Gramsci, my earlier work (Peletz 1996; 2009), Williams (1977), Ortner (1989/1990), and the scholarship of Connell (1995; 2016), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), Inhorn (2012), and their interlocutors who emphasize the historically specific, potentially mutable relations of plurality and hierarchy among the typically contrasting and competing discourses bearing on masculinity that exist in a given national, ethnoreligious, or more narrowly defined setting.

[3] The section on Malaysia is based primarily on my ethnographic fieldwork and archival research (see note 7); the section on Pakistan draws mostly on the published work of anthropologists and historians.

macro-level forces such as colonialism, postcolonial nation-building, and global/
neoliberal capitalism.

A final set of introductory remarks involves a clarification. Many topics I
address in the section on Malaysia (e.g., discourses on "lazy natives," the
counter-narratives they helped spawn) could be explored in Pakistan and
other South Asian milieux. Conversely, the tropes of Muslim male violence
that I engage in the Pakistani setting could also be examined in Malaysia
and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. I am not suggesting that the discourses in
question are specific or unique to any given country or more expansive
region, or that similar kinds of essentialisms have any conceptual or analytic
purchase. I do argue though and endeavor to explain why the scope, force,
and overall salience of both the hegemonies at issue and their principal
Others are very different in the two nations that serve as the focus and
grounding of my discussion.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Much of what we know about South and Southeast Asians living in the past few
centuries—bearing, for example, on men of "martial races" (Gurkha, Sikh,
Pathan) and their putatively feminized Others (Hindus, Bengalis, Malays), as
well as women, religion, and politics—comes from the pens of European
colonial administrators, Orientalists, philologists, and missionaries. Some of
these observations were incorporated into classic anthropological texts of the
late nineteenth and early-to-mid-twentieth centuries (most notably, Morgan's
Ancient Society [1877], Lévi-Strauss' *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*
[1949], and Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* [1966]), many of which relied
heavily on "armchair anthropology" as distinct from substantive ethnographic
fieldwork. In the 1930s–1950s anthropologists began conducting systematic
fieldwork in the region. But even when they focused on exclusively male-
dominated political systems or social structures in "tribal" and other settings,
they tended to say very little about gender, let alone masculinity, per se.
Fredrik Barth's *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (1959), based on
fieldwork in the Swat region of Pakistan, is a classic example, though it
includes scattered observations such as "[p]ride, rivalry, and virility is
expected of chiefs" (133).

This situation changed in the late 1960s, which is when we see the first
"modern," fieldwork-based study of Muslim masculinities in the region. I
refer to the publication in 1969 of James Siegel's historical ethnography, *The
Rope of God*. Heavily informed by the variants of interpretive/symbolic
anthropology developed by Clifford Geertz (one of his mentors) and Victor
Turner, *The Rope of God* provides important insights into the ways
masculinities were experienced, represented, and symbolized by boys and
men living in rural areas and small towns in Aceh (then commonly spelled
Atjeh) in northern Sumatra, Indonesia (though the book encompasses much

more than this). The sixty-two-page chapter entitled "Men and Boys in Atjehnese Families" in particular deftly engages the mutually constitutive nature of symbols and idioms of (bilateral, matrifocal) kinship and gender,[4] while also illustrating the ways these repositories of meaning and templates for social action were keyed to long-standing patterns of male outmigration or "wandering" (*merantau*). The latter patterns entailed men leaving their natal (or wives') homes and communities and seeking their fortunes on commercial pepper plantations and elsewhere, typically in nearby towns or more distant venues, so as to accumulate cash, other material resources, and both the worldly experience and religious knowledge necessary to validate their moral standing as men and, if married, as husbands capable of providing for their households.

Acehnese masculinity (Siegel tends to discuss it in the singular) was partly configured in economistic terms keyed to Qur'anic injunctions specifying that men are the guardians and protectors of women (Arabic, *qawwamun*) and should thus maintain them in a material not just spiritual sense (Surah 4: 34). But it was also defined in accordance with Acehnese understandings of Islamic notions of personhood and gender undergirding such injunctions, particularly *akal* and *nafsu* (as they are spelled in Acehnese, Malay, and Indonesian). *Akal* ('*aql* in Arabic) refers to "reason," "rationality," "intelligence," et cetera, the qualities that separate humans from animals. *Nafsu* (*nafs* in Arabic), sometimes rendered as *hawah nafsu* in the Indonesian archipelago, is arguably the more complex of the two terms, or at least more difficult to translate. Siegel (1969: 99, 286) defines it as the part of human nature that is shared with animals, "everything within man [*sic*] that arises spontaneously," "hence hunger and sexual yearning as well as love for the world." Other scholars, some working in South or Southeast Asia, others in the Middle East or North Africa, gloss *nafsu/nafs* in similar terms, as "passion," "desire," "yearning," "flesh-centered desires and tensions," "lust," "natural instincts," "lower self," "carnal soul," "animal life force," "inner temptations," or simply "self" or "soul." The first seven or eight of these are the more common renderings, either singly or in combination, though contextual variation abounds, partly because of the local relevance of Sufi traditions, which are more pronounced in some parts of the Muslim world (such as Bangladesh and Pakistan) than elsewhere (e.g.,

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[4] In this context, the term "bilateral" refers to systems of descent, inheritance, and kinship generally that place more or less equal emphasis on links through male and female kin, as distinct from systems that formally prioritize ties through men (as in patriliny) or women (as in matriliny). The gloss "matrifocal" designates women's de facto centrality in the domestic domain and in kinship networks as a whole. Bilaterality and matrifocality (coupled with post-martial residence that is either matrifocal or neolocal) frequently co-occur, as in Aceh and among most Malays, Javanese, and other Southeast Asians. In this respect, Southeast Asia differs in important ways from South Asia, where patriliny and its common entailments, including patrilocality and pronounced patriarchy, are widespread. See also note 18.

Malaysia). Scholars routinely emphasize that both "reason" and "passion" (to use the glosses I find most relevant to the cases I examine) are present in varying combinations in all human beings, and that, despite its frequently negative connotations with respect to human comportment, sociality, and ethics, "passion," if properly guided by "reason," may be channeled into Islamic prayer, ritual chanting, and other forms of virtuous behavior (Peletz 1996: 224).[5] Some of them add that humans' quotidian struggles to live an ethical life, one governed by "reason" rather than (albeit in conjunction with) "passion," constitute the "greater jihad" enjoined upon all Muslims at all times. This is distinguished from the "lesser jihad" that involves taking up arms and that is ultimately far less common insofar as it is required and acceptable only in defense of the faith and the *ummah* (Aslam 2012: 108; Pandolfo 2018: 384–85 n23, 397 n27).

More important in light of the thrust of this essay is that, according to the official/hegemonic line in Aceh and other Muslim milieux—including neighboring Minangkabau, Java, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Sudan, and Morocco, to cite a few well-studied cases—males have more "reason" and less "passion" than females.[6] But this varies over the course of the life cycle, is evident primarily in adults, and is in some instances deeply contested by women and men alike, who are thus challenging the gendered distribution of religious capital (Bourdieu 1991: 10). In the case of adult men in Aceh and elsewhere, normative masculinity is an achievement, requiring the cultivation and refinement of "reason" through quotidian activities, including daily prayer and embodied piety, what subsequent generations of scholars, following Foucault, refer to as "ethical self-fashioning." This is particularly true for "ordinary Muslims"—as distinct from religious elites and those in the forefront of or active in religious or political movements—though it is relevant to men in the latter categories as well.

