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**Contested Representations, Conflicted Identities :**  
**The Contestation of Religion in Pakistan's Public Sphere**

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## **Introduction:**

Until recently the public sphere in Pakistan has been faced with a virulent socio-religious polarization that ultimately manifested itself across the political spectrum. At the extreme ends are two segments of the population, one apparently 'radical' and 'religious' and the other presumably 'liberal' and 'secular'. Such rivalry has created contentious divisions along numerous, cross-cutting cleavages in which 'religion' has again and again proven to be the primary fault line. The 'radical' right-wing religious forces seem to be vehemently competing with so called 'liberal' elements for decisive representation in the public sphere in Pakistan, which is consequently largely dominated by these two factions.

However these two contested positions do not seem to reflect the aspirations of the majority of ordinary people of Pakistan, who do not support religious fundamentalism or manifestly espouse supposedly anti-religious secular values.(Marsden 2005; Lieven 2011; Nasr 2009; Qadeer 2006) but have not found a definitive voice or a representative space in the political or public sphere. Consequently the multiplicity of the expressions of religion which exist in Pakistan have not been able to be articulated meaningfully in the public sphere. The diverse and competing forms of religiosity, identities and traditions in Pakistan, such as divisions between 'high' and 'low' Islam, 'institutionalized' orthodox Islam and the 'popular' lived forms of a Muslim personality are all too often overlooked and treated as incommensurable identities that are mapped onto society in Pakistan in a one-dimensional and self-defining way. This study seeks to contest this form of representation and underlines the need to rethink the idea of a unitary 'Islam' in Pakistan because as recent scholarship on Islam shows that 'there are not enough categories' that could express the multiplicity of positions in Islam or highlight the diverse ways of being a Muslim in the present world (Hallaq 2009; Dabashi 2009). In this sense this study argues for the need for new frames of analysis which can apply a different mode of understanding to re-attend to the history and presence of religiosity in Pakistan.

Religion as a Contested Space in Pakistan:

This study will discuss how the current discussions on religion in Pakistan, and by implication secularism, are attended by shrill polemic from two opposing world views. The events of the past decade (including 9/11, the subsequent war on terror, the rise of religious politics globally) have intensified what was earlier only a latent schism between religious and secular world views and therefore 'an insurmountable divide' is posited between strong religious belief and a secular worldview.<sup>1</sup> Because of this potent rivalry an 'alienating Islamic identity' has been created in opposition to a 'Westernized non-religious' one. So that being 'liberal' in Pakistan indicates in general terms that 'one has pro-Western tendencies and finds any mention of Islam abhorrent' while being 'religious' affirms that one is aggressively 'anti-Western and a follower of some puritan interpretation of Islam'.<sup>2</sup> To add to this, any dissent to both of these camps is admonished decisively and instantly labeled as 'un-Islamic' by the religious right wing and considered 'pro-jihadist' by the liberals. The 'liberals' look down on 'Islam' and present the specter of 'Talibanization of Pakistan' to banish Islam from the public discourse (Husain 2012; Rashid 2012; Ahmed 2010) while the fundamentalists use religious dogma for political purposes to undercut rivals and demand unwilling submission from the public (Lieven 2011; Husain 2011; Ali 2008). The contestation over religion manifests itself in debates on sartorial and linguistic choices among other social habits and even over national icons. In a sense the figure of Pakistan's founding father M.A. Jinnah, can be seen as a metaphor for the contestation over 'the Pakistani identity', as it makes the liberals uncomfortable because of 'too much Islam' in his public position while the religious orthodoxy derides him for 'not being Islamic enough'.<sup>3</sup> Such contestation takes place in the media and academia and even literally in public places, so that public spaces become 'sites of contestation' (Butler and Habermas 2010), as can be witnessed from the recent 'blackout' of fashion billboards with public service messages in Karachi<sup>4</sup> and the defacing of female images earlier in the NWFP<sup>5</sup>. Such public

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<sup>1</sup> Mahmood, Saba. *Is Critique Secular?* Public Culture, ISSN 0899-2363, Volume 20, 10/2008, p 447 - 452

<sup>2</sup> Marsden, Magnus. *Mullahs, Migrants and Murids: New Developments in the Study of Pakistan.* Studies, 39 (4). 2005. pp. 987-101 also Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country.* Allen Lane. 2011

<sup>3</sup> Ahmed, Akbar S. *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic identity: The Search for Saladin.* Routledge, 1997. p 193-194

<sup>4</sup> Hasan, Saad. *Values vs. Voile.* Express Tribune. May 6, 2012.

contests become entangled in the invocations of the freedom of expression and public morality with social commentators from both factions either condemning or celebrating their articulation. Ironically the only similarity these two factions share is that both perceive Islam as a rigid unitary phenomenon. In this sense both the 'liberals' and the radical religious groups seem to be appropriating Islam relentlessly for their own benefits and purposes (Lieven 2011; Hassan 2007). Given this context the pursuit of a liberal lifestyle or the domination of Islamized symbols and values takes precedence over the attainment of democratic social ideals for both factions.<sup>6</sup>

In this regard this study will attempt to assess the extent of the correlation between religious and political factors which has fused to create the current state of affairs in Pakistan. It also seeks to make a distinction between 'popular Islam' that is practiced in Pakistan and 'institutionalized or political Islam', which dominates the public sphere. It will also attempt to analyze the historical processes by which the institutionalized unitary form of religion has, in some contexts assumed a qualitative role in Pakistan's social life, as part of a process of secularization that remains dependant upon state projects (Zaman 2002; Iqtidar 2011). In this way state management of religion has encouraged a radical Islamic identity which has come to dominate the public sphere in Pakistan and overshadowed popular forms of religion which are more tolerant and diverse. This paper will attempt to underline a vast gap between the imagined and lived religion and highlight the fact that a grounded traditional Islamic identity actually impedes radicalization in the society. It also argues that invocations of 'increasing radicalism' and 'fundamentalism' within the Pakistani society are misrepresentations. This paper will attempt to highlight certain factors such as an increased access to education and the new media can facilitate the expression of popular forms of religiosity.

Given the nature of the contested public sphere, this study seeks to meaningfully analyze and identify various socio-political categories and characterizations along with

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<sup>5</sup> Ebrahim, Zofeen T., *Taliban-Style Law Passed in Pakistan*. Dawn .July 21, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Zaidi ,S. Akbar. *Military, Civil Society and democratization in Pakistan*. Vanguard Books, 2011. p 212-213 , see also Ali, Tariq. *The Duel*. Scribner. 2008 p 23-34

the assumptions that they uphold in the context of Pakistan. This research therefore contends with such categories and concepts as 'modes of agency', 'structures of possible actions' and even as 'articulations of power'.<sup>7</sup> In this sense it argues that the generic liberal, secular, Islamic, fundamentalist categories (among others) distort actual lived reality by forcing it to confine to the constrictive Western concepts and distinctions. (Kaviraj 2005; Mahmood 2009).

Eventually this paper argues that these categories are all elite discourses, which do not matter much to ordinary people in Pakistan. Furthermore the commonly assumed dichotomy between Islam, on the one hand, and modernity and secularism, on the other holds little meaning for the vast majority of Muslim who refuse to see their development as a choice between Islam and modernity. (Qadeer 2006; Marsden 2005; Hasan 2002) However when such categories have been used by the Pakistani elite as 'articulations of power' and 'forceful policy prescriptives' they subvert social reality and constrain the agency of the masses. This paper will therefore attempt to analyze the way in which the rigid opposition between secular and sacred space, that seems so inherent to everyday practices of modern life, is complicated by the 'other ways of being' in Pakistan where religious diversity cuts across the contested and opposed categories upheld by the Westernized liberal elite and the orthodox Islamist elements.

#### Conflation of Categories:

Given this context this study will attempt to examine an extensive confluence and misrepresentation among the modern analytical categories that are in common currency in Pakistan. For example when one talks about being 'liberal' in Pakistan one can make a distinction between what can be called the 'lifestyle liberalism'<sup>8</sup> with the actual notion of 'liberalism' in the classical sense which espouses equal rights, democracy and rejects imperialism. In the contextualization of the Pakistan civil society it can be pointed out that the 'lifestyle liberals' are 'undemocratic', willing to support military dictatorships and endorse the imperialist agenda because it resonates with their Western values. It has

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<sup>7</sup> Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Islam, Christianity, Modernity*. Stanford University Press. 2003

<sup>8</sup> Zaidi, S. Akbar. *Military, civil society and democratization in Pakistan*. Vanguard Books. 2011. p 212-213

also been said that in Pakistan 'liberalism' is not really a reflection of a 'political philosophy', but of 'personal choices of morality' because the Pakistani 'liberals' espouse the Leftist liberal values of 'free speech' and 'rule of law', but do not want to instill the economic and democratic mechanisms to ensure them or practice the egalitarian values such as the distribution of power and wealth which underline 'liberalism' in the literal sense. (Lieven 2011; Ali 2008; Hasan 2002)

There is further conflation between the categories of 'secularism' and 'secularization', specially in the authoritarian context that is used incessantly by the ruling elite in Pakistan. For example, recently the Musharraf regime promoted a version of 'secularism' which was conflated with the process of 'secularization' or the 'secular' ideal and modernity interchangeably. In many cases it seems that what was being called 'secularism' within Musharraf's Enlightened Moderation narrative was primarily the total absence of religion not only in the political realm but in the social, cultural sense as well, which is not 'secularism' at all but rather a consequence of 'secularization'. According to some definitions however, secularism must be liberal and autocratic regimes cannot be secular (Taylor 2007; 2012). In this sense then it would be contentious to identify Musharraf as 'secular' or 'liberal' as is done generally in Pakistan. In order to understand these contradictions it seems relevant for the sake of analysis to question and make distinctions between the phraseology that is used to articulate these positions. A re-evaluation may unsettle existing assumptions but might allow us to meaningfully understand these positions and put them into proper social context.

### **'Lifestyle Liberalism':**

While it is easy to identify and classify the radical Islamist groups in the spectrum of socio-religious polarization it is difficult to characterize and identify the 'liberals' in Pakistan as such. In many ways the term liberal seems to be a 'misnomer' in Pakistan where 'liberalism' is not really a reflection of a 'political philosophy', but of 'personal choices of morality'. In Pakistan what defines the 'liberals', is not a desire for more complex freedoms and principles of law and equity but their liberal lifestyle choices

which are often characterized with elitist, hedonistic Westernized values. (Ali 2008) In this sense the Pakistani liberals can be identified as 'lifestyle liberals'.<sup>9</sup>

Comparing such proclivity with the classical Western liberal framework, which uphold equal rights in matters of life, liberty and property, and rejects imperialism and state intrusion into the lives of individuals, it seems clear that what the 'lifestyle liberals' espouse is not liberalism in the true sense. Liberalism as a distinct philosophical tradition, employs the concept of 'natural rights' and the 'social contract' to reject absolutism in government, asserts that rulers are subject to the consent of the governed, and that private individuals have a fundamental right to all civil liberties (Mahmood 2009; Ali 2008). None of these characteristics can be said to be realistically affirmed by the liberals in Pakistan, since they have incessantly displayed political opportunism and openly collaborated with autocratic regimes when it suited their purposes. In this sense for these liberals the 'lifestyle' liberalism takes precedence over political liberalism.<sup>10</sup> Such complicity in supporting dictatorships was witnessed recently during the eight year long rule of General Musharraf, whose Westernized 'lifestyle' and socially and culturally liberal agenda was in resonance with the 'lifestyle liberals'. The 'liberals' support not only the dictatorships but also democratic governments in suppressing religious groups and manifestly trampling over civil liberties. ( Zaidi 2011; Ali 2008)

Classical liberalism believes in free markets and the equal distribution of wealth and property. By contrast, in Pakistan, a different variety of 'liberalism' is associated with the 'ruling elite', who enjoy unprecedented levels of wealth, power and education, but have never considered it their responsibility as the best educated and most privileged in society to contribute to its development. Such liberalism can thus be equated with 'elitism' which exists in many forms ranging from the feudal, traditional and economic elites, who control a disproportionate amount of wealth and property in Pakistan , but continue to follow and implement policies which protects their status quo

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<sup>9</sup> Zaidi, S. Akbar. *Military, civil society and democratization in Pakistan*. 2011 p. 212-213

<sup>10</sup> Zaidi, S. Akbar. *Military, civil society and democratization in Pakistan*. 2011. p 216-217 also Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. 2011. also Zaidi. Mosharraf . *Elites Hegemonic Rule*. Dawn. November, 4, 2011

and continually marginalizes the general population in socio-economic terms.<sup>11</sup> Many 'liberal' commentators in the West describe the liberals in Pakistan as being at 'loggerheads with the common citizens of the country' and attribute social dissonance in the country to the 'divide between the majority of the people of Pakistan and their corrupt, uncaring rulers'.<sup>12</sup> These Westernized elite have been responsible for creating the economic, political and social conditions which have sustained a cycle of social despair in Pakistan over the decades but they have little interest in the reconstruction of the state because they have the most to lose if power is truly exercised by the people (Zaidi 2011; Ali 2008). For this reason they have never meaningfully supported indigenous politics or democracy in the country which would allow expression to the non-liberal segments of the society.<sup>13</sup>

In the classical sense liberalism identifies itself against conservatism but many 'liberals' who are part of the traditional elite in Pakistan have incessantly shown a preference for tribal conservatism rather than the state defined Islamic laws, especially at junctures when the religion would uphold individual rights and distribution of wealth in the liberal sense. Nelson and Wilder has shown through their work in central Punjab how many traditional landowners prefer the tribal customs over Islamic laws when it comes to issues such as the distribution of land or the right of inheritance of women. ( Nelson 2009; Wilder 1999) Inversely Zaman and Iqtidar's works shows that the religious classes uphold modernity and seek to restructure traditions.(Iqtidar 2011; Zaman 2002) In this sense the 'unpredictability' of the correlates of faith and partisanship therefore force one to be cautious about quick generalizations about the political stance of 'believers'.<sup>14</sup> Therefore conservatism is not a good yardstick to measure religiosity since many conservative people are not manifestly religious or conversely religious people do not have to be conservative. In many instances religiously inclined Muslims also support modern, secular agenda (Iqtidar 2011; Qadeer 2006; Marsden 2005) and in

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<sup>11</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*, Routledge, New York and London, (2006). also Hasan , Arif. *The Unplanned Revolution*. City Press, (2002)

<sup>12</sup> Ali, Tariq. *The Duel*. Scribner. 2008

<sup>13</sup> Zaidi ,S. Akbar. *Our Westernized Elite*. Dawn. August 11, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. *An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity*. European Journal of Sociology, ISSN 0003-9756, 12/2005, Volume 46, Issue 3, pp. 497 - 526



other instances conservative, traditional people have sought strategies to circumvent Islamic laws. (Marsden 2007; Nelson2009; Iqtidar 2011)

Given the post-9/11 scenario the 'liberals' have also described themselves as 'moderates', reflecting 'western labels' of 'alternatives to fundamentalism'.<sup>15</sup> While in literal terms liberalism does symbolize moderation, in Pakistan however such 'moderation' seems to have become another form of extremism with the liberals vehemently pursuing a 'radical' agenda to enforce a particular interpretation of 'Westernized values' in the society.<sup>16</sup> In the public perception then 'liberalism' has somewhat become synonymous with 'libertinism' so much so that it has been pointed out that one reason why so many people in Pakistan today try to avoid the label of 'moderate' or 'liberal' is the perception of having been 'sold out on their religion to the West and it's suffocating terminology'.<sup>17</sup> Instead of opposing foreign intervention as classical liberalism demands, the Pakistani liberals welcome it in order to protect their lifestyle from perceived threats. ( Lieven 2011; Zaidi 2011) It can be pointed out that on the one hand, the 'liberals' 'object to virulent *fatwas* by local clergy' but on the other, they 'welcome diktats from foreign sources that fit into their liberal agendas',<sup>18</sup> so much so that Western commentators characterize Pakistan's liberal elite as incessantly trying to 'impress' and 'appease' West of their resonance with Western liberal ideology (Lieven 2011, Marsden 2005).

