

**EBRAHIM MOOSA.** *What is a Madrasa?* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xi + 290 Pages, transliteration and translation, glossary, notes, bibliography, acknowledgments, index. Cloth US\$28.00 ISBN 978-1-4696-2013-8.

The interrogative of Ebrahim Moosa's *What is a Madrasa?* is meant to introduce the *madrasa* as an educational institution to unfamiliar audiences. The book aims to provide an insider's perspective on the Deobandi madrasa system of Pakistan and India to post-9/11 American audiences who may have erroneously taken the madrasa to be a site for harboring terrorism. The madrasa system of education has been a hallmark of Islamic civilization since at least the twelfth century, inhabiting major centers and networks of the Muslim World. Moosa focuses solely on Deobandi *madrasas* in South Asia, its historical formation, training, pedagogy, texts, authors and the continuing debate surrounding the relevance of madrasas amidst globalization. Readers will quickly discover that Moosa positions his text not simply for "outsiders," but as a medium to insert his thoughts about madrasa curriculum reform for the "insider" Muslim as well. Overall, the text is structured into four parts spread across twelve chapters.

Part one, titled "A Novice" is an autobiographical account of Moosa's six year residence in the madrasa system. As Moosa himself attests, the text "is also my own complicated life story" (6). Moosa is keen to reiterate the concept of the *madrasa* as not simply a place of attaining knowledge, but also constructing a bodily form directed for piety (*maslak*). Thus, the madrasa is as much a place to discipline a student's body through embodied practices and imitating exemplary figures, as it is a place to read legal, theological, and philosophical texts. In this quasi-monastic space, time is understood through activity. The section ends with examples of how prominent Deobandi figures of the past such as Qasim Nanautvi and Ashraf Ali Thanvi used Hanafi legal precedent in counterintuitive ways during British colonialism. This is perhaps best articulated in Mahmud Hasan's reflection that vindictive attitudes every time the Prophet Muhammad is caricatured negatively by non-Muslims is a reflection of a poorly-formed collective Muslim ego.

Part two, "History and Contexts," uses biography to approach greater social, political and historical contexts surrounding the madrasas formation in India and Pakistan. Moosa's use of biography serves as a helpful guide to understand contemporary theological divisions between various madrasa groups, such as Deobandis, Bareilvis, and the Ahli-Hadith. Readers are then given snapshots of the famous *Nizami* curriculum, a body of authorized canonical texts approved over generations by luminaries of the tradition. The

*Nizami* curriculum is sacrosanct and instructors are not permitted to change texts for their classes. Moosa ends this section emphasizing that he only came to understand the fruits of madrasa study once he attended graduate school and encountered modern knowledge. He contends that the complexity of the *Nizami* curriculum should be placed at the level of post-graduate study.

In part three, “Politics of Knowledge,” Moosa shifts from the madrasas historical formation to contemporary ethnography as he visits his former alma mater madrasas, interviews professors, audits courses, and asks students questions about their experiences. The theme of body *habitus* is fundamental to this section. Madrasas read and embody the words and actions of the Prophet (*hadith*) through instilling habits into their bodies. Moosa repeatedly reminds readers that the madrasa is a space where “excellence in knowledge is always secondary to moral formation,” and Moosa is not shy to express his discontent with this reality (163). Nevertheless, Moosa is adept at detailing how interpretation works in jurisprudence, such as his brilliant reenactment of a class discussion inquiring into whether or not cat saliva nullifies the purity of water. Moosa then guides readers as he travels to various madrasas with different theological affiliations, including gendered politics of contemporary female madrasas.

The section ends by unraveling the complexity of Islamic and modern epistemology. Islamic epistemology, Moosa contends, is entangled between modern binaries. It makes no clear separation of objective/subjective or secular/religious, both modern constructs developed out of colonial encounters. For Moosa, pre-modern Islamic thought intertwined knowledge whereas modernity separates knowledge into neatly arranged disciplines. This false separation has erroneously convinced madrasas that they inhabit a site of “religious” schooling, despite the fact that major Islamic luminaries such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Jurjani, and Aslam Qasami did not envision this as so.

Part four, “Madrasas in Global Context,” seeks to redress negative media caricatures of madrasas. These cultural stereotypes are constructed throughout American media outlets, eventually finding permanent seats in the psyche of many uninformed Americans. Moosa concludes with two letters: first to policy makers in Washington to decenter their received image of madrasas and replace it with the actual madrasa portrayed in the book. The second letter is to Moosa’s former madrasa teachers, urging them to consider basic curriculum reforms.

Moosa is arguably at his best when he compares madrasa knowledge with modern knowledge. This occurs frequently in the text, either between

classical madrasa studies and modern graduate studies, or comparing Islamic epistemology with the knowledge of modern secular universities. One vignette which punctures Islamic thought into modern philosophy is Jurjani's "I exist, therefore I know" with the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am"; or take Ibn Khaldun's view of the habitual body (*malaka*), similar to Bourdieu and Foucault's discussion of the body as *habitus*. Another is Moosa's re-appreciation of Ibn al-Hajib's grammatical treatise once he had studied the semiotics of Derrida and de Saussure following the linguistic turn.

While Moosa's text aims to decrease tensions between Western political elites and Muslims, it also reifies a Muslim/West binary that it precisely seeks to overcome. Occasionally, translations were difficult to comprehend. The conclusions of each chapter, while necessary and helpful, were typically places for Moosa to express his personal grievances and praises of madrasas rather than a summarization of the chapter content. Despite these criticisms, Moosa's text has succinctly articulated the complex madrasa network of South Asia to unfamiliar and curious readers. Policy makers in the West and curriculum reformers at madrasas will benefit from Moosa's experience. Readers can sense Moosa's struggle to balance sincere criticisms with hope for a less apprehensive future. That struggle should not go unnoticed. ✂

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**ALISON PARGETER.** *Return to the Shadows: The Muslim Brotherhood and An-Nahda since the Arab Spring.* London: Saqi Books, 2016. ii + 296 pages, acknowledgments, end notes, index. Cloth US \$24.95 ISBN 978-0-86356-144-3.

**A**ny book on the Muslim Brotherhood or political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa should address several issues that have dominated the analysis of political Islam over the past twenty years, whether in the form of the inclusion-moderation debate or Post-Islamism. The basic issue is that the Muslim Brotherhood since its foundation in 1928 has been handicapped by a deep confusion about the role politics should play in the movement. Can salvation be attained through pursuing a religious morality and preaching (*da'wa*) in order to build a religious community (*jama'a*) from below, or should it be brought about by gaining political power and if so should the state play a role in "Islamising" society from above? The problem was compounded by the vagueness of classic Islamic political theory, a vagueness that was largely compensated by the Brotherhood in its ideological overreach as expressed