PERSPECTIVES FROM MALAYSIA/SOUTHEAST ASIA

The achievement of idealized masculinity in Malaysia in the late 1970s and 1980s, when I began my ethnographic fieldwork,[7] was more complex and fraught than in Aceh at the time of Siegel's research (the 1960s). There are a

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[5] Some of these dialectical relations have been incisively documented for the Khowar-speaking Muslims residing in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, discussed later in this essay. As Marsden (2005: 259) learned in his fieldwork there: "Reasoning intellect ('*aql*) must discipline the carnal soul, but so too must balanced affections exert a controlling influence on the overly excitable and critical intellect." To put some of this differently, "religious emotion, besides making possible intense religious experience, is also conceptualized as having the potential to facilitate reasoned thought and calculated action" (ibid.: 238; see also Verkaaik 2004: 42–45).

[6] See Dwyer 1978; Abu-Lughod 1986; Ong 1987; Boddy 1989; Lavie 1990; Ong and Peletz 1995; Peletz 1996; Brenner 1998; Aslam 2012; Alam 2018; A. Khan 2018.

[7] I conducted eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Malaysia in 1978–1980, seven months in 1987–1988, and six months since then, primarily in 2010–2013 and 2018. All of the

number of reasons for this, including the advance of global capitalism in Malaysia and throughout Southeast Asia (and beyond) in the decades since the 1960s; the ways that hierarchies of gender, race, religion, and class have been intertwined in Malaysia; and the fact that the demographically and politically dominant Malays[8] have long lagged behind the nation's other major ethnic groups (Chinese and Indians) in terms of monthly household income and living standards. Also relevant are widely promulgated colonial-era (1874–1957) and postcolonial discourses on "lazy (Malay) natives" (Alatas 1977) that targeted men. As will be clear in due course, these discourses are appropriately regarded as hegemonic in the sense of powerful, dominant, and widespread—which are among (and are at times) the defining features of hegemonies for Gramsci (see note 2)—even though they do not portray Malay men in "culturally honored" or "exalted" terms. I mention this issue partly to point to one of the ways my approach differs from that of Connell (1995: 77, 194, 213–15; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832), who typically confines the concept of "hegemonic masculinities" to variants of masculinity that are exalted or honored over others, notwithstanding some of their negative connotations (Ford and Lyons 2012: 5–6). This limiting view precludes understanding of dialectical dynamics entailed in the emergence of the kinds of counterhegemonic discourses on masculinity, certain of which subsequently attained hegemonic status, that are evident in Malaysia, Pakistan, and elsewhere (see Demetriou 2001: 342–45).

"Lazy Natives," "New Malays," and Their Masculinities

Some of the postcolonial discourses at issue were promoted in widely disseminated self-Orientalizing narratives of Malay political elites. The most (in)famous of these appear in The Malay Dilemma (1970), a heavily racialized screed written by forty-five-year-old Mahathir Mohamad who was trained as a physician but quickly turned to politics instead. Mahathir, as he was (and still is) commonly referred to, not only castigated fellow Malays for being "inbred," "apathetic," "soft," "idle," "weak," "passive," "feudalist," and oblivious to proper time-management and capitalist ethics; he also went on to become the nation's longest serving and most esteemed prime minister (1981–2003, 2018–2020). More important is that the socioeconomic and other circumstances that gave rise to The Malay Dilemma prompted the

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fieldwork was supplemented by archival research. Discussions of methods and findings are provided in Peletz (1996; 2002; 2009; 2020b).

[8] Ethnic Malays constitute 50–51 percent of Malaysia's population of thirty-three million people. The other major ethnic groupings are the Chinese, the majority of whom are Buddhists, and the Indians, mostly Hindus. Since all Malays are Muslims and since around 85 percent of Malaysia's Muslims are Malay, I use the designations Malay and Muslim (and non-Malay and non-Muslim) interchangeably when discussing Malaysia.

design and implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1971–1990), which, like its successor the New Development Policy (NDP, 1991–2001), was geared toward eliminating the link between "race" and "economic function" (Chinese as shopkeepers and businessmen; Malays as peasant farmers, etc.) and eradicating poverty among the predominantly agrarian Malays. Specifically, the NEP aimed to create a new middle class of business-oriented urban Malays, who would become more risk-taking, flexible, and entrepreneurial, and otherwise more competitive in relation to Chinese, Indians, and the force fields of global/neoliberal capitalism.

State strategies geared toward the uplift of Malays and the modernization of Malayan Islam, which was also part of the program, involved a critique of (rural) Malay masculinity and a call for its urban/capitalist transformation. Indeed, the discourses of lazy Malay natives focused on the sensibilities, dispositions, and habits of (mostly rural) men, not women, as did much of the NEP and the NDP. The same holds for the state-sponsored discourses of "new Malays" (*Melayu baru*) that were introduced in the early 1990s and that continue to be extensively elaborated in various realms of cultural production. The oftentimes formally unmarked subjects of these discourses have almost always been men, just as the public sphere has long been coded as masculine (Stivens 1998: 92–93). The future of Malays was thus held to depend on (among other things) the urbanization of men, albeit with their families in tow, and their critical reappraisal of, and self-distancing from, their rural past, which was enmeshed in matrifocal kinship—and in the state of Negeri Sembilan, a system of matrilineal descent and inheritance—and for these and other reasons unduly feminized.

The achievement of this recently emergent and increasingly hegemonic Malay masculinity thus involves not merely the quotidian subordination of "passion" to "reason." It also requires the embrace of a broad range of cosmopolitan, urban norms and livelihoods. Two more general analytic points are that masculinities, like femininities and other discourses bearing on gender and sexuality, are rarely, if ever, cast in a single register (Connell 1995; Reddy 2005), and that however cohesive the state project at issue is in theory, its translation into practice has lacked cohesiveness and has been, for many, largely unattainable.[9] In the case at hand, we may discuss the other registers in terms of four realms of activity that cross-cut a number of analytically distinct social fields: occupation; consumption and fashion; ritual and religion; and kinship/marriage, gender, and sexuality. I consider each briefly.

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[9] I draw here on the wording of James Scott (1994: xi), who emphasizes the analytic importance of not making a priori assumptions concerning either the cohesiveness of state elites' hegemonic projects or that state elites do in fact have such projects.

Occupationally, the achievement of this newly emergent masculinity has entailed pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities or white-collar jobs in greatly expanded government bureaucracies or the private sector, or, failing that, engaging in wage labor, rather than continuing with more traditional subsistence-oriented activities such as growing rice and tapping rubber. The more encompassing goal involves fashioning (male) selves that are more flexible, risk-taking, and entrepreneurially oriented, as suggested above. In terms of consumption and fashion, the attainment of the new masculinity means availing oneself of a new range of consumer goods, including, ideally, a modern concrete bungalow in an urban context, a car, and Western-style business suits and neckties, and patronizing upscale *halal* restaurants. In the realm of ritual and religion, "new Malay men" are expected to cultivate a heightened piety and to commit to rationalization in a Weberian sense. The latter means distancing oneself from syncretic rituals that contain elements of Islam but are grounded in the animistic and Hindu-Buddhist traditions that predated the "coming of Islam" around the fourteenth century, especially those associated with births, weddings, deaths, ancestral figures, and spirit possession. Ritual practices identified with Sufism are also to be avoided, as is involvement in activities associated with Shiism, particularly in light of the increasingly Wahhabi-inflected Salafi coloration of state-sponsored Islam that has occurred in recent decades.