Ironically, the greatest opposition against foreign intrusion and imperialism in Pakistan has come from the 'Islamic civil society'.<sup>19</sup> whose agenda has shown remarkable resonance with classical liberalism.<sup>20</sup> Historically, the liberal factions in Pakistan have also shown itself to be 'inflexible and uncompromising' in their political stance and thereby contributing further to more polarization in the society with their policies (Iqtidar 2011; Nasr 1994). In comparison the 'religious elite' has made more compromises

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<sup>15</sup> Ali. Tariq *The Duel*. Scribner. 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Hassan. Riffat. *The hoax of "Enlightened Moderation"*. The Nation. Oct. 2007

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ali. Tariq *The Duel*. Scribner. 2008. p 27-29

<sup>19</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*, 2006

<sup>20</sup> Iqtidar, Humeira. *Secularizing Islamists? : Jama'at-e-Islami and Jama'at-ud-Da'wa in urban Pakistan* . University of Chicago Press, 2011 160- 161. Zaidi, Mosharraf . *Elites Hegemonic Rule*. Dawn. 4, 2011

and has been 'more sensitive to the changes in the structure of Pakistani society' than the ruling elite, a fact that does not reflect positively on the 'liberals'.<sup>21</sup> The categories of 'radical right and 'liberal left' are also unwittingly used to describe both sides of the divide. In these characterizations the right wing radicals are unchanging and rigid whereas the liberal progressives factions are 'willing to change'. (Husain 2012; Siddiqa 2011; Ahmed 2002) But here again it can be argued that such categorizations distort reality in Pakistan where many liberals have been inflexible and rigid in their views, especially of those who disagree with them and have a different worldview while the so called radicals have sought to change the existing status quo by repeatedly taking up liberal positions. (Ali 2008; Lieven 2011; Iqtidar 2011)

However where the 'lifestyle liberals' do find resonance with classical liberalism is in its secular proclivity for the separation of religion and state, and its relegation of religion to the private sphere. A manifest reliance on secularism is clearly one of the central characteristic of liberalism. 'Liberal secularism', as a principle of liberal state governance however entails not so much the abandonment of religion altogether, as the 'liberals' in Pakistan seek, but its ongoing regulation through a variety of state and civic institutions. Infact it has been proved that the process of secularization as a stable endpoint does not result in the 'disappearance of religion' (Katznelson and Jones 2010). The right to religious liberty is infact widely regarded as a crowning achievement of secular-liberal democracies that guarantees the peaceful co-existence of religiously diverse populations (Mahmood 2008). Given this context a great normative value is added to the supremacy of 'secularism' by the so-called liberals and dictatorial regimes in Pakistan but it is questionable if what they seek to implement is indeed a liberal form of secularism.

### **Secularism and Pakistan:**

In the light of the above argument it would be useful to analyze the attributes of liberal secularism and compare them with the characteristics that constitute 'secularism' in Pakistan presently. In literal terms the distinct character of liberal secularism lies in its

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<sup>21</sup>Nasr ,Vali. The Vanguard of the Islamic revolution :the Jama‘at-i Islami of Pakistan. 1994

'forceful commitment to the principle of religious freedom' and liberal secular states, while they regulate religious life, must 'constantly counterbalance this regulation with an individual's right to practice his/her religion freely without coercion and state intervention'.<sup>22</sup> However such liberal secularism has been elusive in Pakistan because the state suppresses religious freedoms in various ways and instead of separating religion from the affairs of the state it manifestly uses religion to legitimize political agenda. In recent times for instance the project of 'Enlightened Moderation', stylized by the former President Musharraf, was imposed in Pakistan as a pivotal policy which promoted such a version of 'secularism'. Musharraf described himself as a 'liberal' and 'secular' Muslim and his version of 'secularism' sought to 'weed out religion' not just in the polity, but generally from the public sphere, by placing checks on religiosity and thereby intruding into the socio-cultural life of the citizens. (Hassan 2007; Iqtidar 2011) In doing so it was not only enforcing 'secularism' in an authoritarian fashion, it was forcefully enforcing 'secularization' as 'a broader social process through the forcible privatization of religion' (Bilgrami 2012).

It is well worth making a distinction here between the process of 'secularization', the 'secular' ideal and 'secularism' as a political doctrine. In the classical sense 'secularization' refers to the canonical process whereby a religious person has 'left the cloister to return to the 'world' and its temptations, becoming thereby a 'secular' person. (Katznelson and Jones 2010) 'Secularization' extends as a process within a society at large through its cultural and intellectual life which entails 'the migration of a religious calling to the worldly sphere' while secularism, which is a narrower notion and is restricted to the polity.<sup>23</sup> According to the theory of secularization which emerged an 'unchallenged truth' of the twentieth century social sciences, secularization was taken to mean 'the waning of belief in God' and referred to the decline of overt demonstrations of religiosity and religious values in personal and public life.<sup>24</sup> In this way the recession of religion was seen as an inevitable sociological process which was built upon sweeping post-Enlightenment expectations in which religion was 'replaced' with science and

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<sup>22</sup> Mahmood , Saba . *Is Critique Secular*. Public Culture, ISSN 0899-2363, 10/2008, Volume 20, Issue 3, pp. 447 - 452

<sup>23</sup> Jose Casanova. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. University of Chicago Press, 1994. p.13

<sup>24</sup> Katznelson , Ira and Jones, Gareth Stedman eds. *Religion and the Political imagination* Cambridge University Press, 2010. p 3-17

secularization (Katznelson and Jones 2010). It was averred that a universal contraction of the 'capability, ambition and effect' of religious institutions would consequently led to the weakening of religious faith and practice due to 'social differentiation, rationalization and social knowledge' associated with modernity.<sup>25</sup>

Presently in Pakistan the concept of secularism seems to be conflated or even equated with the notions of the 'secular' ideal and the process of 'secularization'. However the secularization is largely 'irrelevant' to the idea of secularism and the enforcement of 'secularization' is not necessarily a sign that 'secularism' must exist. Similarly polities may be predominantly 'secularist' with or without the society at large being proportionately 'secularized'. (Bilgrami 2012) This can be easily assessed from the case of Pakistan where, even when the state has had a manifestly secularist outlook the people are not overtly secularized in terms of the surrender of religious habits of dress or showing lack of religiosity in the public sphere<sup>26</sup>. However there does exist an underlying anxiety, which has been described as a 'sense of urgency' to declare oneself a secularist in present times, that manifests itself as a sort of 'a social blackmail' that demands to know if one is either for or against secularism. (Mahmood 2009) It is argued that there is 'an essential kernel' to secularism that must be preserved and defended from religious extremism and backwardness. However the crucial problem with this kind of thinking is its assumption that a secular worldview is the opposite of a religious one, where each is grounded in a 'distinct and irreconcilable epistemology' against the other.<sup>27</sup> In Pakistan, as in the Muslim world in general, secularism is also equated with atheism (*ladinyat*) and rejection of religion (*dahriyat*). This is so even in the absence of any theological opposition within Islam toward secularism. (Asad 2003; Iqtidar 2011)

However the religious and the secular are not so much 'immutable essences' or 'opposed ideologies' and in a literal sense 'secularity does not imply the absence but the

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Harvard University Press 2007. p431

<sup>26</sup> Iqtidar, Humeira and Gilmartin, David eds *Secularism and the State in Pakistan*. Modern Asian Studies. 2011

<sup>27</sup> Mahmood, Saba. Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide? *Critical Inquiry*. 2009. p836

diversification of religion and religious possibility'.<sup>28</sup> The 'secular' ideal has also been taken to imply hostility to religion but it can only be defined as 'a consciously non-religious position'. As a condition, secularism is a heterogeneous position which 'broadens religions variety' by being mindful of the continued importance but the 'changed status' of religion. and therefore it must be 'responsive' to religion and not hostile to it.<sup>29</sup> Secularism in the literal sense therefore cannot be characterized as 'obsessively seeking religion out as a target' or trying to 'polemically remove it root and branch from public life', in all its social, cultural and intellectual aspects nor can it be seen as being 'dismayed by' or 'concerned' with the presence of religiosity in the society.<sup>30</sup> Secularism is actually dependent on religion so much so that whatever the understanding of religion is in common currency, 'secularism defines itself and has a parasitic meaning which is partially elaborated around it' (Bilgrami 2012). In this sense if religion is equated with the unitary political Islam that dominates the public sphere as in Pakistan, then secularism will inevitably identify itself around it and seek to control it.

In Pakistan's context the state repeatedly shown an indifference to popular religion while at the same time allowing a particular version of political Islam to forcefully articulate itself in the public sphere for political purposes, ironically at the cost of stifling other expressions of religiosity. (Hassan 2008; Nasr 1994) Such circumstances can attest for the fact that secularism is 'not a guarantee for the ideals of tolerance in all contexts'. (Bilgrami 2012, Iqtidar 2011) It can also be pointed out that 'secularism can often be and is accompanied by bad political and institutional arrangements'.<sup>31</sup> It is therefore worthwhile to question the point and rationale for secularism when the benefits that secularism seeks to provide cannot be not seen necessarily as advantageous and also to assess whether tolerance and plurality could be achieved by other social and political arrangements that were not secularist. Bilgrami points out that secularism does not seem to have a philosophical right on its side that makes it rise by the light of reason over other opposing claims. (Bilgrami 2012)

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<sup>28</sup> Mahmood , Saba . Is Critique Secular? Public Culture, ISSN 0899-2363, 10/2008 se also . Katznelson , Ira and Jones, Gareth Stedman eds. Religion and the Political imagination. p437

<sup>29</sup> Katznelson , Ira and Jones, Gareth Stedman eds. Religion and the Political imagination edited by Cambridge University Press, 2010. p 28-29 , 32

<sup>30</sup> Bilgrami, Akeel Secularism: Its Content and Context. Economic & Political Weekly. January, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

More often than not, however, instead of any critical inquiry into a historical understanding or the value of secularism is hurriedly abandoned for the 'moral superiority of secularism through recourse to the familiar 'Enlightenment rhetoric' of freedom, human creativity, and autonomy in which religion is contrasted against the irrationality and backwardness of religious practices and overt religiosity correlates with insufficient modernization and is overtly seen as a measure of the primitiveness of society. (Katznelson and Jones 2010) Groups that are culturally repugnant to liberal academics continue to be studied as anti-modern, fundamentalist, backward and irrational (Mahmood 2008). In this sense the tradition of critical theory seems infused with 'a suspicion, if not dismissal', of 'religion's metaphysical and epistemological commitments'.<sup>32</sup> Given this context the notions of Islam's inability to secularize have continued to saturate international debates about secularism and lead to conclusions such as that Islam is 'secularization-resistant'.<sup>33</sup> The distinction secularism makes between 'religious faith' and the 'secular argument' which limits faith and ritual to a strict private domain and suppresses 'complex registers of persuasion, judgment and discourse operative in public life' which continue to function even within secularism. (Mahmood 2008) Secularism in its current understanding seems inevitably intertwined with a Western understanding of the process of secularization which emphasizes privatization of religion and the separation of spheres but by this emphasis on privacy and separation, religion is sometimes 'misleadingly' removed altogether from the public sphere. (Katznelson 2010) However, despite all the structural forces, the legitimate pressures, and the many valid reasons pushing religion in the modern, secular world into the private sphere, religion continues to have and will likely continue to have a public dimension.<sup>34</sup>

In this context the process of secularization gives rise to two distinctive and contrasting outlooks towards religion, that is 'freedom from belief' as well as a 'freedom

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<sup>32</sup> Mahmood, Saba. *Is Critique Secular*. *Public Culture*, ISSN 0899-2363, , Volume 20, Issue 3, 10/2008.

<sup>33</sup> Gellner, Ernest. 'Islam and Marxism: Some Comparison', *International Affairs* 67. 1991.

<sup>34</sup> Casanova, Jose. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. University of Chicago Press, 1994. p.13, 66.

to believe'.<sup>35</sup> These two divergent outlooks can be clarified with the distinction between 'political' and 'existential' secularism, where 'political secularism' upholds the freedom to believe while 'existential secularism' seeks freedom from belief.<sup>36</sup> In a classical sense 'political secularism' connotes a historical, institutional and normative process by which collective public power developed a justification separate from a religious foundation. 'Political' secularism is thus a privatization of religion and separation of public and private affairs and can be viewed as both a process of change which is embodied in institutions and beliefs grounded in non-religious legitimating authority, yet 'one that takes religion seriously' and continues to be cognizant of it.<sup>37</sup> 'Existential secularism' on the other hand identifies with some version of the ideology of secularism which leads to the decline of religious belief and practice but it seeks the disappearance of personal religious faith altogether.<sup>38</sup> It is significant to also note that existential secularism is 'irrelevant' and 'unnecessary' for political secularism. ( Katznelson and Jones 2010)

In Pakistan 'existential secularism' can be seen as being upheld by the category of 'lifestyle liberals' who do not always believe in political secularism which recognizes religion as an important element of social and political interaction. More often than not existential secularism resonates with the process of secularization, which marks a highly general and dispersed social, intellectual and cultural phenomena and processes including a stance against religion that requires redirection of either personal belief or a range of personal and cultural habits of dress or diet. With the exception of Zia, most political leaders like Ayub, Bhutto and Musharraf could be easily characterized as 'existential secularists'. However while rejecting religion privately these 'existential secularists' brought religion in the political realm by appropriating political Islam for their own purposes, which by and large placed constraints on other forms of religious expression in the society. (Hassan 2007; Qadeer 2006)

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<sup>35</sup> Davie, Grace ' Sociology of Religion'. Sage Publications .2007 p 289

<sup>36</sup> Katznelson , Ira and Jones, Gareth Stedman eds. Religion and the Political imagination p 13-18

<sup>37</sup> Ibid 28-29

<sup>38</sup> Ibid pg 13-18

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 28-29

## The Politics of Secularism:

In this sense secularism is not 'an arbitrary stipulation' when it is imposed. Bilgrami points out that in the politics of secularism in current times, 'secularism has its point and meaning, not in some de-contextualized philosophical argument, but only in contexts that owe to specific historical trajectories, with specific political goals to be met'<sup>39</sup>.

In the colonial contexts in South Asia secularism has played an 'intolerant' and 'authoritarian' role. The separation of church and state, as a definitive process of secularization with a reduction in religions power, was essentially a 'modern western political development which was not necessarily required in South Asia nor did the Muslims' situation necessitate it. (Kaviraj 2010) In historic terms, Islam did not produce a comparable tension between the church and state because it did not have an ecclesiastical hierarchy comparable to Christianity. Therefore in Muslim communities there was no 'need' for aggressive secularization that insists on sharp divisions between church and state. The forms of religious codification introduced by the British for administrative reasons, reshaped the religion producing radical versions of Islam. (Kaviraj 2010) In this sense secularization was a harsh imposition which did not lead unconditionally to the creation of the 'liberal subject' but rather it invoked a severe reaction in the form of religious fundamentalism and created a static unitary form of Islam.<sup>40</sup>

Given this background and the consequent manifestation of fundamentalism in Pakistan it seems meaningful to 'rethink the secular'. (Bilgrami 2012; Mahmood 2008) Bilgrami makes the 'uncontroversial' claim that secular liberalism is one truth among many' and that alternatives to the basic ideals within a liberal framework, such as those of fundamental rights and constitutional commitments, which exist beyond secularism. (Bilgrami 2012) Another option in the current impasse is to reject the liberal framework

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<sup>39</sup> Bilgrami, Akeel. Secularism: Its Content and Context. Economic & Political Weekly. January, 2012

<sup>40</sup> Kaviraj , Sudipta. 'On Thick and Thin Religion: Some Critical Reflections on the Secularization Theory' also Iqtidar, Humeira. Secularizing Islamists?: Jama'at-e-Islami and Jama'at-ud-Da'wa in urban Pakistan . University of Chicago Press, 2011



and turn to some sort of indigenism which suggests that the historical trajectory of each society is incomparably peculiar, and should be analyzed as far as possible by its own 'internal' or indigenous concepts.(Nandy 1998) However such strategy seems rather 'ahistorical' in suggesting essentialized, nativist categories given the centuries long interaction with modern colonialism. In this sense it seems impossible not to engage with the modern liberal framework because traditionally South Asia did not have any political ideals or institutional practices comparable to modern conceptions. Therefore the political history of South Asia atleast from the mid 19th century onwards cannot be understood except in terms of a modern history. (Kaviraj 2005) This is not to say that the West is the only 'true subject of history' but because of the extensive Western political and cultural influence, the vocabulary that is available for post-colonial societies like Pakistan is limited to what is defined by a Western experience. Therefore those who seek to oppose it still have to engage with it in conceptual and structural terms. (Hallaq 2009; Kaviraj 2005; Chatterjee 2004) This can be assessed from experience of the secularizing Islamists in Pakistan (Iqtidar 2011), a phenomenon which seems hard to explain given the 'historic resistance' to secularism in Pakistan (Ahmed 2010; Qadeer 2006).

Some of the constitutive assumptions of secularism, particularly those that enable the distinction between 'enlightened religiosity' and its more 'dangerous forms' allow secularist regimes to enforce secularism as a measure of protection against the latter. (Mahmood 2008) Such distinctions also underwrite the current U.S. government's attempts to intervene politically and strategically in the Muslim world. Secularism in its current understanding has therefore become inevitably intertwined with a modern and Western understanding of the process of secularization as a project whose imposition by dictatorships is tolerated as 'a lesser of two evils by Western governments and liberal political audiences' (Bilgrami 2012). Such insights can provide an explanation for the way that Musharraf's secular military rule has been so well received in the liberal circles in Pakistan as well as the West (Zaidi 1999). However when secularization' does not have any substantive engagement with the structures of the society which it seeks to reform it becomes 'hegemonic' and autocratic in nature. (Iqtidar 2011; Bilgrami 2012)

### Authoritarian Secularism:

Authoritarian secularism in the Muslim world has worked by diminishing the visibility of Islam in the public sphere, including restricting people's religiosity by manipulating and repressing popular religion. While authoritarian secularism has made claims to 'liberalize' Islam, in all the cases it has been upheld, the end result has been the suppression of the people by oppressive, dictatorial regimes. (Katznelson and Jones 2010) Clearly the notion of secularism has been appropriated by these regimes to perpetuate subversive political arrangements and in this sense authoritarian secularism is not an 'ideological problem but one of methodology' where the state does not engage meaningfully with particular modalities of religious practice and secularism comes into the service of real-politik or corrupt ends. (Bilgrami 2012; Mahmood 2008)

Such adverse political arrangements and institutions have been seen as 'a reason and occasion to question and redefine secularism' so that they cannot either be seen as possessing 'agentative liberal characteristics' or they don't count as secularist polities at all. According to some view points secularism should be incompatible with determined authoritarian efforts at imposing secularization. (Taylor 2012) In other words given such a view secularism cannot be autocratic and authoritarian. However there are still others views who believe that not all secularism need be liberal secularism and uphold that 'The authoritarian properties of regimes do nothing to cancel the secularist nature of the regime, but they do cancel the liberal nature of the regime'.<sup>41</sup> In this view authoritarian secular regimes can not be described as 'liberal' but can be secular or none of the two. Both viewpoints in any case remove the agentative connotations associated with secularism.

In Pakistan's context, for example, the recent Musharraf regime which identified itself as being 'secular',<sup>42</sup> would by Taylor's account would not be secular or liberal. Conversely by Bilgrami's definition it could be considered secular but not 'liberal'. Such arguments can sufficiently contest the way in which this regime characterized itself as

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<sup>41</sup> Bilgrami, Akeel. *Secularism: Its Content and Context*. Economic & Political Weekly. January, 2012 vol 4

<sup>42</sup> Musharraf, Pervez. *A Plea for Enlightened Moderation*. The Washington Post. June 1, 2004.

'secular' and 'liberal'. This discussion can also provide an insight into the way that the 'life-style liberals' in Pakistan have repeatedly supported autocratic regimes with great ease, because none of these actors follow 'liberalism' in the true sense. They might have secular aspirations but they do not practice secularism in the literal sense with their open hostility to any form of religiosity. (Hassan 2008; Iqtidar 2010)

### **State Management of Religion in Pakistan:**

Ironically it has been some of the most secular rulers such as Musharraf and Bhutto, who have insisted on identifying Pakistan as an 'Islamic republic' and 'not a secular state' <sup>43</sup>, for the sake of political expediency. Showing excessive opportunism in the face of political unpopularity, the ruling elite in Pakistan have used Islam as a strategy to legitimize themselves. The difference between the policies of civil and military regimes has been insignificant in this regard. Therefore in the state management of religion and their engagement with the political Islamists groups, the civilians have continued in the footsteps of their military counterparts.<sup>44</sup> Appeasing engagement with the religious elements has thereby allowed the ruling regimes to secure their own position but has also led to the formulation of harmful policies cloaked in Islamic rhetoric. Ultimately, the way political Islam has developed in Pakistan, where politicians are insistent on keeping the religious orthodoxy happy or by providing an environment where religious groups were allowed to flourish or both - has contributed to the increased strength of these groups and a particular kind of Islam in Pakistan. <sup>45</sup>

The identification of the state with a vision of 'a unitary Islamic community' and its association with the projection of a Muslim nation, have empowered the assertion of the state's right to manage and control the operation of religion in Pakistan. (Iqtidar and Gilmartin 2010) The correlation between the state and the 'religious elite' can be

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<sup>43</sup> Abbas, Zafar. *Pakistan not meant to be secular*. BBC News. Jan 2002. also Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. 2006

<sup>44</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. 2006

<sup>35</sup> Ghazali, Abdus Sattar. *Islamic Pakistan, illusions & reality*. National Book Club. 1996 .

<sup>45</sup> Iqtidar, Humeira and Gilmartin, David eds., *Journal Forum on "State Management of Religion In Pakistan"*, *Modern Asian Studies*, 2010.

explained in the context of the 'High Islam' vs. 'Low Islam' debate, where 'Low Islam' is associated with the 'masses' and the puritanical textual and rule oriented 'High Islam' has always been associated with the orthodox religious elite. The secular elite continued to use the orthodox 'High Islam' to validate themselves and consequently elevate the puritanical clergy to a superficial, symbolic prominence. In the process the tolerant and diverse 'Low Islam' of the masses which has a rural and spiritual thrust, has continued to disappear from the public sphere and is relegated to the private realm. But this is not to say that it does not flourish in the private sphere. (Hasan 2001; Lieven 2011; Marsden 2005)

The state management of religion or the political use of 'High Islam' is therefore an elite tradition of manipulating religion for narrow political ends that dates back to the early years of Pakistan. It is also a strategy to divide and rule the society, by juntas that have lacked a constituency.<sup>46</sup> Earlier in 1953 the Punjab's unpopular Chief Minister Daultana played a major role in the Anti-Ahmadiya agitation by supporting the religious right. President Ayub's campaign against Fatima Jinnah in the 1962 used religion to discredit a woman's candidacy. Similarly Bhutto's 'Islamic' concessions to save his government in the last days of his rule are indicative of his appropriation of religion to consolidate his political power. However the Zia regime's contribution to this tradition was qualitatively different from anything that preceded it. In seeking legitimation and social base for his rule, Zia's Islamization policies manifestly encouraged orthodox practices in the public sphere thereby allowing fundamentalism to strengthen its institutional base and violently suppressing popular religion (Qadeer 2006; Ghazali 1996).

In the 1980's the US sponsorship of an international jihad further provided the framework for proliferation of arms and sanctification of organized violence on religious grounds.<sup>47</sup> The introduction of the blasphemy laws, *Hudood* ordinances, public hangings within the process of Islamization created 'an ethos of brutality' in which weaker sections of the society became fair game by way of serving as instruments to establish

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<sup>46</sup> Rashid, Ahmad .Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan Viking, 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Iqtidar, Humeira and Gilmartin, David eds., Journal Forum on "*State Management of Religion*". 2010

the Islamic credentials of the state as well as the privileged claims of the more powerful sections of society. An aura of symbolic religiosity was created in the public sphere which promoted overt expressions of religiosity, when in earlier times, religion was largely a private matter which need not be demonstrated in public.<sup>48</sup> Such public proclamations of orthodox religiosity overshadowed popular religion in the public sphere and insisted upon a unitary religious identity, over which it asserted its claim. Ultimately the project of Islamization sharpened denominational identities, cultural cleavages and precipitated institutional dissonance and divergence of values and norms. In the process peaceful social co-existence was made increasingly difficult due to the state management of religion. (Iqtidar 2011)

Militant sectarian groups emerged as a corollary of the state sponsored 'Islamization project', employed as a political strategy, which privileged religion as understood by one sect.<sup>49</sup> The theocratic promises of a unitary Islam in the political sphere had the effect of provoking sectarian conflicts and providing a fertile base for sectarianism to grow and prosper. Religiosity rather than religion have continued to be placed at a premium and this had a significant bearing on the rise of a certain class which had access to the resources of the state and learnt to manipulate the levers of power. (Qadeer 2006; Ghazali 1996) Consequently violence practicing groups, sectarian parties and militant organizations of all shades and affiliations, which materialized during Zia's rule, emerged as the state's competitors and have continued to flourish and presently exist as a nuisance on the fringes of the mainstream society. (Nasr 2009; Qadeer 2006; Ghazali 1996) Even after the end of the Islamization period, political Islam did not retreat as easily as the military and continued to dominate the public sphere. The dominance of this form of religiosity and the accentuation of multiple forms of violence associated with it, which have historically signaled 'the decline of the state, its legitimacy, ideological mooring, and institutional will and capacity to govern', continued in Pakistan.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. 2006 p. 175

<sup>49</sup> Mian Zia and Ahmad, Iftikhar. *Making Enemies, Creating Conflict: Pakistan's Crises of State and Society*. Mashal Publishers. 1997

<sup>50</sup> Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Islam, Christianity, Modernity*, Stanford University Press. 2003

The gradual weakening of the state seems to have become a common phenomenon where the post-colonial states have lost substantial legitimacy in what has been described as 'a rising tide of undirected and uncontrollable social aspiration'.<sup>51</sup> The notion of the modern state as a 'distant, second-order, spectral, moral entity' allows the distinction between the 'state' and 'society' to be understood as an institution of the imagination. (Kaviraj 1997) The state negotiates its claims to authority as 'an imagined locus of power' existing outside society, even as it exercises power through interventions in the society and claims unitary authority as integral to its assertion of a legitimate interest in acting upon religion rather than being controlled by it ( Iqtidar and Gilmartin 2010) Dominant groups actively manipulate the state for patronage and favors, and the state's monopoly of force is undermined by the numerous armed religious groups who have forceful political agendas of their own. However the state's porousness as an actual institution also makes it susceptible to being manipulated by forces of religion in a way that the state gradually loses its 'attributes of authority'. (Asad 2003) In this sense 'the Pakistani state can be seen as being weak and society as being very strong'.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore such 'imagination' of a static Islamic state has been in pervasive tension with the fragmented operation of the state and with the expectations of the Pakistani society.<sup>53</sup> Competing ideas and power interests exert new pressures that facilitate the emergence of new configurations of state, society and religion out of existing traditions. That is to say that there is manifest conflict between 'the aspirations of the state and society' which creates 'inefficiency, exasperation and arbitrariness' in everyday life in Pakistan (Qadeer 2008; Hasan 2002). These points of conflict between state and society in the public sphere which create social and political tensions can be described as 'normative paradoxes' in the Pakistani society because of which 'religion' becomes both a source of imagined unity and of division.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. *Filth and the Public Sphere: Concepts and Practices about Space in Calcutta*. Public. 1997.

<sup>52</sup> Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011 . p 12-13

<sup>53</sup> Iqtidar, Humeira and Gilmartin, David eds., *Journal Forum on "State Management of Religion In Pakistan"*, *Modern Asian Studies*, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. 2006

## The Reformulation of Islam:

These perspectives reflect that the state's intervention in the society produces 'new subjectivities and norms' tied to religious practice and the pattern that emerges is that of increasing political and social 'entanglement' which cannot proceed along strictly linear formations and inevitably produces 'new forms of religion'.<sup>55</sup> Through this process of entanglement emerges a 'modular conception of religiosity' and a 'concomitant religious subject' that habituates various liberal discourses in present times. (Asad 2003; Mahmood 2006; Iqtidar 2011) Such a modular conceptions, which are also prevalent in Pakistan, however tend to overlook the internal complexity of religion and sees it as a singular static concept.

Such static outlooks can be attributed to the 'Christian baggage' tied to the concept of religion, which of itself has a 'contested' and 'changing' history. (Anidjar 2009) The constitution of the modern state required the forcible redefinition of religion as an 'intangible universal belief' and therefore whatever narrative of religion is adopted, its dominant understanding remains tied to a specific Christian history. (Asad 2003; Anidjar 2009) From being a coherent set of practical rules attached to specific processes of power and knowledge, religion has come to be seen as an abstract, unified and universalized phenomenon in modern times. This concept of religion has been also been described as 'a polemical concept whose relation to power is not merely derivative but inherent and dynamic, the product of unequal and conflicting forces at work within and around it'<sup>56</sup>. Religion is therefore 'an essential, asymmetric and contradictory moment in a series of acts, enactments and motions that constitute it as an object' in modern times.<sup>57</sup> This modern understanding of religion is hard to distangle from the actual conception of religion because of the 'modern knowledge'<sup>58</sup> that post-colonial societies such as Pakistan have of themselves.