As regards kinship/marriage, gender, and sexuality, new Malay men are increasingly encouraged to embrace the ideals of companionate marriage (but not necessarily monogamy) along with the contraction of extended kinship associated with it. Additionally, they are expected to comport themselves in accordance with conceptions of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality held to be congruent with the previously noted (Wahhabi-influenced Salafi) understandings of Islamic doctrine and normativity that have been ascendant in Malaysia over the past few decades. I discuss some of these issues in more detail below, but first want to underscore that we see similar patterns in Java and Indonesia as a whole. Nancy Smith-Hefner's research on the rise of companionate marriage in Java is relevant here. She reports that notwithstanding "an official state promoted ideology of patriarchal masculinism" and heated debates about women's "proper place" that have dominated media and the public sphere generally in Reformasi-era Indonesia, "the facts on the ground today favor women's increasing involvement in extrafamilial work and careers" along with new forms of masculinity and marriage (2018: 98, 100). These new forms place a premium on "compromise and themes of complementarity" as well as husbands who, compared both to their predecessors and to some of their present-day counterparts in Islamist circles and elsewhere, are "less distantly patriarchal," more desirous of "open, 'democratic', and emotionally expressive marital partnerships," and also more inclined to "express strong

support for their wives' and daughters' higher education and employment." This emergent pattern, she adds, "is most apparent among more middle-class, educated youth, but it is nonetheless a pervasive model and one that is rapidly spreading" (ibid.: 89, 98, 99), much as in Malaysia.

There are a number of figures who embody the idealized image of the new Malay man, but I would argue that those known as "*sharia* advisors" are of greatest symbolic and material importance. This recently emergent class of Ph.D.-bearing, globe-trotting experts, most of whom are male, is made up of the "'movers and shakers' of the formal Islamic economy" (Sloane-White 2017: 5). Sometimes referred to as business consultants or management advisors, they are hired to provide guidelines and advice to government ministries and large and small enterprises alike that are charged by state certification boards with confirming that their operations and workplace environments are "*sharia* compliant" and otherwise in accordance with Islamic law, ethics, and normativity (ibid.). The more general objectives of these cognoscenti is to help make the nation "more Islamic" through the dissemination of expert knowledge about *sharia* law and the mainstreaming of Islamic banking and finance, and thus to help position Malaysia at the center of global Islamic finance, whose assets in 2021 were estimated to exceed US$2.4 trillion.[10] Commonly clad in black business suits, these experts typically drive (or are chauffeured to work in) luxury cars, work in beautifully appointed air-conditioned offices, live in upscale housing (often in gated communities), and enjoy many other benefits of high-end salaries, such as being able to send their children to expensive private schools, take their families on overseas vacations, and undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Especially significant about the nation's *sharia* advisors are their deeply conservative views bearing on kinship/marriage, gender, and sexuality. Importantly, but not surprisingly, these tend to be shared by their wives and are increasingly espoused by Malay women and men of all backgrounds and social classes. In using the phrase "deeply conservative," I mean that the views in question evince pronounced strictness and conformity with respect to doctrinal orthodoxy compared to Malay views of the 1980s/1990s and previously (Wazir Jahan Karim 1992; Peletz 1996; Sloane-White 2017: ch. 5). Patricia Sloane-White's incisive (2017) ethnography of the life-worlds of *sharia* advisors and the corridors of corporate Islam is germane here. She found that gendered discourses bearing on "reason" and "passion" are highly salient in these social fields (as elsewhere; see Ong 1987; Peletz 1996; Frisk 2009), and are commonly invoked by men and women alike to explain a wide variety of social phenomena. These include: why men monopolize

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[10] Standard and Poor's *Islamic Finance Outlook*, 2021 edition, p. 7, https://www.spglobal.com/_assets/documents/ratings/research/islamic-finance-book-2021-edition.pdf.

the most powerful and prestigious positions in *sharia* consulting and advising firms; why they are seen as capable of greater piety and orthodoxy than women; and why even highly successful career women are ultimately defined primarily by their roles as wives and mothers. Perhaps most telling are Sloane-White's comparative-historical findings, based on ethnographic research since the early 1990s. She writes that "women's sexual, marital, social, and economic roles in the *sharia* generation [which came of age in the post-NEP era] are increasingly circumscribed by a more conservative and patriarchal interpretation of Islam," and that they now lead "more acutely asymmetrical lives" (2017: 121, 125).

Negotiating the Hegemonies

Sharia advisors regard themselves and are seen by others as combining the best of rationalized, global Islam and modern corporate capitalism. The specialized religious and financial knowledge they possess and are able to market allows them to enjoy highly desirable lifestyles along with considerable prestige, which is partly to say that their subject positions are held in high esteem by a broad cross-section of Malay men (and women). Also important to appreciate, however, is that many men cannot achieve the new masculinity embodied by *sharia* advisors and other relevant figures like bankers, lawyers, and CEOs, a pattern that is globally widespread insofar as men throughout the world often lack the material and other resources that signify locally relevant exemplars of masculinity (Inhorn 2012: 32). Broadly speaking, this kind of dilemma is nothing new. Some Malay men fell short with respect to earlier iterations of idealized masculinity. The reasons for this, to cite examples commonly invoked by villagers during my fieldwork, was their involvement in gambling and the consumption of alcohol, which, like squandering money in coffee shops, shows the prevalence of "passion" over "reason."[11] The problems that men currently face exist largely because of limited economic opportunities that preclude their joining the ranks of entrepreneurs, government bureaucrats, and other white-collar workers. Economic pressures in rural and urban areas, moreover, militate against many men achieving high marks in secondary school and the tracking exams that follow, let alone enrolling in the tertiary institutions necessary for entrée into and advance in the world of white-collar jobs. Hence women greatly outnumber men in the nation's colleges and universities (comprising 70 percent of the Malay total), a fact that has caused serious alarm in government circles and elsewhere.