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<sup>55</sup> Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Islam, Christianity, Modernity*, Stanford University Press. 2003

<sup>56</sup> Anidjar, Gil. *The Idea of an Anthropology of Christianity*. *Interventions*, ISSN 1369-801X, 11/2009, Volume 11, Issue 3, pp. 367 - 393

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Hallaq, Wael. *Sharia: Theory, Practice and Transformations*. Cambridge University Press. 2009. p 23-25

The modern reformulation of religion reconstitutes, reforms and recomposes it in 'a field of possibilities' that range from self-conscious and powerful reassertion of militancy to laicism at the other, so much so that the meaning of religion becomes 'a plethora of possibilities'<sup>59</sup> Furthermore there exists 'a large space' in-between secularism and religious fundamentalism which is occupied by various combinations and configurations of lived religion (Kaviraj 2010). Therefore rather than talk about religion as a universalized abstraction and a generality, it should be seen as 'a combination of many institutional and ideational structures, intellectual systems, authoritative institutions and sets of ritual observances'.<sup>60</sup>

Islam is not an 'imagined monolith' as is usually asserted, but rather various national cultures, historical experiences, political trajectories, as well as class affiliation, produce different cultures and sub-cultures of Islam (Hallaq 2009) . Religious perceptions and practices across and within different Muslim nations are further comprised of people with 'various degrees of religious affiliations' and the strength and durability of Islamic identity has 'situational' and 'local' explanations. <sup>61</sup> Any 'absolutist projects of monolithic Islamic commitment', are therefore an exception in what can be described as 'a highly diverse and internally conflicted religious community'. <sup>62</sup> In short there are different ways of being a Muslim. Furthermore as Bayat points out 'Muslim societies' in general as concrete entities are 'never religious by definition', nor are their cultures confined to mere religion and so it seems irrelevant to reduce them to a single religious identity. (Bayat 2007)

In the same way Pakistan is home to a great diversity of Islamic thought, where different sectarian outlooks, diverse ethnicities and their corresponding variations of Islam which have been living along side with each other for hundreds of years as 'identities within identities'.<sup>63</sup> Different religious sects and communities have lived side

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<sup>59</sup> Katznelson , Ira and Jones, Gareth Stedman eds. *Religion and the Political imagination* edited by Cambridge University Press, 2010. p 6-10

<sup>60</sup> Kaviraj , Sudipta. 'On Thick and Thin Religion: Some Critical Reflections on the Secularization Theory'.2010

<sup>61</sup> Bayat, Asef. *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Bilgrami, Akeel. *What Is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity*. 1992

<sup>63</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. 2006 also Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011. p 11-12



by side in relative peace and independence without having to prove the authenticity or the righteousness of their Islam, until recent times (Qadeer 2006; Marsden 2005) In spite of the socio-political pressures to adhere to 'a universal Islamic identity', enforced Islamization and the dominance of political Islam has not substantially altered the socio-political realities in Pakistan. Ethnicity, community, family and kinship, which have been described as the 'building blocks' of the Pakistani society, invariably take precedence over any imagined Islamic unity (Qadeer 2006; Lieven 2011). This can be assessed from the distinction of public and private faith during and after the Zia era. A survey of the nature of religiosity during the Islamization period suggests that 'clear chasm between politically expressed belief and private behavior' and that during this era there was a 'manifest divide between the way the people saw religion and the way it was enforced officially through the state'.<sup>64</sup> So much so that 'people remained indifferent to the political aims of Islamization' and the project 'had no discernible impact on the spiritual and moral life of the people'.<sup>65</sup> However in spite of the fact that popular religion was resistant to politicized Islam, the institutionalized Islamist rhetoric remained unscathed by the lack of personal commitment toward it and continued to dominate the public sphere. (Qadeer 2006 ; Ali 2008)

In this context it seems clear that no unifying religious identity or force seems to be powerful enough to unite this diversity into a whole and 'every effort to unite people behind a single religious cause has failed'.<sup>66</sup> So when Islam is described as an 'anchor' of Pakistan's social life and 'a foundational social institution',<sup>67</sup> such viewpoint refer to a multiplicity of religious expression, which have been described as 'sources of internal resilience' in Pakistan.<sup>68</sup> While the urban Islamists are caught up in ideological battles in the public sphere at the grassroots the popular religion of the Pakistani society is somewhat 'liberal' and 'tolerant'.<sup>69</sup> Clear indications of this are the repeated rejection of

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<sup>64</sup>Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. 2006. p154-163

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p 167- 169

<sup>66</sup> Lieven. , Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011.32-35

<sup>67</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. 2006 p.154-155

<sup>68</sup> Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011. 11-12.

<sup>69</sup>Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. 2006 176

Islamist and their orthodox religion at the electoral polls and the consistent reverence for the Sufi culture (Lieven 2011, Werbner 2004, Marsden 2005).

Historically a form of religious tolerance has existed in South Asia which can be identified as 'thick' religion. This 'thick' religion was based on 'firm religious belief, attentive ritualistic observances, cognitive modesty, recognition of religious pluralism and social tolerance', and can be seen a conventional notion of religiosity which is different from 'new religious ideas'.<sup>70</sup> The 'thickness' of religion can be described as 'a catalogue of beliefs about large and small things, all of which are crucial to the practice of their particular faith' that is centered around small group and community identities.<sup>71</sup> In this context the most significant implication of thick religion is its effect on the 'calculus of identity' which is the reason why thick religion cannot be understood meaningfully in the modern liberal discourse that makes small communities forcefully affiliate with a large identity.<sup>72</sup>

Such forced affiliation with a larger religious identity can be seen as 'thin' religion which primarily focuses on religious exclusion of 'other' communities from 'a sense of participating in a historically common and interactive religious culture by creating a distinct singular alienating monolithic religion' and in this sense the new thin religion, is 'intolerant, unaccommodating, this worldly, political, unethical' and is opposed to the traditional forms of religiosity.<sup>73</sup> Clearly the traditional form of religion was more tolerant and diverse than its unitary modern manifestation, a fact which undercuts the liberal narrative which 'claims an ownership over religious tolerance' (Bilgrami 2012). Religious plurality and tolerance existed in the earlier South Asian society not because of liberal secularism but because of the thickness and diversity of religion. (Kaviraj 2010)

Secular modernity has created and promoted 'thin' Islam at the expense of the traditional 'thick' religion, allowing the new 'thin' form of religion to become

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<sup>70</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. 'On Thick and Thin Religion: Some Critical Reflections on the Secularization Theory'. 2010

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

increasingly assertive. Kaviraj points out how the singular features of modern politics brought 'thin' religion into existence with the use of Western rationalist cognitive techniques, which led to the cognitive 'objectification' of space and populations. The forms of cultural codification and objectification initiated by the colonial state, and later adopted and transformed after 1947, have shaped the contemporary claims of cultural and religious collective entities and identities that are now a dynamic feature of Pakistan's political culture (Lieven 2011). These techniques not only brought about new kinds of conflicts between new kinds of communities and created new alien identities through which all acts of individual or a group of Muslims came to be represented as distinctly 'Islamic'(Kaviraj 2010).

Furthermore the present liberal discourse, which manifestly informs the religious identification and categorization in Pakistan currently, fails to take into account the fact that 'sacred' Islamic injunctions are matters of struggle, of competing 'readings' or in other words they are 'matters of history'.<sup>74</sup> In a sense people define their own religion since ambiguity, multiple meaning and disagreement are embedded in the *Quran* and *Hadith*, and they identify their own 'truths' since individuals and groups with diverse orientations may find their own often conflicting truths in the very same scriptures. (Hallaq 2009; Bayat 2007) In Pakistan, the discourse on religion is also framed and measured in a teleological grid of progress and regress where religion is seen as being 'backward' and a high level of religiosity is seen as an 'indicator of social regression'.<sup>75</sup> In such constructions to be secular is to have agency and belief is to give up on one's agency.

The predominant discussion on religion in Pakistan reflects the liberal discourse which measures the quantity of belief in terms of visible marker of religious identity such as church/mosque attendance or sartorial preferences such as veiling etc. The religious conviction or the quantity of religion of the 'ordinary believer' is then questioned and compared with that of the orthodox religious extremists who have come

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<sup>74</sup> Bayat, Asef Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn . 2007 p 12-19

<sup>75</sup> Iqtidar, Humeira. Secularizing Islamists?: Jama'at-e-Islami and Jama'at-ud-Da'wa in urban Pakistan. 2011. p 150-157

to symbolize the epitome of religious passion and therefore 'levels of religiosity' are measured by the perverse criterion of how violent or radical one can become for one's belief.( Kaviraj 2010; Mahmood 2009;2008) Such measurements of faith and belief are clearly prejudiced and unreliable. A better criterion to understand increased or decreased religiosity is in terms of 'quality' of belief which is the 'texture' and the 'substantive elements' of religion, instead of quantity that makes assumptions about less or more religion. <sup>76</sup>

Officially sanctioned 'Islamic laws', 'political pieties' and 'absolutist assertions' of Islamic identity are problematic because they imply that the state decides what constitutes Islam, not the people. Such institutionalization of Islam, which turns the religion into an ideology that is rigid and singular, undermines its inherent diversity and creates a new social category of a static 'Islam-inclined' subject. (Mahmood 2009) In this way the moral complexities of Islam are pushed aside for political expediency. While popular Islam easily operates within 'grey areas' and is historically grounded in 'an acceptance of uncertainty', its association with ideology violently enforces a moral rigidity upon it (Hallaq 2009; Dabashi 2009). Consequently in such a relationship if and when an ideology is discredited or corrupted, then religion is tainted by association, as has happened in Pakistan. Such conflation of belief with ideology, and lack of agency is therefore a distortion of facts, as is the inability of such a discourse to differentiate between the 'quality' and 'quantity' of religion. However these are the criterion that continue to be employed to understand and measure religiosity in Pakistan.

Infact the supremacy and dominance of institutionalized, political Islam is seen as an inevitability and an unquestionable reality in Pakistan. (Rashid 2012; Husain 2012; Siddiq 2011; Ahmed 2002) A particular reading of Pakistan's past and present continues to assert that when a state is carved out in the name of religion then it comes as ' no surprise that religion comes to dominate the public discourse and influence individual

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<sup>76</sup> Kaviraj , Sudipta. 'On Thick and Thin Religion: Some Critical Reflections on the Secularization Theory'.2010

thinking and social behavior'.<sup>77</sup> Such a reading of Pakistani history as a linear progression from religious nationalism to Islamism distorts and ignores the complexities that exist within the range of religious belief in Pakistan. A substantial amount of narratives of the post-partition Pakistan reveal a sense of contingency and highlight the range of options to articulate religion as being explored among the urban Muslim intelligentsia at the time rather than present a static and rigid institutionalized form of religion. (Qadeer 2006; Ali 2009; Karim 2010; Akbar S. Ahmed 1997) This information thus undercuts any teleological narrative of Pakistan's history as simply the inevitable unfolding of the logic of Muslim nationalism and presents a narrative of potential possibility within religion. In reality the state management of religion created a new form of institutionalized Islam, which were very different from the narratives envisioned by the founding fathers of Pakistan (Akbar S. Ahmed 1997). It is therefore problematic to attribute the rise of a certain kind of 'thin' religion to the fact that Islam is both officially and popularly seen as being the *raison d'être* for the existence of Pakistan. This centrality of religion in the social life does give Islam a special role in Pakistan's national identity but the 'thin' Islam that is 'state sanctioned' is different from the 'thick' one that resonates with social values and aspirations. (Lieven 2011; Qadeer 2006; Marsden 2005) However Islam is reduced to a caricature of its diversity when presented in the popular media portrayals and policy discussions so much so that ultimately in Pakistan, Islam and orthodox Islamism are thoroughly conflated with each other.

### **The Problem of Islam?**

This leads one to question a generally accepted assumption that 'Islam' is 'a problem' in Pakistan. (Husain 2012; Siddiqa 2011; Ahmed 2002) In this regard it is significant therefore to highlight the distinction between 'thick' popular religious devotion and the 'thin' institutionalized religiosity. 'Personal or popular religion' are the beliefs held and mobilized by people at both collective and individual level, while the 'institutional religion' is identified as the beliefs represented by the church or structured

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<sup>77</sup> Siddiqa, Ayesha. Pakistan's Modernity: Between the Military and Militancy. Economic & Political Weekly. December, 2011

religion.<sup>78</sup> Personal religious commitments are therefore expressions of transcendental belief, personal identity, which cannot be measured or judged by their adherence to the larger national and group identities or captured by the institutional aspects of faith. The 'problem' in Pakistan therefore is that the official narratives of institutionalized orthodox Islam, which dominate the public sphere, differ vastly from the actual lived religion .

The present discourse on religion in Pakistan currently continues to equate orthodox institutionalized religion with personal religious practices and does not differentiate 'thick' religion from 'thin' religion. The equation of 'personal faith' with 'institutionalized' Islam incorrectly conflates political agenda with personal belief. In Pakistan many would argue that the personal religion is not a problem, but the orthodox 'institutionalized' Islam which is manipulated by the state for its own ends, that is 'disruptive' and 'constrictive'( Lieven 2011; Nasr 2009; Qadeer 2006). Given this context it is easy to understand how, within the notion of religion in common currency, 'Islam' has become equated with a radical interpretation of the religion, which does not represent the inclinations of the majority of Pakistanis. In this view the orthodox Islam of the Islamist parties is the 'religion' ordinary people in Pakistan follow. However in reality popular religion in Pakistan is based on tolerant values but is largely missing from the public sphere and the 'liberal Islamic' viewpoints which have sought a balance between tradition and modernity have been 'effectively driven of the public platform'.<sup>79</sup>

'Islam' also becomes a problem in Pakistan when it is identified as a 'monolith' and judged by the binary distinction between religion and secularism. As Lieven notes, 'Given a choice between secularism and Islamism...Pakistanis will shrug them both off'.<sup>80</sup> This absence of a lack of identification with rigid criteria and assumptive categories however should not be seen as a 'weakness' because Muslims consider their Islamic identity as 'negotiable in the face of other values that they cherish' and is not a conflict between two set of values modern or religious.<sup>81</sup> In the same way recent research

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<sup>78</sup> Katznelson , Ira and Jones, Gareth Stedman eds. Religion and the Political imagination. 2010. p 31 -35

<sup>79</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation. 2006 p183

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p 29- 30

<sup>81</sup> Bilgrami, Akeel. 'What is a Muslim?: Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity. 1992

has shown convincingly how a vast cross-section of the Pakistan society, such as people trained as 'religious scholars', supporters of ethnic-based parties in Sindh, and the disciples of Sufi saints in Kohat, the landowners in Punjab, the ordinary people of Chitral do not adhere to such dichotomies and are not 'simple automatons' instrumentally directed either by the Pakistan state or rigid religious values but rather, an active and creative part of the country's socio-political culture ( Nelson 2009; Ahmad 2009; Zaman 2002; Verkaaik 2005; Werbner 2004; Marsden 2005).

### **Radical (Mis)representations :**

It can be argued that personal religiosity cannot be truly 'represented' by the religious or political leaders. It is therefore important to make a distinction between organized religion, its leaders, institutions and philosophy, on the one hand, and the people who affiliate themselves with that religion. People, as 'agentive actors, determine the inclusive or authoritarian thrust of their own religion.( Mahmood 2009; Bayat 2007) From this perspective, religion is nothing but a body of beliefs and ideas which invariably makes claims to 'authentic meaning' or some 'higher truth'.<sup>82</sup> However the individuals or groups that hold social power and are politically assertive often 'hegemonize' those truths.<sup>83</sup> More often than not small sections of a community, having the 'shrillest voice' and the most activist presence become 'representative' of the religion undeservedly, but understandably. (Bilgrami 2012; Qadeer 2006) 'Absolutist Muslim minorities', with the exploitative appeal that they generate, have a disproportionately large public presence and consequently become 'representative' of Islam, as has happened in Pakistan. This equation of a religion with 'a small fraction' of its membership and its practices, can also have the effect of 'driving ordinary devout people into the arms of the fundamentalists'. (Bilgrami 2012; Taylor 2012) This somewhat poetic allusion towards increasing religiosity suggests that forced categories and identities can have and have already had a destabilizing effect on Muslim identity.

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<sup>82</sup> Bayat, Asef. Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn. 2008. p 10.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore Bilgrami points out that Muslim commitment to Islam is governed by a 'historically determined defensiveness' where any criticism of the religious radicals would be seen as a surrender to the 'forces of the West'.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore the rhetoric of 'secularization' has become laden manifestly with 'anti-Islam propaganda' which in turn plays a role in making the vast majority of ordinary Muslims 'unwilling to be critical of the offending practitioners in their midst' and instead avidly adopting visible markers of religiosity. These factors cause a 'defensively uncritical psychology' within the majority, who might have otherwise been more willing to criticize fundamentalists in their community. (Asad 2003; Bilgrami 2012) Because of this defensive function and their 'silence' ordinary Muslims are exploited by political agenda of absolutist Muslims.

But does such silence make them radical themselves, as is generally implied and characterized as the phenomenon of 'growing radicalization' in the society, is a question that needs to be explored in Pakistan's context. Such collective silence from groups who do not publicly resist or disparage radical or contentious viewpoints in a society, social scientists point out, does not make people 'collaborators' or 'compromisers' within certain worldviews.<sup>85</sup> This is significant because increasing opinion suggests that 'Pakistan has become obsessed with religiosity' and that 'increasing radicalization is ravaging the country'. (Husain 2012; Rashid 2012; Siddiqa 2011) Such characterization of obsession with religion or 'over-religiosity', couched in various terms such as fundamentalism, revivalism, conservatism, fanaticism or extremism, appear to represent a global trend which specifically targets Islam and are not limited to Pakistan as such. Such representations in the West have shaped a particular, negative conception of Muslim societies, the yardstick and the central core of which is 'religio-centrism' (Mahmood 2009). So much so that the authoritarian regimes, weak civil societies and corrupt political culture in the Muslim world are often attributed to its religion, Islam. (Bayat 2007; Nasr 2009). However the outstanding feature of Pakistan, it can be pointed out, is not any unified religion that people follow but rather other diverse questions of politics, economy and sociology manifestly impinge on the notion of religious identity (Lieven 2011; Nasr 2009).