As might be expected, some of the dilemmas confronting recent generations of Malay men are highlighted in popular culture. We see this

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[11] Most Malay men neither gamble nor drink alcohol, but the villagers and urbanites who engage in such activities are almost always men (Peletz 2020b).

clearly in the realm of cinema. Ahmad Fuad Rahmat has recently analyzed Malay films produced since the 1950s in a thesis tellingly titled *Neither Here Nor There: The Uneven Modernization of Malay Masculinity*. He sets the stage by emphasizing that "the *Melayu Baru* or 'New Malay'—the entrepreneurial, innovative and hard-working driver of Malay commerce—was not simply defined against the rural, agrarian, and 'lazy' Malay of old, he was also expected to embody a new masculinity that would thrive in a global and competitive economy" (2020: 12–13). According to state discourse and policies, moreover, the new Malay man was envisioned as part of a new Malay corporate class, not merely as a petty trader or small-scale businessman, despite the fact that "the Malay world at the time was neither industrial nor capitalist," the majority of its inhabitants "illiterate, rural poor, and malnourished."[12] The sharp disjunction explains why Malay films of the period (featuring the legendary P. Ramlee, A. R. Badul, and others) portray the achievement of this new masculinity as highly elusive, commonly focusing on men's movement between rural and urban contexts, often depicting them as "neither here nor there," "between joblessness and homelessness," and otherwise "deficient."[13] Iconic cinematic instances of the latter "deficiency" involve a character known as Badul, played by the renowned actor A. R. Badul, who is frequently featured in celebrated comedic films produced during the late 1970s and 1980s as a "poor village slacker navigating his way through the new Malay world by pretending to be what he is not."[14]

Note here the pronounced historical revalorization of the link between masculinity and (spatial) mobility. In the mid-twentieth century and previously, as emphasized in Siegel's work on Aceh and in the scholarship on the nearby Minangkabau region and the Indian Ocean world more broadly, men's mobility (in *merantau*, for example) was valorized in exceedingly positive ways (Peletz 1996; Ho 2006). At present, in contrast, such "wandering" is subject to diverse, sometimes mutually contradictory interpretations and is often viewed with marked ambivalence, if not disdain. The ambiguity and ambivalence at issue were pronounced features of hearings in the *sharia* courts that I attended in the late 1980s, especially when women approached the court in hopes of ascertaining the meaning of their husbands' long-term absences (without any communication). Did such absences have to do with their working in distant locales to accumulate

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[12] Ahmad Fuad Rahmat 2020: 173.

[13] Ibid., 38, 50, 149.

[14] Ibid., 177. I have focused on the material difficulties involved in being a new Malay man, but ethical and other challenges also abound. James Hoesterey (2016) analyzes such challenges in neighboring Indonesia. See also the important work of Marcia Inhorn and her colleagues on the ethical, emotional, and other challenges facing new Muslim men in the Arab world and beyond (Inhorn 2012; Inhorn and Naguib 2018).

resources that would eventually be sent or brought home, thus fulfilling key entailments of their spousal duties? Or did they have to do instead (as they usually did) with the women having been divorced or abandoned by their husbands, who had thus failed in the fulfilment of such duties as far as the women, and court officials, were concerned (Peletz 2002). The situation has been exacerbated in the intervening decades by the global rise of groups and networks like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, coupled with Malaysia's strong support for the U.S.-led Global War on Terror. State agents and others are increasingly concerned to monitor and control male peregrinations, particularly when they involve travel to Muslim-majority nations or other locales seen as training grounds for *mujahids* or hotbeds of Islamic radicalism.

There are other communities of male-bodied individuals—some but not all of whom identify as men—whose bodily comportment and ways of being in the world are deeply incongruent with the masculinities that political and religious elites have sought to render hegemonic in the sense of being widely seen and experienced as God-given and natural, hence simultaneously sanctified, immutable, and commonsensical. One such set of communities consists of Malay men who self-identify as *gay*. These communities tend to be differentiated in terms of social class and other variables (Shanon Shah 2018). Their members are definitely Other in relation to the prevailing hegemonies, even in the case of accomplished, cosmopolitan, and virtuous professionals who may meet all of the criteria of the new Malay man other than—admittedly no small matter—the injunctions enjoining heteronormativity and heterosexual reproduction. The same holds for the communities consisting of their male-bodied counterparts who are referred to as *mak nyah*, *pondan*, or *lelaki lembut*. The first of these terms, which is relatively neutral (as regards its "baggage"), is sometimes rendered into English as a "transgender woman" or "a female (soul) born or trapped in a male body," and commonly connotes dressing and adorning oneself as or like a woman and engaging in sexual relations with normatively gendered men, much like the designations *waria* in Indonesia and *bakla* and *bantut* in the Philippines. The second term (*pondan*), which is construed by many as derogatory but has long been widely used in heteronormative circles, has come to be utilized by some heteronormative people as a synonym for *gay*, and vice versa. It alludes to phenotypic males who transgress normative gender expectations insofar as they gesture, comport themselves, and sometimes adorn themselves like women, are overly involved in stereotypically female activities like cooking, or simply mix "too much" with women, in kitchen areas and at wedding festivities, for example. In earlier decades the label *pondan* did not necessarily include any intimations with respect to sexuality (unlike *mak nyah*). But this has changed. The term has become sexualized (and medicalized) and increasingly implies a same-sex orientation that is shared with *gays*. Many of these generalizations also pertain to the third term, *lelaki lembut* ("soft man"), which is used colloquially and in

mass media (in lieu of *pondan*) to refer to men held to be effeminate or gay (ibid.: 49 n7).

Political and religious elites have done much to stigmatize and criminalize sexual diversity and gender variance in recent decades, commonly painting them and the discourses supporting them as unacceptable Western imports if not conspiracies against Muslims engineered by Western imperialists and their Zionist accomplices. The nation's ordinary Muslims, however, have long been more accepting of gender variance and to a lesser extent sexual diversity (at least among phenotypic males) than contemporary elite discourses might suggest. And to a large degree, they continue to maintain a time-honored ethos of "don't ask, don't tell," so long as imperatives enjoining heterosexual marriage and reproduction are honored by all concerned, much like the Makassar of Sulawesi, Indonesia depicted in Kathy Huang's (2011) documentary film, *Tales of the Waria* (see also Boellstorff 2005; Davies 2007). But many of these same elites have repeatedly lamented that (too) many Malay men are "soft," "weak," and "effeminate," particularly compared to local Chinese, and that this situation has perhaps always obtained because it is a quintessential feature of "Malay tradition." Indeed, former Prime Minister Mahathir made many arguments along these lines in *The Malay Dilemma*, and continues to do so.

Additionally, these same arguments have been staples of political and public discourse in the neighboring city-state of Singapore, where Malays have long been marginalized and regarded by the Chinese majority and their political representatives as having both deficient cultural capital and insufficient loyalty to the nation-state.[15] In that setting, Malay masculinity is widely seen as needing to be stripped of its "softness" and "fluidity" and otherwise shorn up in martial terms congruent with the enactment of patriotism required of high-performing citizen-subjects endowed with expansive cultural capital, such as the politically and demographically dominant Chinese. This includes the evangelical Christians among them, who tend to be middle-class and university educated, hence ideal citizens as far as the state is concerned. It is not surprising then that Singapore's Malay community recently joined forces with Chinese evangelicals to lobby for the retention of colonial-era sodomy laws and draconian punishments introduced by the British, and that "a new and emerging homophobia" is evident within this community, even though "historically [its members] never expressed such overt rejection of homosexuality" (Nur Amali Ibrahim 2016: 955). One of the unfortunate ironies of this "defense of hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1995: 216), which we see in a theme-and-variation sense in many other settings, is that "Standing alongside [Christian] evangelicals against

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[15] My comments on Singapore are adapted from Peletz 2020a.

homosexuality enables Singaporean [Malay] Muslims to perform good citizenship, even as they seek to overcome their minority status by trampling on another minority" (Nur Amali Ibrahim 2016: 981).

In Malaysia, the "deficiencies" and otherwise "aberrant" departures from normative masculinities that I have considered loom much larger in national discourses than do those linked with other Others I have yet to comment on, most of whom I can only mention in passing here. I refer to men who have either joined spiritual reform movements like Tablighi Jamaat (discussed in the following section on Pakistan), have committed themselves to armed jihad, or are inclined toward other modalities of violence, and thus might be said to evince a surfeit rather than a deficit of masculinity. The relative scope, force, and prevalence of these discourses in Pakistan and various other parts of South Asia (despite commonalities in other realms) is quite different, as we shall see.

PERSPECTIVES FROM PAKISTAN/SOUTH ASIA

"*Violent Pakistani Men*" *and Their Others*

The hegemonic Muslim masculinities and their Others that obtain in Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia share certain similarities with their counterparts elsewhere in the Muslim world, though each case is also unique in its own way. The Muslim-majority nation of Pakistan is a former British colony like Malaysia, but one with roughly seven times the population, a much higher percentage of Muslims (95–98 percent compared to Malaysia's 60 percent), and a far more rural, cash-strapped citizenry. The two countries provide interesting comparative cases for two reasons. The first has to do with topic-locale icons that depict Pakistan as a nation long afflicted if not birthed by violence associated with the Partition and Independence of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947.[16] These images and the realities to which they purportedly refer are not always thoroughly congruent, but both provide sharp and generative contrasts with Malaysia. This is partly because Malaysia both attained its independence from the British and was severed from Indonesia peacefully; has enjoyed considerable political stability relative to Pakistan; and has long celebrated an image of ethnic, religious, and sectarian relations that emphasizes accommodation and harmony (this too is relative). This is in addition to its reputation, at least through the mid-to-late 1980s, for promoting moderate, progressive variants of Islam that are generally held to be far more open to difference, compromise, and accommodation than are their statist and popular Pakistani counterparts and the analytically distinct discourses of *ulama* informing them.

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[16] The voluminous literature includes Das 1990; Tambiah 1996; Pandey 2001; 2006; Verkaaik 2004; Ring 2005; N. Khan 2010; Aslam 2012; Rashid 2012; and Gayer 2014.

Much of the well-documented violence that exists in Pakistan can be attributed to the fact that throughout the postcolonial era, civilian and military leaders susceptible to corruption and foreign interference have succeeded neither in forging "a shared national identity that transcends ethnicity, tribe, religion, and language" (Rashid 2012: 29) nor in ameliorating the nation's massive socioeconomic and regional inequalities.[17] This is partly to say that such concerns have been accorded low priority in postcolonial projects of nation building, state formation, neoliberal capitalist development, and international diplomacy—or, alternatively, that many such projects have repeatedly failed—as compared to what we see in Malaysia and many other parts of the world. The violence includes physical assault, kidnapping, torture, murder, rape, arson, and the destruction of property, and is heavily gendered, as is typically the case cross-culturally and historically. It occurs primarily at the hands of men, though readers should bear in mind that most Pakistani men neither participate in nor encourage violence. The men most directly implicated in the discourses on violence are involved in a heterogenous range of activities, many of which are cast in religio-political terms, others not. They include feud-related (or other) acts of revenge; "tribal" retaliation/warfare; gang activities involving black-market trafficking, racketeering, "protection," and the policing of territorial boundaries; petty street crime; urban riots inflamed by ethnic, sectarian, or communal tensions or labor unrest; armed jihad within and beyond the nation's borders; protests against the Pakistani state, its security apparatuses, and the social orders they endeavor to sustain; and last but not least, violence at the hands of police, military, and their proxies and allies. Important to note too is that the violence is more often than not directed at men, though sometimes at women who are raped and otherwise defiled in communal riots; are thought to have brought dishonor (*beizzati*) to men or the households, patrilineal kin groups, villages, or ethnolinguistic or religious communities with which they are associated;[18] or, as in Bangladesh and many other parts of South Asia (Muslim and Hindu alike), are thus "persuaded" to bring more dowry to their marriage or punished for not doing so.

Most significant here is the hegemonic status of the view that Pakistani men are inclined to violence, particularly in locales such as Karachi, a

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[17] The generalizations in this paragraph derive mostly from material presented in Tambiah 1996; Verkaaik 2004; Ring 2005; N. Khan 2010; Aslam 2012; Rashid 2012; and Gayer 2014, though many other sources cited in the bibliography (e.g., Das 1990; 2007; Pandey 2001; 2006; and others writing about Partition) are also relevant, as is the literature on Pakistani soldiers' comportment during Bangladesh's 1971 War of Liberation.

[18] Culturally elaborated and emotionally laden concerns with honor (*izzat*) and dishonor (*beizzati*), like the systems of patrilineages, patrilocality, and extended household settlements which help animate and sustain them, are widespread in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and South Asia generally, but are not found among Malays or most other Southeast Asians.

megalopolis with more than 20 million residents that has been described as "awash with violence" in recent decades (A. Khan 2018: 67; Verkaik 2004; Ring 2005; N. Khan 2010; Aslam 2012; Gayer 2014). In referring to this view as hegemonic, I mean that it is dominant not only in private/domestic and public/national discourse, but also in transnational narratives animating and sustaining the U.S.-led Global War on Terror. Many of the latter narratives are relatively "free floating" and "broad brush" with respect to the social-class locations of those allegedly prone to violence, although their domestic counterparts tend to ascribe violence to state actors or those situated toward the bottom of social-class or ethnicized/raced social hierarchies. In both cases, religious or ethno-religious "motivations," "rationales," or "personality types" are alleged to loom large, as might be expected in light of the perduring influence of Orientalist tropes of colonial origin. In many ways this situation constitutes a marked contrast with Malaysia, where, as we have seen, the hegemonic discourses on masculinity among Malays have involved narratives of either "lazy Malay men" or "new Malay men." Neither of these emphasizes violence or the need to contain it; neither links violence with (local) Islam; and neither of them foregrounds (local) Islam or problematizes it as a threat to national or regional security or global peace.

The second reason Pakistan is of interest has to do with the ways that different Muslim communities in the nation conceptualize their aspirations and activities and have in some cases consciously positioned themselves as exemplary Others in opposition to the hegemonic view that Pakistani men are prone to uncontrollable rage and aggression. Some middle-class people and others of more humble standing position themselves in these ways through largely unmarked, routine daily activities involving affirmative interactions with those of other religious and ethnic communities, "moral and spiritual strivings of the everyday," as Veena Das (2010) puts it with reference to her Muslim and Hindu interlocutors in India. These quotidian strivings are well documented in Laura Ring's (2005) ethnography of a high-rise apartment building in Karachi that is home to Sindhis, Punjabis, Muhajirs, and other newly middle-class families whose primary breadwinners are typically men employed in government jobs (as teachers, engineers, police officers, doctors, etc.). Here the neighborly exchange of information, assistance, and affection across ethnic, sectarian, and other divides, which involves the intentional but mostly discursively unmarked forging of a broadly construed kinship oriented toward "recreating a familiar … sociality under new conditions" and everyday peacemaking (ibid.: 76), is almost exclusively the work of women. This is largely because of women's views, commonly shared by their male kin, that "men are simply not equipped to handle the vicissitudes of balance in exchange, due to their vulnerability to sudden, explosive anger" (ibid.: 89; see also Aslam 2012:

269–77)—a vulnerability that, paradoxically, does not necessarily lead Pakistanis to question the hegemonic notion that men tend to be endowed with more "reason" and less "passion" than women.[19]

In the pages that follow I focus on two communities whose aspirations and activities in these areas are more explicitly elaborated. I do so not simply to illustrate counterhegemonic deviations from the dominant trope of violent Pakistani manhood. Rather, I seek to highlight variants of manliness that are representative of more general forms of masculinity that have a much wider relevance beyond the two communities I discuss. The more general point is that notions of masculinity in Pakistan, like their Malaysian counterparts, are, by definition, suffused with conflicting norms, ideals, values, virtues, and feeling-tones.