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<sup>84</sup> Bilgrami, Akeel. *Secularism: Its Content and Context*. Economic & Political Weekly. January, 2012.

<sup>85</sup> Zaidi, S. Akbar. *Military, civil society and democratization in Pakistan*. Vanguard Books, 2011. p 191-192



As Mahmood points out , such descriptions of 'religious extremism' enfold a set of judgments and evaluations such that 'to abide by a certain description is also to uphold these judgments'(Mahmood 2008). Events and persons deemed 'extremist' or 'radically dangerous' are often not only reductive of the conditions they purport to describe, but more importantly, they are premised on 'normative conceptions of the subject, law, and language' and the assumption that the philosophical truth is on the side of the liberal and secular ideal'.<sup>86</sup> The dichotomous characterization of secular and religious depends upon such explanations of religious extremism, often amassing together 'a series of practices and images that are said to threaten the secular liberal worldview'<sup>87</sup>, ranging from suicide bombers, to veiled women, to angry mobs burning books, to preachers pushing devious agendas in *madrassas*, as has been seen in Pakistan. Needless to say, these diverse set of images and practices neither emanate from a singular religious logic nor belong sociologically to a unified political formation (Mahmood 2008). Such assumptions need to be urgently re-thought and revised if one is to look beyond the current 'secular-religious' impasse in Pakistan. However questioning normative assumptions about the secular discourse can be situated as 'a grave intellectual and political error', which is ultimately dismissed as 'conservatism'.<sup>88</sup>

### **The Nature of 'Conservatism' and 'Radicalization' in Pakistan:**

The terms 'conservatism' and 'radicalization' are frequently being used to describe an increased level of religiosity within the Pakistani society. Conservatism is the disposition that seeks to preserve or restore the established traditional order and to limit change. Radicalization on the other hand, in the literal sense, is the process by which an individual changes from passiveness or pacifist activism to become more revolutionary, militant or extremist, and refuses tradition (Kaviraj 2010; Mahmood 2009). Such characterization of radicalism can be fittingly ascribed to certain Islamist groups or militant political organization which exist within Pakistan but it does not represent the predominant sensibility of ordinary Pakistanis who cannot be described as

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<sup>86</sup> Mahmood , Saba. *Secular Imperatives*. Public Culture, ISSN 0899-2363, 10/2008, Volume 20, Issue 3, pp. 461-465

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. pp. 461

<sup>88</sup> Mahmood , Saba . *Is Critique Secular?* Public Culture, ISSN 0899-2363, 10/2008, Volume 20, Issue 3, pp. 447-452

militants, revolutionaries or refusers of tradition. Nor does the notion of 'latent radicalism', which is defined as the 'inability to imagine the other' on the basis of religious dogmatic differences ( Siddiqa 2011), seem to resonate with the outlook of a majority of Pakistanis who uphold inclusive and tolerant values (Marsden 2005).

More often than not in Pakistan these terms are conflated with each other when infact they are grounded in very different realities. Radicalism 'refuses' tradition while conservatism seeks to preserve it. In this context Pakistan has been described as 'a highly conservative', archaic and 'somnolent mass of diverse and different societies' based on strong 'traditional kinship networks' (Lieven 2011; Qadeer 2006). The 'conservative' and 'traditional' nature of the Pakistani society is the biggest deterrent against fundamentalism and radicalism (Lieven 2011). The reason the Islamism fails in Pakistan is because of the 'conservative nature of the state' since ordinary people are rooted in tradition and don't support Islamists agenda which thrives manifestly on a 'partially achieved modernity'(Iqtidar 2011). Paradoxically for instance, people use the ballot for tactical reasons informed by local traditions and politics, not rigid, otherworldly religious concerns that are symbolized by the Islamists. Recent work on electoral decision-making process in central Punjab has shown people make decisions based not on religion but on perceptions of the effectiveness of the candidate in 'delivering patronage benefits' and how many local landowners who identify themselves as devout Muslims and lent rhetorical support to the institutionalized religion actually show a propensity to 'resist' and subvert Islamic inheritance laws 'seeking to avoid its effective or consistent enforcement' ( Nelson 2011; Wilder 1999).

This discrepancy can be explained with the notion that one can understand religion and society only from 'particular locations within' them.<sup>89</sup> In this sense people in Pakistan locate and define religion within their society and the larger world in particular contexts and in multiple ways. It also seems erroneous to assume that people within a culture live 'uniform lives' or believe in identical things and that all people who

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<sup>89</sup>Narayan, Kirin. 'How Native is a 'Native' Anthropologist?' *American Anthropologist*. No. 95. 1993 p . 671-686

engage with religion have the same quantitative or qualitative experiences that connect them with their belief. (Kaviraj 2010; Mahmood 2006) It is therefore important to be attentive to the variety of projects, conceptions of selfhood, structures of authority and goals that exist apart from religion among people living in Islamic culture because none of these are realistically reducible to a singular framework (Mahmood 2012), as the political and institutionalized forms of Islam assert in Pakistan.

The complexity of positions and locations within 'the Pakistani identity' suggests that complicated relationships exist among factors such as religion culture, ethnicity, gender, class, age, forces of nationalism and modernity and that identity is determined not only by religion but equally by socio-cultural factors as well. In a study of Pakistani women, Shahla Haeri notes that the *nikah* or the Muslim marriage contract, is the 'least elaborate' part of the predominant wedding rituals in Pakistan which span over three to four days. She points out that the traditional rituals and ceremonies like the *mehndi* which involve singing and dancing take precedence over the Islamic *nikah*. (Haeri 2002) In this sense social and cultural tradition take precedence over religiosity. Similarly even as the religious elite have been incessantly publicly castigating 'the obscenity of Bollywood movies' and the immorality of cultural festivals like *Basant* as being 'unIslamic', both these practices have thrived in Pakistan, even in conservative households and remote villages (Qadeer 2006). Such facts affirm that while religiosity manifestly permeates daily life, people also uphold tradition and modernity in equal measure.

### **A 'Critical Middle' in the Debate on Tradition and Modernity :**

Pakistan's experience bears out that the relationship between tradition and modernity is not unidirectional but is 'adaptive' and traditions have been very 'resilient' in their interaction with modern forces, by constantly being 'reinvented' to meet new challenges. (Lieven 2011; Qadeer 2006; Marsden 2005) Throughout Pakistan's history people seemed to have embraced the goal of material well being and have been eager to adopt modernity regardless of their beliefs and traditions. In this regard Pakistan has incessantly witnessed 'a grafting of modern forms onto traditional functions and

meanings', reflecting a dialectical process between traditional society and modern practices.<sup>90</sup>

The stark distinctions between the 'traditional' and 'modern' have habituated us to think of these two as 'exclusive and exhaustive', such that any thing that was not modern or liberal was taken to be traditional.<sup>91</sup> Such paradoxes underline one of the major theoretical problem arising out of 'the restrictive structure' of the received theory of modernity (Kaviraj 2005). In such discourse it is therefore not possible to be modern and traditional at the same time, a fact that belies the reality on ground in Pakistan where people manifestly uphold both tradition and modernity. Furthermore, when the modernity is so intrinsically equated with Western forms of politics, economy and social behavior, this lead to 'monstrous misidentification of present facts' <sup>92</sup>. From the Western perspective veiling, urban poverty and political Islam are seen as 'traditional' phenomenon when the they have actually shown to be the inverse (Iqtidar 2011; Mahmood 2009; Kaviraj 1997). Religious tolerance is seen as a modern concept which is a consequence of secularization of the society. However scholarship has shown that tolerance and the acceptance of religious diversity were an intrinsic element of the traditional pre-modern South Asian society. (Kaviraj 2010; Marsden 2010; Hallaq 2009) In this sense such dichotomies need to be questioned as a distortion of the actual reality.

Nasr describes the 'devoutly Islamic yet highly modern Muslims of Pakistan' as the 'critical middle' of the Pakistani society, which increasingly looks to religion and tradition 'to help navigate the currents of change' and can be seen as 'the true force for moderation' in Pakistan.<sup>93</sup> As Nasr points out 'there is much Islam at the heart of the Pakistani society, but that society is much more interested in development and prosperity than jihad or foreign adventures'.<sup>94</sup> Nasr acknowledges that violent extremism has footholds in Pakistan, but insists that extremism does not appeal to

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<sup>90</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation

<sup>91</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity. European Journal of Sociology. 2005

<sup>92</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. Filth and the Public Sphere: Concepts and Practices about Space in Calcutta. Public. 1997

<sup>93</sup> Nasr, Vali . Forces of Fortune: The Rise of the New Muslim Middle Class p. 184

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 184 p. 146- 231

majority of the population which is comprised of 'commerce-minded' Muslims who want to do 'vigorous business even while staying true to their Islamic faith'.<sup>95</sup> People in Pakistan are 'purely motivated by material gains' to seek social development at the local level.<sup>96</sup> In other words they are driven by more immediate concerns than religion. In this context it is not the didactic principles of institutionalized Islam but rather the economic dealing, acquisitive interests and material considerations, which drive everyday life in Pakistan (Lieven 2011; Nasr 2009; Qadeer 2006; Hasan 2002). What most Pakistanis seem to be seeking is an 'enchanted modern', that is modernity which includes a spiritual and religious component but is also a blend of technological advance and consumerism, and individualism. ( Deeb 2006)

This is not to take away from the fact that in Pakistan there has been a vivid reappearance of 'religion' in the public sphere in different forms of religious commitments and social identity, which manifests itself in issues of sartorial and linguistic choices, academic preferences, discussion on offensive speech and imagery etc. This 'religion' which has become very visible in the public sphere in Pakistan is the 'institutionalized religion' which leads to an 'objectification' of faith, aspires to give faith 'a concrete form' and create pious subjects infused and informed with 'a unitary consciousness' (Iqtidar 2011; Mahmood 2006; Ewing 1997). Such discourse makes Islam 'accessible' in the public sphere in a way that makes people more amenable to engaging with religious discourse ( Iqtidar 2011; Ahmad 2009). Significantly Islam is presented as not being 'illiterate and backward' but as something 'very modern and rational'<sup>97</sup> and the rationality behind Islamic precepts is incessantly underlined to create a dialectical relationship between faith and reason. People involved in such particular religious framework inevitably become actively involved in the construction of 'a particular kind of a Pakistani culture' and in many ways 'appropriate the meaning of Islam'. ( Iqtidar 2011; Ahmad 2010; Zia 2009) It allows for 'a narrow path of acceptable behavior' which is highlighted by a refusal to participate in 'traditional Islamic rituals' and foregoing a number of cultural practices taking place around major life events such as weddings and deaths etc. (Iqtidar 2011; Husain 2011; Ahmad 2009) The conspicuous changes

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<sup>95</sup> Nasr ,Vali . Forces of Fortune: The Rise of the New Muslim Middle Class p. 184

<sup>96</sup> Hasan ,Arif. The Unplanned Revolution. City Press . 2002. p 12.

<sup>97</sup> Ahmad, Sadaf. Transforming Faith. Syracuse University Press, 2009. p 69-72

introduced by such religiosity in sartorial choices, conversations and behavior stand out in the public sphere and become more 'visible' than quotidian everyday practices. It is specifically those affiliated with such institutionalized religious frameworks, who are the main components of the 'Islamic civil society', that competes assiduously with the 'lifestyle liberals' for social primacy in the public sphere.

However such 'institutionalization', 'objectification' and 'rationalization' of belief is inevitably problematic from the perspective of an ordinary Pakistani because it seeks to dismiss and separate the religious from the spiritual, and the popular form of Islam that is practiced in Pakistan manifestly has a 'spiritual' proclivity (Lieven 2011; Marsden 2010; Qadeer 2006). Furthermore competing social and cultural codes constrain institutionalized faith and produce or accentuated tensions and dissonance among individuals associated with such religious frameworks (Iqtidar 2011; Ahmad2009; Zaman 2002). These competing forces range from cultural practices, levels of education or linguistic divides such as the unofficial 'Urdu medium versus English medium' segregation<sup>98</sup>, and become a source of tension for people within the institutionalized religious frameworks and between those who practice popular forms of religion. This can be affirmed from the experience of the Al-Huda organization whose 'success' has been unwittingly 'tempered' by people who are religious but yet are grounded in competing cultural codes that 'prevent them from completely assimilating its ideology'.<sup>99</sup> In this way orthodox ideology clashes with other preexisting socio-cultural codes since different people are religious in a different number of ways.

### **Irrelevance of Political and Institutionalized Islam in Pakistan:**

In a sense the 'puritan idealism' that nourishes the Islamists makes it irrelevant to the general public in Pakistan at the same time. The 'totalizing' narrative of the Islamist project runs counter to the people's commitment to regional traditional culture and ethnic identity. (Lieven 2011; Marsden 2005) Given the predominance of tradition in Pakistan the revivalist Islamic ideology has thrived in a 'vacuum of idealism' because the

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<sup>98</sup> Ahmad, Sadaf. Transforming Faith. Syracuse University Press, 2009. p 23-24

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 85-86

Islamist projects do not want to maintain traditional status quo but to change it.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore opinion polls have consistently shown that a majority of Pakistanis reject militant and radical viewpoints held by the Islamist groups.<sup>101</sup> This fact is reflected in the electoral process where the religious parties consistently do poorly, getting only 5% of the popular votes at best. (Lieven 2011; Ali 2008) They have no popular support but are capable of sustaining themselves in mainstream politics by maintaining a parasitical relationship with the military and the Saudi financing community. Strong patronage links with the Pakistan military and Saudi Arabia among other the Gulf states clearly has a direct impact on the way a certain kind of Islam became predominantly visible in the society (Lieven 2011 ; Qadeer 2006; Ghazali 1994).

Therefore distinct political factors play a role in the resurgence of a politicized religious activism mainly due to the opportunism of successive political leadership that has pandered to it. As Asad has observed, orthodoxy is 'not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship of power . . . to regulate, uphold, re-quire or adjust what are perceived to be correct practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones'.<sup>102</sup> Seen from this perspective, the spread of a heightened orthodoxy in Pakistan is brought about through a great 'reconfiguration' or 're-centering' of Islamic tradition which has to do with the orthodoxy's establishment of stricter controls as its 'recognition as a religious authority' within the state and consequently by defining the contours of Islam for the state. The increased public space enjoyed by the radical religious groups and parties manifests itself in the social landscape of the country in terms of its disruptive nuisance value which encourages orthodoxy and discourages public discussion of Islam. (Rashid 2012; Lieven 2011; Qadeer 2006 ; Alavi 2002) These religiously mobilized groups put intense and vocal pressure on politics in Pakistan and ultimately their agenda is reflective more of it's political aspirations than religious ones, which is significant given that religion is the haloed rationale for their existence.