Tablighi Jamaat

Let us first consider a widely dispersed community involved in a piety/spiritual reform movement that developed in British India in the 1920s and has drawn much of its inspiration from the Deobandi movement, which originated in the late nineteenth century with a focus on the strengthening of Islamic education and the purification of religious practice in the face of growing threats from Hinduism and the materialism, secularism, and modernity promoted by British colonizers. I refer to Tablighi Jamaat (Tablighi for short), which has attracted large followings among Muslims in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, and according to some estimates currently boasts around 80 million members worldwide (Hassan 2020). Tablighi missionary/outreach organizations and attendant piety movements (glossed *dawat* in Urdu) have "experienced dramatic growth in Pakistan since the 1980s," though their members remain a minority of the nation's Muslims (A. Khan 2018: 65). This striking growth is partly a consequence of President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's (r. 1977–1988) deeply divisive Islamization and Shariatization policies, which, in conjunction with his military dictatorship, resulted in a good deal of sectarian and communal strife, the marginalization of various ethnic and religious minorities, and the pronounced constriction of women's rights.

Tablighis are drawn from all social classes and are opposed to the worldly social hierarchies, status distinctions, and mundane material strivings that have been central to processes of economic development, nation-building, and capitalist state formation in postcolonial Pakistan. The males among them have cultivated an image through acts of piety and ethical self-fashioning that is in many respects an inversion of the hegemonic view that Pakistani

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[19] Violence is commonly held to be "reasonable," legitimate, and culturally desirable in defense of honor, dignity, and fairness, and in certain other contexts.

men are inclined to violence. They have done this partly by reworking Islamic symbols and idioms of "reason" and "passion" in ways that emphasize men's "symbolically coded 'female' position relative to a male deity, which Tablighis say produces men whose hearts are soft and open and who have a cool temperament … like the exemplary figure of the Prophet" (ibid.: 56). Barbara Metcalf characterized Tablighis in Pakistan and India in broadly analogous terms some twenty years earlier. She observed that their "gentleness, self-abnegation, and modesty …, coupled with their undertaking a range of activity associated with women's work [on their preaching tours, such as cooking and cleaning], marks them as inculcating what may be core religious values but are also culturally defined as quintessentially feminine" (2000: 50).

Before elaborating on these issues I should clarify that Tablighis' *dawat* activities are grounded in "Islamic conception[s] of personhood, … [particularly notions of] a lower self (*nafs*), reason (*akl*), and spirit (*ruh*)" (A. Khan 2018: 57). These are salient in many other Pakistani contexts[20]— although sometimes entangled with and/or subordinated to gendered notions of honor (*izzat*) and dishonor (*beizzati*)—and are also prominent, as we have seen, in Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Morocco, and elsewhere in the Muslim world. Among Tablighis (and other Muslims) these concepts and the differential distribution of religious capital associated with them (in hegemonic views that men have more "reason" and less "passion" than women, for example) are invoked to explain why women are held to be weaker than men and less able to control themselves, and why they are seen as more of a threat to social and moral order, hence appropriately subject to seclusion and segregation (ibid.: 58–59).

Of further interest is the theme of "male gestation." Arsalan Khan explains in a passage I quote at length:

Dawat is frequently described as 'the mother of practices' (*umm-al-amaal*) because it is said to 'give birth' to and 'grow' faith in the practitioner. Tablighis are expected to conduct one 40-day tour … each year, which Tablighis explained was the period it takes for a child to take human form in the womb…. The procreative metaphor is critical; God inseminates the heart of the Tablighi, just as men inseminate women to initiate the procreative process…. The metaphor … simultaneously implies that the Tablighi is the female relative to a male deity and that he is the child in the womb of the congregation. The former … implies that the Tablighi is pregnant with God's agency, thus invoking a wife-husband relation between devotee and God, a relation frequently invoked in Sufi mysticism. The Tablighi as child-in-the-womb implies a son-father relationship between Tablighi and God. Both figures invoke relations of dependence, but there is a crucial difference: the wife-husband metaphor represents the permanent dependency of humans on God, while the figure of the child-in-the-

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[20] See, e.g., Kurin 1988; Verkaaik 2004: 42–45, 51–53; Marsden 2005: 87–88 et passim; Ring 2005: 87, 109, 150.

womb implies a liminal or transitory state on the path towards the autonomy of masculine adulthood (2018: 60–61).

Much more could be said about Tablighi ritual, masculinity, and related matters, including how, despite the foregoing, Tablighi men enforce patriarchy and rigorous purdah in their homes—heterosexual marriage and reproduction are religiously sanctioned cultural imperatives that all Tablighis are expected to honor. Also worthy of consideration are the ways the ideals they promote "encourage more egalitarian relationships between women and men" and a more muted division of labor by gender than obtain outside Tablighi circles (Metcalf 1998: 115). But I want to step back and consider the larger context.

    I should thus reiterate that only a small fraction of Pakistani men are involved in the Tablighi movement. Many of Pakistan's ordinary Muslims, moreover, do not support all of the movement's specific orientations and activities, even while they typically concur that a renewed, purified Islam will reduce the moral chaos and violence plaguing the nation. Some of them emphasize in addition that fixing both the failed economy and the corrupt and inefficient system of governance would do much to mitigate these problems, as would favorable resolution of widely ramifying geopolitical struggles involving neighboring India, Kashmir, the Taliban and other Afghan forces, and the CIA and its proxies and allies among Pakistani intelligence and security forces (Aslam 2012).

    Some Pakistani men, for example, inveigh against Tablighis' "excess religiosity." This "excess" is commonly regarded both as a "stepping stone" or "gateway" to "extremism" and as typifying militant jihadists who sometimes endeavor to recruit Tablighis to their cause, even though Tablighis disdain politics and are characterized as "apolitical" if not "explicitly anti-political" (A. Khan 2018: 65, 69). Others condemn Tablighis for leaving their wives and children and expecting them to fend for themselves for long periods of time while they are traveling for purposes of proselytizing (ibid.: 63; Metcalf 1998: 117–20), much as increasing numbers of Malays express strong disapproval of male "wandering," as discussed earlier. Still others complain that in light of the women's work they undertake and their bashfulness, humility, reticence, and non-confrontational demeanor, they "act female." In a telling remark that symbolically condenses much of what Tablighis represent vis-à-vis the hegemonic view of Pakistani masculinity, one man ruefully confided to Metcalf (2000: 45) that a friend's son who had joined the Tablighis "acts like a Pakistani girl."

    Despite the Tablighis' status as a minority movement, the masculinity of its male members is highly visible both in rural and urban settings and in national and transnational mediascapes, including film, audio cassettes, print media, and online venues. Of at least comparable significance are the general

population's direct encounters with Tablighis; as Metcalf recently put it, "I haven't met a single Muslim from South Asia who doesn't have a firsthand experience of Tablighis."[21] For these and other reasons Tablighi manliness is an important example of a masculinity that is explicitly fashioned and performed not merely as Other in relation to a hegemony, but also as a "protest masculinity," as some phrase it (Connell 1995: 109–12; Aslam 2012: 85–88; see also A. Khan 2018: 71), that in key particulars is explicitly counterhegemonic.