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<sup>100</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation, Routledge, p 188

<sup>101</sup> Gallup - Pakistan database .( <http://www.gallup.com.pk/>)

<sup>102</sup> Asad, Talal. Formations of the Secular: Islam, Christianity, Modernity, Stanford University Press. 2003

However, all Islamists groups cannot be essentialized as a single faction since even within the category of 'religious groups' there is a distinct difference between the radical militants and the traditional *ulema*. In his work with the religious organizations in Pakistan, Zaman cautions us against labeling Pakistan's religious authorities as 'unthinking' jihadis and shows them to be resourcefully adapting religion to modern demands. He makes the distinction between the 'high ranking' *ulema* and the 'peripheral' *ulema*, between those 'who have devoted themselves primarily to academic pursuits' and others who 'wage sectarian battles on the street'. Militant sectarian religious groups and parties, are characterized as being led by half-educated 'peripheral' mullahs who are not grounded in religious traditions and are also rejected by the 'high ranking' *ulema*. (Zaman 2002) He also alerts us to the need to challenge the notion that expanding levels of mass education has inevitably resulted in the weakening of the *ulema's* authority as well as intellectual influence and convincingly shows that in the face of growing levels of education and regimes hostile to their position in society, the *ulema* have sought to define 'religion' as a separate sphere and themselves as 'religious specialists', indicating an almost secular position. The *ulema* are themselves in engagement both with the world of politics and theology that entails the active and creative deployment of the intellect. In this way the transmission and synthesis of religious ideas and values continues to take place even in the context of hardened sectarian boundaries in Pakistan. Recent scholarship also show that Pakistan's *ulema* have used, incorporated and in the process transformed the doctrines, symbols, and practices of Sufi-influenced Islamic texts and teachings in their revivalist discourses. (Werbner 2004; Marsden 2005) In this sense all religious institutions cannot be seen as being radicalized 'hotbeds of militant extremism' (Husain 2012).

Islamic groups outside of the mainstream politics are also faced with the same dilemmas within their engagement with the society. Sadaf Ahmad's extensive work with women's groups like Al-Huda shows that the women who identify themselves with the particular religious framework and actively engage in cultural production of such religious knowledge 'end up becoming the Other in mainstream urban society' in



Pakistan.<sup>103</sup> This is so because the outlooks and practices that are upheld by such viewpoints are 'novel' and 'foreign' in Pakistan, and go against the dominant cultural norms of the society. Ahmad points out that because these practices are not reflective of the dominant cultural norms and do not resonate with the society, these women are impelled to employ strategies of resistance to overcome 'social resistance' and 'mainstream disapproval'.<sup>104</sup> Zaman and Marsden's work also highlights the way that the *Tablighi Jamaat's* influence has met with resistance in both urban and rural settings and becomes somewhat neutralized by local traditions. ( Marsden 2006; Zaman 2002) This indicates that popular religion has been resistant in the face of such forms of Islam.

It is also relevant to point out that religious institutions are clearly not the most popular avenues for education in Pakistan and only 6% of the population go to *madrassas*.<sup>105</sup> Recent research has shown that, contrary to the prevalent assumptions in the international discourse on Pakistan, Pakistani people are not clamoring to send their children to the Islamists' organizations but rather show an inclination towards pragmatic choices by preferring private schooling which imparts 'modern' education. For instance in 1983, there were roughly the same number of madrasas and private schools in the country - 2,563 madrasas and 2,770 private schools. By 2005, there were five times as many private schools. Moreover, the growth in private schools has increased since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, while madrasa growth has stayed relatively flat.<sup>106</sup>

This information is significant because it undercuts the prevalent 'radicalization of the society' narrative. In this context it is important to look past fundamentalism's hard hitting rhetoric.<sup>107</sup> Images of Pakistan as a country turning into a hybrid-theocratic state 'awash with fundamentalism', a society 'passively embracing Talibanisation' under the excessive influence and authority of Islamist parties ( Siddiqi 2011; Husain 2012; Rashid

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<sup>103</sup> Ahmad, Sadaf. Transforming Faith. Syracuse University Press, 2009. p 154

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p 3-5, 174-175.

<sup>105</sup> Khwaja, Asim Ijaz. The Madrassa Myth (with T. Andrabi, Pomona, J. Das). Foreign Policy. 2009

<sup>106</sup> Khwaja, Asim Ijaz. Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan: A Look at the Data . 2006

<sup>107</sup> Marsden, Magnus. 'Mullahs, Migrants and Murids: New Developments in the Study of Pakistan A Review Article.' Modern Asian Studies, 39 (4). pp. 987-1010 (2005)

2012) present inadequate accounts of religion, society and politics in Pakistan. Such accounts of extremism and violence often over exaggerate the power of Pakistan's 'Islamist' parties and divert attention from longer-term changes occurring in the society such as those that indicate that the fundamentalists power is on the wane (Lieven 2011; Nasr 2009; Marsden 2005).

Invocations of increasing extremism and violence divert attention from the fact that public religiosity is frequently not simply an expression of religious affiliation but is more often than not, a political statement. Faith as a marker of identity in addition to personal belief complicates the relationship between religion and political identity in Pakistan. Taking the example of veiling which can be understood as a divine command or a symbolic marker, both these understandings of the veil can be analyzed as two distinct 'speech acts' that perform 'very different kinds of work in the making of the religious subject' and presume a very different relationship between the subject's exteriority and interiority.<sup>108</sup> In the usual approach to the subject, the veil is discussed within the dichotomy of 'Islamist' versus 'secularist' approach, where one group reveres the veil and the other finds it abhorrent. In a sense women become the objects of contestation between these two viewpoints in the public sphere with excessive energy expended by men and women in Pakistan to remove the veil, proverbially, and by others to affirm or maintain it.

For the both the Islamists and the 'liberals' the veil is used as the criterion by which the level of a Pakistani woman's piety or commitment to Islam is measured, judged and ranked in religiosity. In other words it is an evaluation of the quantity of her religion. For the lifestyle liberals it is also a sign of social regression and oppression. But why one may ask, is there no middle ground in this discussion and why cannot a woman be unveiled and still be 'religious'? Inversely why can a women wearing a veil not be 'liberated' or 'modern' at the same time? The answers to these questions seem constrained by the need to confine individual preferences within pre-defined categories of 'secular' and 'religious'. In this way the veil also becomes an instrument of

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<sup>108</sup> Mahmood , Saba . Is Critique Secular? *Public Culture*, ISSN 0899-2363, 10/2008, Volume 20, Issue 3.

contestation by the 'lifestyle liberals' and the 'Islamic civil society' over the Muslim identity in the Pakistani public sphere.

It can be argued however that veils are not necessarily religious markers but sometimes more an instrument of socio-cultural projection. Although little formal statistics exist about the incidence of veiling among Pakistani women, but from the existing available information it seems evident that a large number of women who are choosing to veil live in urban communities and are educated, independent women. (Siddiqa 2011; Ahmad 2010 ; Iqtidar 2011; Haeri 2002). This dispels the myths that the only poor, rural and oppressed women are 'forced into veiling' and are a victim of increasing 'conservatism' in Pakistan.<sup>109</sup> Infact far from indicating that the wearers of the veil remain fixed in the world of tradition and the past, the veil has been described as 'the uniform of arrival' of Muslim women, thereby 'signaling an entrance to and a determination to move forward into modernity'.<sup>110</sup> Infact, the emergence of women capable of forging a path of political, educational, professional, and economic autonomy for themselves, as veiled women are doing in the Pakistan, in itself seems to perhaps represent 'a moment of unprecedented potential'.<sup>111</sup> As recent research has shown that veiled women who 'engage with Islam' are openly questioning the orthodox ideology of political Islam and 'opening up new spaces for questions and contestations'. (Iqtidar 2011; Ahmad 2010; 2009) Unfortunately the increasing number of Muslim women wearing the veil does act as a visual aid to bolster claims of the 'alarming rise' in Islamic fundamentalism. Without particularly intending to perhaps, the veiled women lend support and strength to Islamist political forces which, if successful in realizing their objectives, would encourage policies that would certainly have a devastatingly negative impact on women themselves.

### **Socio-political Discontent and Social Conservatism:**

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<sup>109</sup> Ahmed, Khaled. Pakistan: The State in Crisis. Vanguard. 2002.

<sup>110</sup> Mahmood , Saba. Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide? Critical Inquiry, ISSN 0093-1896, 07/2009, Volume 35, Issue 4, pp. 836 - 863.

<sup>111</sup> Haeri, Shahla. No Shame for the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women. Syracuse Press. 2002.

The manifestation of the growing social conservatism and the increased visible markers of religiosity in the Pakistani society can be attributed to the general feeling of insecurity and outrage in the post 9/11 world amongst Muslims and the sense that Islam and Muslims alike had come under 'a global onslaught'. This has increased the appeal for languages of religiosity and nativism to be adopted.<sup>112</sup> Such US led violence has led to an anti-American sentiment and radicalized an entire generation of *jihadis*. (Husain 2012; Rashid 2012) Many in Pakistan see such radicalism and militancy as symbols of the manifestation of a geopolitical modernity as a response to foreign presence in Afghanistan (Ali 2008; Lieven 2011) In a way Pakistan's turbulent history, a result of continuous military rule and unpopular global alliances, also confronts the ruling elite in the form of increased symbols of religiosity in the public sphere( Lieven 2011; Nasr 2009). The overwhelming majority of the country disapproves of the government's foreign policy and the consequent 'war on terror' has caused 'great unhappiness' on Pakistan's streets as well as in the military ranks.<sup>113</sup> Domestic factors such as these and globalization also serve to undermine citizen's trust in government and in political leadership, perhaps pushing some citizens to search for public authority in 'ready made' or 'reinvented' religious symbols or channels.<sup>114</sup> Such domestic and geopolitical explanations can account for the various aspects of emerging religiosity in the public sphere as Pakistanis set to the task of 'being Muslim' in their world of political uncertainty and transformation.

After 9/11 however Pakistan's local problems have taken on a global significance and the relationship between religion and politics in Pakistan acquired an urgency. It is in this context that the 'resurgence of religion' in Pakistan's public sphere has come to be seen as a 'problem'. This revival of religion in the public sphere has thus far largely been conceptualized by both scholars and popular commentators as the product of growing Islamic fundamentalism or radicalization of the population. However as recent scholarship suggests, this form of analysis 'conceals far more than it reveals about the

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<sup>112</sup> Bayat, Asef Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East. Stanford University Press .

<sup>113</sup> Nasr ,Vali . Forces of Fortune: The Rise of the New Muslim Middle Class. Free Press .2009

<sup>114</sup> Katznelson, Ira and Jones, Gareth Stedman eds. Religion and the Political imagination edited by Cambridge University Press, 2010.

form of the country's political culture today' about the complexity of the relationship between Islam and politics in Pakistan since the nature of religiosity in Pakistan can be easily distinguished from politicized radicalism.<sup>115</sup>

### **Popular Religion in Pakistan :**

A majority of Pakistani people do not subscribe to the puritanical and textual 'High Islam' that is propagated by the religious elite and uphold 'Low Islam' which is tolerant and inclusive (Qadeer 2006; Marsden 2005). Popular 'low Islam' has syncretic and spiritual outlooks, which are tolerant of religious diversity, is manifestly practiced in both rural and urban settings in Pakistan (Lieven 2011). In this sense the predominant form of religion that is practiced is a 'thick religion' which is socially tolerant and attentive to ritualistic observances, and is based around 'small communal identities'.<sup>116</sup> In Pakistan 'being Muslim' is never an exclusive identity, but only one of many situational identities of family, language, nation, region, gender and others which require pragmatic compromise and accommodation. Therefore debates over 'being Muslim' therefore are intensely local in Pakistan and popular religious practices in Pakistan are localized and contextualized according to the regional, ethnic and communal variants of Islam (Lieven 2011; Marsden 2006). Therefore any discussion on the nature of religiosity in Pakistan must therefore take into consideration the role played by combined intellectual and cultural processes in religious experience.

Various recent surveys of the socio-religious proclivities in Pakistan show how people 'think, react and question' when they are called upon to change or conform to new standards of spirituality and behavior by the state, the ruling elite or by growing influence of Islamizing forces.<sup>117</sup> It is too often assumed by both popular commentators and scholars that there are few possibilities for 'the living of creative lives within Islam',<sup>118</sup> but such creativity seems manifest in Pakistan. Muslims in Pakistan have

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<sup>115</sup> Marsden, Magnus. *Living Islam: Muslim religious experience in Pakistan's North West Frontier*. 2005

<sup>116</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. 'On Thick and Thin Religion: Some Critical Reflections on the Secularization Theory' in *Religion and Political Imagination*. Cambridge University Press. 2010

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Gellner, Ernest. 'Islam and Marxism: Some Comparison', *International Affairs* 67. 1991

resourcefully deployed, engaged, and challenged historically important Islamic concepts, teachings and figures of authority in ways that offer them the possibility of confronting the contemporary problems they face in their everyday lives (Lieven 2011; Marsden 2006).

A great diversity and 'tolerant flexibility' exists in the forms of Muslim religiosity and identity available to believers in contemporary Pakistan. For instance whilst politically manipulated acts of violence between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are now a regular feature of Pakistan's social landscape, Sunnis and Shi'as continue to live peacefully together in many communities and regions of the country. Marsden highlights the 'thoughtful life of plurality'<sup>119</sup> that the Shi'a-Sunni lead in Chitral, with both sects bound together through 'shared sources of faith and values'<sup>120</sup>. A survey of neighbourhood mosques in Lahore shows how Barelvi Sunni imams regularly speak at gatherings in Shia *imambargahs* and hold commemorations in their own mosques during Muharram (Khan 2011). In other instances Sunni and Shias are shown to allow each other's presence of at their respective mosques and even allowing Ahmadis, who are prohibited to construct their own *masjids*, in their mosques and protecting them by 'guaranteeing them secrecy in the midst of public exposure'<sup>121</sup>. In Islamabad many women's *dars* groups are regularly attended by women of both Shi'a and Sunni sects to encourage cooperation and understanding between the two (Ahmad 2009). In this sense it is not possible to argue that the violent nature of Sunni-Shi'a relations is a 'routinized' and an inevitable feature of life in the country. If certain sections of the 'Islamic civil society' have sought to radicalize Sunni and Shi'a identities across Pakistan, they have not been overly successful in their efforts (Lieven 2011; Marsden 2005; Qadeer 2006) Not too many Muslims in Pakistan see the religious elite as 'authentic founts of pure Islam' and 'ordinary Muslims' continuously attempt to contest the calls to commitment towards institutionalized orthodox Islam. <sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Marsden, Magnus. *Living Islam: Muslim religious experience in Pakistan's North West*. 2005. p 246

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* p 193

<sup>121</sup> Khan, Naveeda. ' *Mosque Construction or the Violence of the Ordinary*' in *Beyond Crisis: Re-evaluating Pakistan*. Routledge. 2010. p 489-490 , 511

<sup>122</sup> Marsden, Magnus. 'Mullahs, Migrants and Murids: New Developments in the Study of Pakistan'. 2005

An integral part of popular religion in Pakistan are the Sufi thought and practice that can be seen as a powerful source of faith and values as a thriving and dynamic feature of Pakistan society which transcends cultural and linguistic divides. In this way Muslims in Pakistan seem 'bound together by a culture of pilgrimages and allegiances to shrines and holy saints' which cut across sectarian, provincial and linguistic boundaries.<sup>123</sup> The contention that Sufism is 'derived from the past' and 'a rural phenomenon' has also been thoroughly discredited by recent research (Lieven 2011; Marsden 2006; Werbner 2004). There are sufficient examples of predominance of an urban presence of syncretism that is defining feature of Sufism. Furthermore Sufism is not bound by the Sunni-Shi'a divide and is seen as 'something undefined in-between'.<sup>124</sup> The Sufi shrines are therefore equally frequented by Shi'as and Sunnis.( Lieven 2011; Marsden 2010)

What has been described as an overwhelmingly 'Pakistan-centered' religious orientation is seen as the main force behind the 'homogenization of the thinking and practices of Pakistan's Muslims'.<sup>125</sup> For instance, in Kohat, where hard-line fundamentalism is manifestly present, a Sufi brotherhood not only has followers from different regions of Pakistan, but also frequently brings different sects together in moments of shared religious ritual, despite the differences of the settings from which the followers of the saint hail (Werbner 2004). Lieven defines Sufism as 'a middle space' in Pakistan and points out that this Sufi culture is not just a rural phenomenon. The way in which the shrines of *Pir Golra Sharif* and *Bari Imam* near Islamabad are frequented by the urban elites affirm the fact that Sufism is very much an urban phenomenon in the present times(Lieven 2011). Sufism has also been resistant and resilient enough not to be eclipsed or unsettled by Western forms of modernity or the modernism of the Islamists and the transcommunal nature of the shrines, is 'a very strong cultural and emotional force' based on 'latitudinarian and pacifist moderation' which presents a strong sense of living and growing tradition.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011. p 136-138

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Werbner. Pnina. *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult*. Hurst and Company. 2004

<sup>126</sup> Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011. p143

Similarly Marsden's work highlights the Sufi outlooks of musical performers who 'play and pray in the same space' and the Sufi proclivities of the 'amulet making' Deobandi *alims* who are also members of the Tablighi Jamaat.<sup>127</sup> He also points out that the Sufi tradition in Chitral, 'focuses on intellectual and emotional engagement with Sufi texts and ideas, rather than ecstatic worship at shrines and affiliation to formalised Sufi lodges and brotherhood'.<sup>128</sup> His work depicts the flourishing of Sufi poetry and musical tradition in the North western region of Chitral in the face of Islamist objections, as an affirmation of the fact that the society there is largely 'resistant' to radical fundamentalism.<sup>129</sup> In the same way Khan highlights the way in which many mosque communities in Lahore continue to celebrate *Eid-Milad Nabi* and encourage practices of *naat* and *durood* continue despite being banned or condemned frowned upon by the Deobandi or Ahle Hadith groups for 'being in excess'.<sup>130</sup>

Furthermore the manifestations of religion in the popular culture in Pakistan also highlight a 'wholesome' Pakistani identity that manifestly seems to 'celebrate' diversity, by taking cues from different strains of Islam practiced within Pakistan (Elias 2011; Saima Zaidi 2010; Dalmia and Hashmi 2007). The popular visual culture in Pakistan is based on indigenous popular icons, a majority of which draw heavily on religion and mythology. In this way these religious symbols in the popular culture exist as 'perceptual metaphors', showing the capacity to pattern responses in the context of how the individual relates to the world or to the divine (Dalmia and Hashmi 2007). Pakistani popular culture reveals 'a very pluralistic and inclusive society' where a heterogeneity of Islamic beliefs and practices in the social landscape coexist easily, even with non-Islamic ones and it is not unusual to find Hindu or Christian symbolism immersed with the Muslim traditional symbols (Saima Zaidi 2010; Dalmia and Hashmi 2007). The diversity of such thought and expression reflected in popular culture allows for the 'coexistence of contradictions' that exist in the form of dichotomies of the spiritual and material, traditionalism and modernity, realism and fantasy realms in the society. (Saima Zaidi

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<sup>127</sup> Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011. p 136-138 p.101

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid* p. 241

<sup>129</sup> Marsden, Magnus. *Living Islam: Muslim religious experience in Pakistan's North West*. 2005. p 183

<sup>130</sup> Khan, Naveeda. ' *Mosque Construction or the Violence of the Ordinary*' in *Beyond Crisis: Re-evaluating Pakistan*. Routledge. 2010. p 499



2010) Religious imagery in the popular culture also co-exists comfortably with modern symbols so that images of *Buraq*<sup>131</sup> and F-16s can be easily placed within the same frames, representing worldviews that uphold tradition and modernity in equal measure (Elias 2011).

An explosive expression of popular or folk art manifests itself in the Pakistani truck art, for instance, which also serves as a platform of potent religious symbolism. Such art incorporates religious symbols and texts, good luck charms, as well as lines of verse, which are humorous, romantic, and philosophical (Elias 2011, Saima Zaidi 2010). Such religious images, even at their least denotative or most abstract, are symbols which 'provoke thought and demand a response' from the viewers (Elias 2011). The truck art thus creates 'a sacred geography' spanning Pakistan and becomes a reflection of 'an imagined community' that is united by symbolism.<sup>132</sup> That these religious symbols are pictorial, the most common religious symbols being the *Ka'baa* and the Prophet's Mosque, and that pictorial representation elicited 'religious reactions' from onlookers, also raises questions about the real and imagined nature of religion and religious art in Pakistan, which views itself 'as resolutely lacking pictorial representations'.<sup>133</sup> Such representations of popular religion have until recently been conspicuously absent in the elite discussions on culture and religion, which manifestly dominate the public sphere. In this sense the 'imagined' and the 'lived' culture are at a variance with each other, where the imagined culture is framed in a unitary form of Islam and the lived culture continues to be informed by popular forms of religion. This 'thematic distance' between the imagined and lived religion leads to the 'compartmentalization' of social life.<sup>134</sup>

### **Competing identities , Multiple locations:**

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<sup>131</sup>The Prophet's Horse in Islamic mythology. see Zaidi, Saima. *Mazaar, Bazaar :Design & Visual Culture in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press. 2010

<sup>132</sup>Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011. p 136

<sup>133</sup> Elias, Jamal. "On Wings of Diesel: Trucks, Identity and Culture in Pakistan" *One world*, 2011

<sup>134</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation* 181-185.

Such 'compartmentalization' of religious and social life is manifestly visible in the 'normative paradoxes'<sup>135</sup> that exist in the Pakistani society. Taking into account, for instance, the 'regimes of illegality' that surround the construction of mosques in Lahore where the religious elite openly support the illegal seizure and construction of mosques through dubious financial means. (Khan 2010) Khan points out the possibility that almost 90% of all mosques in Lahore are built on illegally seized land and yet are frequented by 'pious'<sup>136</sup> people who are able to rationalize such discrepancies within their religious worldviews. Similarly Pakistan's 'chaotic road traffic' is an excellent illustration of a contrast between professed piety and personal irresponsibility that is evident everywhere in Pakistan. Vehicles are adorned with religious memorabilia and roadsides frequently showcase *Quranic* texts but traffic rules are habitually flouted and little regard is given to the safety of others, and in this sense the moral principles of Islam clearly do not inform the traffic behavior in Pakistan (Elias 2011; Qadeer 2006).

Another example of the 'compartmentalization' of social life can be seen by the way issues in ordinary people's lives, informed by a number of ideological frameworks, are prioritized to fit specific contexts. Ahmad cites the examples of 'pious' young girls in Islamabad, who believe that listening to music is forbidden, do not listen to it during Ramadan because it is a time when their 'Muslim identity may be at its strongest'.<sup>137</sup> This does not take away from the fact that, living in a culture in which music is a normal part of life, these girls do listen to it otherwise. In this sense such persons may experience themselves as a 'symbolic, timeless whole but this self may quickly be displaced by another, quite different self which is based in a different definition of the situation'.<sup>138</sup> In this way the projection of a person's identity is contextual or dependant on specific contexts.

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<sup>135</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul, Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation 181-185.

<sup>136</sup> Khan, Naveeda. 'Mosque Construction or the Violence of the Ordinary' in *Beyond Crisis: Re-evaluating Pakistan*. Routledge. 2010. p 487- 505

<sup>137</sup> Ahmad, Sadaf. *Transforming Faith*. Syracuse University Press, 2009. p 57-58

<sup>138</sup> Ewing, Katherine. 'The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self and the Experience of Inconsistency,' *Ethos* 18, no. 3, 1990. p 251-278

As becomes evident in Pakistan, people do not live their lives within one framework but many and have multiply constructed identities because they live in a culture that is informed by more than one ideology and set of values. According to Stuart Hall individual identities are built over 'varying, often conflicting, positions and discourses and are therefore multiply constructed' (Hall 1996). In this sense individual identity in Pakistan 'embodies various selves' and upholds distinct 'ideological strands' that allow it to identify and connect with others around some issues and under different contexts, and in other instances it does not. The fact that individual life is informed by a number of competing identities allows us to question the assumptions of it as a 'unified, coherent and self-centered' entity. (Hall 1996) Such assumptions correspond to the western conception of the person as being 'bound and organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background.'<sup>139</sup> Situating an identity within a space of boundaries and categories is therefore 'an awkward process' because these boundaries are 'imagined and experienced as highly complex, multiple, overlapping, diverging identities which are also shifting, permeable and highly resistant to mapping in conventional ways'.<sup>140</sup>

Seeking to restrict the diverse social and religious sensibilities to a rigid dichotomy is then tantamount to committing a form of violence on such identities. (Rose 2002; Ewing 1990) A one dimensional view of lives and cultures as being seen as 'determined by a discourse .....or being totally outside of that discourse' is over simplistic because it is 'inadequate to capture subjective experience in the face of the clash of discourses and the competition of ideologies characteristic of postcolonial societies' like Pakistan .<sup>141</sup> In this sense there is a need to question rigid Eurocentric categories and binary distinctions such as modern vs. traditional, religious vs. secular for analytical purposes since most Pakistanis seem to want to transcend these categories. Ultimately the elite notions of secularism and absolutist religious piety do not seem to matter much to the most

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<sup>139</sup> Ewing, Katherine. 'The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self and the Experience of Inconsistency,' *Ethos* 18, no. 3, 1990. p 256

<sup>140</sup> Rose, Gillian. 'Subjectivities, Knowledge, and Feminist Geographies.' Rowman & Littlefield. 2002. p 253-258.

<sup>141</sup> Ewing Katherine. 'The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self and the Experience of Inconsistency,' *Ethos* 18, no. 3, 1990.p 251-278

Pakistanis or determine how people make decisions about private or public matters since most Pakistani people do not consciously see themselves as either rejecting religion or embracing a secular modernity. (Lieven 2011; Nasr 2009; Qadeer 2006; Marsden 2005).

Pakistanis continue to show an inclination towards considerable religiosity while upholding progressive ideals. In this they reflect the distinctive 'devout Muslim's identity', where their commitment to Islam has 'a deep integrated place in their self identity' but also upholds 'a fundamental commitment to modernity'.<sup>142</sup> In her study of Bangladeshi women Elora Shehabuddin describes this sensibility as a 'subaltern rationality' through which decisions are made on the basis of material and spiritual concerns which seem irrational from both secular and Islamists perspectives.<sup>143</sup> In the same way with the apparent rejection of tradition and modernity, religious and secular binaries, Muslims in Pakistan provoke changes in their surroundings by adopting secular strategies without abandoning Islam but rather by retaining, reclaiming and reshaping it. (Qadeer 2006, Marsden 2005, Lieven 2011) In many instances the actions and beliefs of citizens often appear inconsistent and contradictory, but they become comprehensible when one realizes that they are in fact motivated not by ignorance and gullibility, as the 'life-style liberals' and the Islamist elites alike claim, but by a rationalized knowledge, born of experience of the limits of the state and contemporary existential dilemmas.

However the intensifying social problems also bear evidence of 'a moral crises' in Pakistan, which has also been described as the dilemma of Pakistan's social change whose resolution could possibly lie in 'a liberal and pluralist social order' in which popular Islam continues to be 'the source of ethical and spiritual guidance'.<sup>144</sup> There are various examples in recent scholarship that points towards the acceptance of such a social order. Oskar Verkaaik's research in Hyderabad with the urban unemployed and underemployed youth shows them as neither resisting or unthinkingly following the country's powerful religious or more 'secular' parties, but rather as having constructed a

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<sup>142</sup> Bilgrami, Akeel. *What is a Muslim?: Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity*. 1992

<sup>143</sup> Shehabuddin, Elora. *Reshaping the Holy*. Columbia University Press. 2008. pg 5-10

<sup>144</sup> Qadeer, Mohammad Abdul. *Pakistan: Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. 2006

symbolic and meaningful place for themselves in what is often stereotyped as being Pakistan's 'elite-governed political system'. He also shows how the MQM promoted a Muslim identity that was 'a paradoxical reconciliation of complimentary but contradictory discourses on Muslim nationalism and ethnic solidarity, Islamic modernism and Sufism', and that this reconciliation of complex and seemingly incompatible sets of discourses was made possible by 'creative fun'. (Verkaaik 2004) Werbner's work show how people from diverse walks of life and ideological spectrums, including the educated elite and secular army officers who are deemed to be impervious to 'low' syncretic culture, are avid followers of the Sufi culture in Kohat. (Werbner 2004) In Chitral, the comparatively well-educated village Muslims did not automatically turn towards Islamist and piety-inclined movements but instead they formulated their own rationalized decisions which were critical of both the teachings and the practices of Muslims they themselves referred to as 'extremists', as well as the Western influences (Marsden 2005).

It is significant also to note that half of Pakistan population, which is under twenty-five years of age and has increased access to higher levels of education and varieties of networking and information-sharing than the previous generations, is significantly influencing the public sphere. As Nasr and Lieven note this generation have a significantly modern outlook but who are also 'religiously inclined'. That they can 'read the Qur'an on their own' and 'talk back to clerics' is perhaps the sign of the way in which they can a role in effecting social change by questioning political Islam and allowing popular religion to express itself in the public sphere.( Lieven 2011; Nasr 2009)

### **Hidden Debates, Ordinary Voices - A 'Revitalized' Public Sphere :**

Recent trends are indicative of the opening of new social spaces in the public sphere which is fast becoming an arena of political expression for groups that have been sidelined in the past. There is a 'new sense of the public' in Pakistan presently owing to

significant factors like the 'media revolution',<sup>145</sup> which has brought into the public sphere already existing forms of invisible debates which lacked articulation in the society. This is significant that the ordinary voices in Pakistan have not been able to articulate themselves meaningfully in the public sphere until present times as the institutionalized, radical Islam has dominated the public space, while the popular forms of religiosity have functioned largely in the private. Religious debates in the public sphere have been manipulated and appropriated through censorship of popular religious practice and speech so much so that the elite and the *mullahs* 'seem to have done *qabza* on public speech'.<sup>146</sup> In this sense popular religious values and practices in Pakistan's social history have remained 'hidden in the margins and interstices' since people could 'speak' meaningfully only in the non-public spaces. (Asdar Ali 2004)

Such hidden debates are not particular to Pakistan however. In classical Habermasian terms, popular culture or religion do not fully qualify as 'universal domains', because they were based on the assumption that 'ordinary people' not only 'lack the vocabulary to articulate themselves as an audience', but they also 'hardly participate in public life', a fact which foregrounds them 'as (emotional) witnesses rather than as experts or persons holding a view or an (interesting) opinion' (Butler and Habermas 2011). Consequently any debate resulting from within the popular culture tends to be 'among acquaintances, neighbors or co-workers' and is in point of fact 'hidden' (Butler and Habermas 2011; Hall 1996). However such notions of the public sphere, which relegates popular religion to the private and removes it from the domain of rational discussion, have been effectively challenged in recent times.

Recent scholarship has shown that 'unique forms of democratic debate, thought and experience' are an integral feature of Pakistan's social culture, in spite of the dominance of the Islamists, the military and elite classes in the political and public sphere. (Lieven 2011; Nasr 2009; Marsden 2005) These debates which were largely taking place in the private realm are increasingly being articulated in the public sphere. In this

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<sup>145</sup> Lieven, Anatol. Pakistan: A Hard Country. Allen Lane. 2011. 232. 255 also Zehra, Nasim. How a Vibrant Media can thwart a coup. Express Tribune. March 2012

<sup>146</sup> Khan, Naveeda. ' Mosque Construction or the Violence of the Ordinary' in Beyond Crisis: Re-evaluating Pakistan. Routledge. 2010. p 492

sense, the role played by critical political debate, be it in the pulpits of the country's mosques, or in vernacular language, university journals, 'cannot be underestimated' in order to capture the nature of critical political engagement in Pakistan.<sup>147</sup> This also indicates that the inequitable political culture and the forms of power relations upon which they build have not gone 'uncontested' in the country, but rather urban private spaces have already been locations of quiet struggles. Bayat describes this as the 'art of presence' where through their quiet and unassuming daily struggles, people 'reconfigure new realities on the ground' not through formal institutional channels, from which they are largely excluded, but through 'critical debates and actions in the very zones of exclusion'.<sup>148</sup> In Pakistan's case such debate has meant the unsettling of the status quo of the political elite and the questioning of the rigid orthodox religion. Furthermore this process is being facilitated by the fact that much of these debates are increasingly taking place in Urdu language, which has 'a multicultural and multi-religious vocabulary'<sup>149</sup>, that gives it the potential to bring disparate voices together .