A more general set of analytic themes has to do with hegemonic figures such as the violence-prone Muslim man and some of the defining features of social fields. Building on (and complicating) points made by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) in another context, we might say that the "hegemonic figure serves as a vortex that gradually transforms other figures to adopt its central qualities," sometimes doing so by inverting them. "The hegemonic figure is not [necessarily] dominant in quantitative terms but rather in the way it exerts a power of transformation over others. Hegemony here designates a tendency" (ibid.: 107), a tendency keyed "gravitationally" to centers of power and prestige in religious, political, and other social fields that may entail processes of appropriation or emulation, but in other instances may involve explicit reversals of the hegemony's main signifiers and its primary referents (Stallybrass and White 1986).

Other more general and abstract points follow. Many social fields (associated with religion, politics, law, education, etc.) have their own relatively field-specific rules of play, cultural capital, axes and zones of contestation, and "centers of gravity" grounded in arrangements of power and prestige within and beyond them, as Pierre Bourdieu has shown. This is to say that they are subject both to internal constraints and attendant dynamics and to external (including economic) forces though they cannot be derived directly from them (Bourdieu 1991: 28; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 94–115). And while a given social field may enjoy a measure of autonomy in relation to others, the ways it is sutured together with others "on the ground," may amplify, dilute, or otherwise transmogrify the effects of hegemonies both within the field and beyond its often fluid and contested boundaries. And finally, masculinities, like other modalities of gender, are formed and performed in relation to empirically variable combinations and relative "weightings" of such fields—their entailments, entanglements, and the ways they are enmeshed in them commonly being both contingent and subject to challenge and change.

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[21] Quoted in Hassan 2020: 1.

Chitralis

The second community of Muslims I want to discuss is composed of Khowar-speaking villagers and townspeople residing in the district of Chitral in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (known prior to 2010 as the Northwest Frontier Province). This district has been described as located "in one of the most turbulent regions of the Muslim world"; this is partly because it borders Afghanistan and is home to "*madrasas* (Islamic seminaries) and paramilitary training camps … widely known to have been connected with the emergence of the Taliban government" (Marsden 2005: 1). Magnus Marsden conducted ethnographic research in the district's villages and small towns in 1995–2006. Two of his more significant findings for our purposes are as follows. First, the mostly Sunni and Shia Ismaili men and women in Chitral (who refer to themselves as Chitralis) are acutely aware of the national and transnational discourses depicting Muslim men living in remote "tribal" areas like theirs and in the nation and the more encompassing geopolitical region as puritanical, uncompromising, aggressive, and prone to violence. And second, "Violence … is much rarer than what both many popular and academic commentators suggest is the norm elsewhere in Pakistan, but it is *a matter of intense concern and debate in village life*" (ibid.: 196, my emphasis). This latter point attests to some of the "vortex effects" of hegemonies discussed a moment ago.

These dynamics help account for both an important range of local sensibilities and dispositions and the degree to which they are culturally elaborated. Specifically, they help explain why in their bodily comportment, ethical pursuits, and cherished pastimes, Chitrali men place great emphasis on the cultivation of a number of interrelated virtues. These include "disciplin[ing] their bodies and their animal-like instinct and emotions [*nafs*]"; fostering and displaying "independent critical intellectual prowess" associated with *'aql* that is conducive to "compromise, principled reflection and vigorous debate"; and living "harmonious … and peaceful" lives not only with their womenfolk and male kin, but also with other members of their local, ethnolinguistic, and religious communities as well as those outside them (ibid.: 172, 201, 245).

A major and much celebrated dimension of Chitral's rural and urban life is young boys' education in "down country" or local *madrasahs*. These schools, commonly funded by foreign governments (particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait), typically feature Tablighi or Tablighi-friendly (Deoband) teachings, which is partly why many Sunnis in Chitral are favorably disposed toward Tablighis and in the case of men (and increasingly women) "regularly join … [them] on their 'preaching' tours" (ibid.: 145 n28). It is nonetheless true that some Chitralis are "deeply ambivalent about the virtues of [the] 'purist' Islamic education" that boys commonly receive in these settings. The larger

pattern, of ambivalence and skepticism toward religious elites (*dashmanan*) and others who proselytize among local Muslims, includes "bravely parading critical attitudes to mullahs" and *ulama* that involve variable combinations of disparagement, mocking, and humor laced with fear (ibid.: 170, 172, 173; see also N. Khan 2012: ch. 5). I observed similar dynamics in my fieldwork in Malaysia (Peletz 1996; 2002).

Some of Chitralis' ambivalence has to do with religious elites' disdainful views of local male pastimes and specialist activities. Many of these pursuits are, at least potentially, sources of prestige, which is one reason why critiques of them are not always well received. The pastimes and activities to which I refer include composing and reciting Persianate Sufic poetry and love songs highlighting romantic attractions, longing, love, loss, sadness, and mourning; fashioning and wearing Sufi-inspired love amulets; riding horses, playing polo, and dancing; attending and performing in plays, musical gatherings, and tournament featuring music and poetry; and consuming both home-brewed wine and hashish.[22]

Importantly, most Chitralis tend to regard the variant of masculinity they cultivate as thoroughly compatible with Islam, much like the situation in neighboring Afghanistan and many other contexts. Chitralis also view their masculinity as both distinctive from and superior to the discourses and practices of manliness associated with variously defined Others. These include, most immediately, the ethnic Pakhtun (variably referred to in the literature as Pashtun, Pushtun, Pathan, etc.), who comprise the demographically and politically dominant group in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Chitralis argue that Pakhtun men are "crude," "uncultivated," "inferior," and "wild" (Marsden 2007: 477), obsessed with their honor, and overly inclined to respond to real and imagined challenges to it with acts of violence, a critique that, significantly, they appear to extend to most of Pakistan's lowlanders. Additionally, Chitralis distinguish their masculinity from that of the more purist Tablighis in their communities, even though they embrace many aspects of Tablighi teachings. Whether Chitralis regard Tablighis or certain of their religious discourses and ritual practices as unduly feminized in light of issues outlined earlier is not clear from the literature.

What is evident, though, is that both Chitralis and Tablighis have each in their own way positioned themselves and their masculinities as both distinct from and opposed to (nationally) hegemonic discourses of Muslim male violence. Viewed in terms of their own hegemonies, moreover, each group portrays the men referenced in these discourses as offensively and dangerously Other. Ironically, even though violence is widely eschewed and

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[22] Consumption of the latter substances is not a source of potential prestige, but neither is it all that heavily stigmatized or criminalized, except by some local police (Marsden 2007: 481).

relatively rare among Chitralis, these depictions draw on many of the same symbols, stereotypes, and caricatures that typify the broad-brush and increasingly incendiary anti-Muslim discourses that are central to ascendant Hindu nationalism in neighboring India, which has recently passed legislation that will effectively strip the nation's Muslims of their citizenship. They also have much in common with the kindred narratives stoking anti-Rohingya sentiment, state-sponsored ethno-religious cleansing, and Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar (Hansen 1996; Verkaaik 2004; Wade 2017).

Gender Variance, Sexual Diversity, and Heterosexual Imperatives

The literature I have consulted does not engage gender variance or sexual diversity within Tablighi or Chitrali communities, though it is important to recall that Tablighi men tend to strike non-Tablighis as inappropriately feminized. More relevant is that throughout Pakistan there are a number of variably visible communities composed of gender-variant and/or sexually diverse individuals. One such community consists of individuals known as *khwaja sira* (or *hijra*), who are typically male-bodied or were so prior to undergoing ritual castration, tend to dress, adorn, and comport themselves as or like women, and provide ritual blessings at weddings, the birth of children, and other auspicious occasions. *Khwaja sira* sometimes characterize themselves as "neither [completely] man nor woman," alternatively, as "both man and woman," and are related via deep kinship both to the more extensively studied *hijra* of India and to their largely overlooked Bangladeshi counterparts (Hossain 2018) owing to a number of shared commonalities. These include their genealogies, which extend back to Mughal imperial courts; the cosmological and mythological groundings of their subject positions, ritual practices, and subjectivities; their stigmatization and criminalization by British colonizers; and their subsequent marginalization and pauperization in the postcolonial nation-state, which has forced many of their members to engage in begging and sex work (with normatively gendered men) to support themselves, thus incurring further risk and stigma. Common to all such groups as well is their social and political activism in recent decades, which has resulted in important legal victories and social recognition (Reddy 2005; F. Khan 2016; Hossain 2018).

Other relevant communities include phenotypic males who may embrace subject positions defined in vernacular terms (e.g., *kothi*, *panthi*), may identify as *gay*, *transgender*, or *queer*, or may abjure all such labels but are nonetheless inclined toward same-sex relations. These communities tend to be urban and stratified by class, ethnic, and other axes of difference. "Wandering (Sufi) ascetics" known as *qalandars* or *malangs* comprise yet another category of male-bodied Other insofar as they not only disavow worldly attachments and conventional dress and demeanor but also practice celibacy and forgo marriage (Ewing 1997). Like their Hindu counterparts in India (*sannyasis*),

however, they are ultimately "highly masculine heroic figure[s], embodying many of the virtues commonly attributed to dominant males: autonomy, resolve, self-control, high-mindedness" (Osella and Osella 2006: 6–7).

I am primarily concerned in this essay with heteronormatively oriented men/masculinity, but the communities referenced here are important to bear in mind for three reasons. First, in being formally Other in relation to the hegemonic heteronormativity inscribed in most idealized variants of Pakistani masculinity, they help shore up the hegemony by negative example. Second, it is not unusual for a presumptively heteronormative Pakistani man to form an enduring bond of friendship (*yaari*), which may include sexual relations, with a member of one or another of these communities (other than *qalandars* or *malangs*), even when the man is already involved in a heterosexual marriage or fully intends to honor that sacred duty and the reproduction associated with it. As Ahmed Afzal (2016: 187, 200) puts it, "sexually intimate male friendships coexist with the ideals of marriage, family, and children," a related point being that there is a marked "absence of gender anxiety regarding engaging in sex with other men, the desire for heterosexual marriage and family, and adherence to Islam," much as in Bangladesh (S. Khan et al. 2005). And third, so long as it entails being the active partner (the one who penetrates), this involvement does not undermine either a man's sense of masculinity or his presentation of self as a heterosexual, though it is also true that, as in Southeast Asia (and elsewhere), a long-established ethos of "don't ask, don't tell" helps reduce the likelihood that such involvement becomes a matter of interest or concern within family circles or beyond. This suggests that in the quotidian discourses and practices in much of this expansive region, at least for phenotypic males, engaging in same-sex sexuality per se is not categorically taboo, despite its widespread criminalization in colonially derived state law and its Islamic counterparts, but—with the partial exception of "world renouncers"—refusing heterosexual marriage and reproduction clearly is.[23]

CONCLUSION

The study of masculinities in the Muslim world, as elsewhere, might be seen as a much younger sibling in relation to the extensive research on women and femininities among Muslims and others. The study of heteronormative Muslim masculinities—as distinct from gender variance and sexual diversity among male-bodied Muslims—even more so, especially when we range beyond the Arab Middle East and North Africa. Factors such as these help explain the thematic and regional focus of this essay, though theoretical insights and debates in the literature on gender hegemonies (Ortner 1989/

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[23] I paraphrase Sang (2003: 93), who makes a similar point about women in late-imperial China.

1990; Connell 1995; 2016; Peletz 2009; Inhorn 2012) have more directly informed my analytic approach to Muslim masculinities and their pluralities and hierarchies.

One of my objectives has involved illustrating that there is much more to Muslim men's lives than daily prayer and conventionally construed submission to God, and that for these and other reasons, as Inhorn (2012) and Schielke (2015) have shown for the Arab Middle East, our inquiries need to range beyond impoverished views of Muslim men that reduce their aspirational projects to concerns with piety, patriarchy, purdah, and punishment. I have also argued that there is no discernable, singular masculinity that is depicted in the Qur'an (or other foundational Islamic texts). I have nonetheless made the case that there is an important but variable corpus of symbols, idioms, norms, ideals, and understandings grounded in Islamic texts that Muslim men and women draw upon to organize, make sense of, and legitimize key features of their private/domestic and public lives. These frequently include symbols and idioms of "reason" and "passion," sometimes in conjunction with one or more similarly or contrastively inflected notions of "soul," "spirit," "shame," "honor," and "respect," to cite a few examples from an empirically open-ended list. I hasten to add that in different historical and ethnographic contexts these phenomena are sometimes refracted and pressed into service in dissimilar ways, with entailments and outcomes that may be quite distinctive, even mutually contradictory. Masculinities, femininities, and notions of appropriate human comportment, "the good life," and "a life well lived," moreover, are rarely if ever cast in a single register. The diversity at issue is not simply a matter of primordial cultural difference. It exists in no small measure owing to the variable confluence of macro-level forces associated with colonialism, global/neoliberal capitalism, postcolonial state formation and nation-building, as well as post-Cold War geopolitical struggles including the Global War on Terror. These forces and the processes associated with them vary considerably both across and within distinct geostrategic arenas such as Malaysia and Pakistan. So too do the ways they inform local hierarchies of power and prestige, the inflections and combinations of symbols, idioms, and concepts that legitimize them, the place of men and women within them, and the kinds of opportunities that may be available to negotiate these and attendant realities.

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Abstract: This article provides ethnographic, comparative, and theoretical perspectives on Muslim masculinities in South and Southeast Asia, home to more than half the world's 1.9 billion Muslims. Its empirical and thematic focus broadens the scholarly discussion of gender and sexuality among Muslims insofar as most of the literature deals with the Middle East and North Africa and is devoted to women and the discourses and practices of femininity and sexuality associated with them. More specifically, the article develops theoretical insights bearing on gender hegemonies and the pluralities and hierarchies of discourses on masculinities in the Muslim-majority nations of Pakistan and Malaysia, each of which illustrates broad trends in the region. It thus sheds important light on the empirical diversity of Muslim masculinities (amidst commonalities) and some of the ways they have been informed by locally and regionally variable macro-level processes keyed to colonialism, postcolonial nation-building, global/neoliberal capitalism, and post-Cold War geopolitical struggles including the Global War on Terror.

Key words: Gender, masculinities, Islam, Malaysia, Southeast Asia, Pakistan, South Asia