In spite of the fact that most people in Pakistan can effectively articulate themselves in Urdu, Urdu has inadvertently come to be seen as a sign of 'backwardness' and 'associated with political Islam' in complex multi-dimensional ways. (Rahman 2006) Well-known liberal intellectuals have publicly derided the language and gone as far to say that 'Urdu is intrinsically not a progressive language, whereas English is'.<sup>150</sup> Historically Urdu was seen as 'the linchpin of the two-nation theory' and 'a cornerstone of Pakistani nationalism' so much so that unconditional allegiance to the Urdu language almost became 'an article of faith' and 'an intrinsic part of the Pakistani Muslim, as opposed to a secular and Westernized, identity'.<sup>151</sup> Possibly because of the religious right's support of Urdu since the very time of the inception of Pakistan, the 'English speaking elite' have been 'resistant' to and 'opposed Urdu', considering it to be 'the language of their opposition', namely the radical Islamists.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Marsden, Magnus. *Living Islam: Muslim religious experience in Pakistan's North West Frontier*. 2005

<sup>148</sup> Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford University Press. 2009.

<sup>149</sup> Rahman, Tariq. 'Urdu as an Islamic Language'. *Annual of Urdu Studies Journal*. No.21. 2006

<sup>150</sup> Ahmed, Khaled. *Pakistan: The State in Crisis*. Vanguard. 2002.

<sup>151</sup> Nasr, Vali. *The Vanguard of the Islamic revolution :the Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan*. 1994. p 18

<sup>152</sup> Rahman, Tariq. 'Urdu as an Islamic Language'. *Annual of Urdu Studies Journal*. No.21. 2006

In complex and contradictory ways therefore, Urdu plays a very contested political role in Pakistan where in linguistic terms the society is divided along ideological and class lines, so that Urdu is also part of the vertical (socio-economic class) conflict in the country where 'the 'elites with wealth and power have access to English medium schooling and the masses are educated either in Urdu or not at all'.<sup>153</sup> Urdu-medium schools and colleges are said to cater mostly to the lower-middle and middle classes and facilitate right wing political and cultural views, while English caters mostly to the upper-middle and upper classes with liberal political and cultural views. While the English mediums schooling is considered to impart 'liberal views' such as encouraging tolerance for religious minorities and sensitivity towards women's issues, it also manifestly 'alienates students from their culture and makes them look down upon their compatriots who are not as Westernized as themselves'.<sup>154</sup> The English language is also seen as 'a status symbol' and 'a class-identity marker' and consequently Urdu has come to be seen as subordinate to the interests of the English speaking urban elite. Urdu becomes 'a liability' which hinders one from 'rising in the society'. (Hasan 2002; Rahman 2005). The attribution of 'a lower status' to Urdu and even local languages, 'militates against linguistic and cultural diversity, weakens the "have-nots" even further and encourages poverty by concentrating the economic power in the hands of the English-speaking elite'<sup>155</sup>. Interestingly however this linguistic disparity also informs debates and creates disparity even within the religious circles. Even within religious organizations like Al-Huda, the English medium and Urdu medium divisions, lead to important divergences over specific tactics and strategies and are a source of constant tension between the two groups who inspite of sharing the same religious ideology have 'significantly different outlooks on life'.<sup>156</sup>

Given the nature of the discussion taking place presently within the 'Islamic civil society', for whom Urdu is manifestly the medium of articulation, the general public discourse in Urdu overtly disparages secular values, the neo-imperialism of the West

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<sup>153</sup> Rahman ,Tariq. Denizens of Alien Worlds A Study of Education, Inequality and Polarization in Pakistan. Oxford University Press. 2005

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ahmad, Sadaf Transforming Faith. Syracuse University Press, 2009 . pg 85-86



and the Westernized elite in Pakistan, encourages and demands the suppression of women in the society and seeks to inhibit many forms of social creativity, such as in the arts and media.<sup>157</sup> In some ways 'the English medium versus the Urdu medium' debate has come to be framed around the contestation of religion between the 'life style liberals' and the 'Islamic civil society' in the public sphere. Furthermore there is also a manifest contestation between the two worldviews over the very notion of secularism. The 'Islamic civil society' describes the secularists in Pakistan as being 'stubborn in the face of failure' and 'carrying on the tradition of slavery of the British Raj while not knowing the first thing about the tradition of secularism in the West'<sup>158</sup> and assert that the 'Pakistani secularists simply learn random phrases written in the West by rote and hurl them at ordinary Pakistanis without knowing what they mean'.<sup>159</sup> In this perspective secularism has a very 'Western' and 'imperial' context. Conversely opinions in the English speaking press suggest that 'secularism should be embraced, but should not be perceived as a threat to religious values' and that a secular system of governance is not 'a hindrance to Islamic faith but an assurance that individuals can practice their religion freely'.<sup>160</sup> The equation of secularism with atheism in Pakistan further constrains the possibility of any meaningful debate between the two groups.

Until recently the English and Urdu discourse has been taking place in two seemingly different spheres with very limited interaction and acknowledgement between both segments (Rahman 2006; 2005). Recently however these entrenched lines have blurred and the English-Urdu dichotomy seems to have somewhat dissipated because of the increased visibility of Urdu in the public sphere, through debates in the media which create a middle space by encouraging a dialogue between the two factions.

### **The Articulation of a 'Middle Space' in the Media:**

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<sup>157</sup> Overview of the Urdu press. [www.jang.com.pk](http://www.jang.com.pk), [www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk](http://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk), [www.express.com.pk/epaper](http://www.express.com.pk/epaper)

<sup>158</sup> Jan, Orya Maqbool . The Daily Jang. May 2, 2012. [www.jang.com.pk](http://www.jang.com.pk)

<sup>159</sup> Rashid, Haroon. Daily Express. March 15, 2012 .[www.express.com.pk/epaper](http://www.express.com.pk/epaper)

<sup>160</sup> Hamid, Mohsin. *Confronting Hypocrisy - The Need for Secularism in Pakistan*. Dawn. 2011. also Talat, Faraz. *Can Secularism Help Pakistan*. Express Tribune. September 13 ,2011

The media seems to have rapidly energized the Pakistani society's 'transformative ability' and in this regard the scope and scale of the electronic media's reach has been specially exceptional. In the print media the newspapers that publish in Urdu are said to have a broader reach than the English-language papers, but in a population of 140 million the Urdu newspapers do not have a combined circulation of even 10 million copies. Similarly the circulation of Pakistan's entire English-language press is said to be no more than 150,000 in a population one hundred times that size. Given this context where the print media has such limited access, it is significant to note that almost eighty six percent of the Pakistani population has access to the electronic media which allows it the imperative of significantly influencing public opinion.<sup>161</sup>

Furthermore as an avenue free from many conventional restrictions on expression, the media's impact on the society has been profound and it has resulted in an intensified cross-cutting of social messages. The public-private boundaries are increasingly blurring and 'cultural citizenship'<sup>162</sup> is being practiced in many ways and in different places. The media and information 'revolution' is encouraging and shaping public opinion, which in turn, impels the government to respond to its needs. In this sense the media has introduced a new phenomenon of public accountability which has been largely unknown in Pakistan (Lieven 2011; Ali 2008). Numerous political events including back channel meetings and negotiations are regularly reported often pushing the uniformed and civilian players to explain, if not justify, their moves (Zehra 2012; Ali 2008). The media often serve as a forum for political parties, commercial, religious, and other interests, as well as influential individuals, to compete with and criticize each other publicly. The media does not 'criticize' Islam as such, but leaders of religious parties and movements are not exempt from public scrutiny and criticism. Although media reporting does not alter the moves made by religious and political elite, it does expose the public to the reality of Pakistan's power play and politics. All opinions in the public realm are scrutinized against the public's 'inherent common sense and its experiential wisdom' and the media discussions in turn 'educates' the public opinion. (Eickelman and Salvatore 2009; Butler and Habermas 2011) In this way public debate and

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<sup>161</sup> Internews Media Resource.

<sup>162</sup> Eickelman, Dale F and Salvatore, Armando. *The Public Sphere and Muslim Identities*. 2009

discussion, which many people are critical of and uncomfortable with, have emerged as new 'power tool' in Pakistan. (Lieven 2011)

Significantly the media has initiated national debates in the Urdu language. Previously most intellectual debates were restricted to English print media or the state-controlled Pakistan television. This is significant because of the way that the masses in Pakistan have been effectively disenfranchised through the barriers erected by the 'supremacy of the English language' in the public discourse (Rahman 2005). The English speaking press in Pakistan is said to have somewhat essentialized the non-English speaking sections as the 'passive' and 'uncultured' other and has manifestly upheld the worldview of the lifestyle liberals (Zehra 2012; Rahman 2006; Asdar Ali 2004; Ghazali 1994). On the other hand the Urdu language press has long perpetuated the orthodox viewpoints that resonate with political Islam. In this way the Urdu language print media facilitates the narratives of the political Islam which encourage an emotional, intolerant and angry view of the world in which the 'enemies of Islam' are 'waging a war on Islam' and Pakistan.<sup>163</sup> In this sense it empowers and becomes the voice of the religious elite. The Urdu language print media is therefore seen as being a 'pro-establishment' and 'right wing' phenomenon, which incessantly propagates 'religious nationalism' and 'conspiracy theories'. (Husain 2012; Rahman 2006; Patel 2011) However in an unprecedented way, both these worldviews are now unwittingly forced to converse and publicly debate with each other on the mainstream electronic media.

In this way the media becomes a 'middle space' which facilitates social dialogue. Lieven describes the Pakistan media also as a 'microcosm' of the Pakistani society and 'a powerful and moderate middle class political force' that is dominated by an educated but 'conservative middle class sensibility'<sup>164</sup>. The media does not overtly endorse the values and viewpoints of the 'Islamic civil society' or the 'life-style liberal' since extreme views and 'final truths' do not stand the test of facts in the public sphere. This however has led the media to be vilified as a 'right-wing' phenomenon by the 'life-style liberals' and also as reviled by the orthodox segments of the society for following 'a wrong

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<sup>163</sup> Eickelman, Dale F and Salvatore, Armando. *The Public Sphere and Muslim Identities*. 2009

<sup>164</sup> Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011. 230-233

Islam'.<sup>165</sup> This is because in response to the demands of a majority of viewers the media articulates strong element of popular culture and popular religion, such as worships of local saints, intra-religious and sectarian unity, gender roles and other open debates. However the media itself is not without contradictions and its ways can sometimes be 'haphazard' and in many cases questionable (Husain 2012 ; Rashid 2012 ; Lieven 2011).

In a sense the contestation of religion continues within some sections of the media as well, with the segments of the cultural media representing the entertainment and fashion industry being dominated by the lifestyle liberals, who show a manifest proclivity for 'elitist' aspirations and representations. The confluence of such liberalized lifestyle outlooks and the technological revolution has created a 'high culture' which projects 'a false air of affluence' in the media ( Hasan 2002). Furthermore a normative and aspirational value seems to be placed on the identity created by this 'high culture', which is manifestly dismissive of religion. Such an obvious aversion to interrogating the actual practices of popular culture in the public sphere by the 'lifestyle liberals' negates 'the continued importance of religious imagery, values and culture in Pakistan' (Iqtidar 2011), even as it continues to elicit fierce reactions from the 'Islamic civil society'. In this sense the visual culture also becomes polarized because it is dominated by representations of the lifestyle liberals on the one end and the Islamic civil society on the other, but is largely dismissive of the popular sensibilities. However there are exceptions and in this context it would be worthy to point out the phenomenon that is Coke Studio<sup>166</sup>, which showcases a fusion of popular and folk music with a modern Western flair. Devotional religiosity that is represented in the traditional *qawaalis* and Sufi *kalam*s, which were previously largely absent on the media platform, is a significant element of the programme. The semi-improvised, semi classical musical performances highlight the diversity in music, poetry, cultures and languages that exist in Pakistan and connects distinct styles, identities and ethnicities within the common denominator of music. In this way using music's visceral drive the Coke Studio has created a rare space for modern entertainment which reflects sensibilities in the popular culture and presents

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<sup>165</sup> Lieven, Anatol. Pakistan: A Hard Country. Allen Lane. 2011. 230-233

<sup>166</sup> Coke Studio home page. (<http://www.cokestudio.com.pk>)

popular folk music with a sacred slant. In this sense it is also a singular space in Pakistan where popular culture meets high culture, in a non-confrontational way.

In this way the media significantly exposes the 'fault lines of polarization'<sup>167</sup> in the Pakistani society but it also however broadens space for inclusive politics, creative culture and a conscious intellect. The role of religious belief and practice in the public and private spaces, from the modes of dress to means of political engagement are increasingly dissected from different angles. In this sense the media performs a remarkable feat by encouraging a wide range of discussions on such issues and creating a debate on the diversity of religion, bringing opinions from ideologically and politically opposed camps on a common platform to engage in a conversation on contentious subjects like religion or women's issues. An instructive anecdote to this fact would be a recent episode of a religious talk show in which a Sunni cleric, who pronounced that 'it was un-Islamic for women to dye their hair', was outrightly discredited by a woman caller and his fellow Shi'a cleric on the show, 'who wanted to know why he dyed his own beard'.<sup>168</sup>

Since Islam forms the focus of a large number of the debates in the media, the monopoly of institutionalized political Islam in the public sphere is effectively challenged by such debates in the media. (Zehra 2012; Lieven 2011; Marsden 2010) The consciousness of media power and the increased accessibility of media, even in authoritarian sociopolitical contexts, also seems to have provided 'alternatives' to articulation of Islamist thought and action in immediate political terms. It also changes the priorities of the Islamists' own agenda for whom to the construction of 'an Islamically informed public' becomes a more realistic goal than the establishment of a local or worldwide Islamic state' (Eickelman and Salvatore 2009; Butler and Habermas 2011). In this sense religious belief and practice play a dynamic, and often constructive, role in shaping the public sphere in a vital way.

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<sup>167</sup> Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. Allen Lane. 2011. p 127-135

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* p 230-233

## Conclusion:

This paper shows that religion is clearly a contested space in Pakistan. Until recently 'Islam' has been presented as a static and unitary phenomenon in the public sphere, which the state constantly supervises and manages. Such representations distort the diversity and negotiability of the Muslim identity in Pakistan which is articulated in multiple ways. This work therefore attempts to provide an analytical insight into such complexity based on the existing resources that are available to capture the complex reality of people's religious lives. In this sense however it also highlights the dearth of analytical knowledge that can represent the diversity of religious expression in Pakistan or which is able to capture the rich details of the religious lives of Pakistanis. Such a lack of analysis is conspicuous in its absence since it is only by representing the complexity of positions and locations that people take through negotiation, accommodation and resistance in the society that the ordinary Pakistani Muslim identity can find meaningful articulation .

In this regard this paper underlines the distinction between popular religion, which has largely been relegated to people's private lives, and the politicized and institutionalized Islam which has long dominated the public sphere. This distinction helps us understand the current socio-political context in Pakistan where Islam has become a 'problem' in the public sphere and has come to be contested between those who want to banish it from the public sphere and those who want to impose rigid interpretations of it. Furthermore this study underlines the fact that the contestation between these two groups is not really a contest between religious and secularism because neither do the lifestyle liberals uphold liberal secularism nor do the Islamic civil society represent the 'Islam' that most Pakistanis believe in. It is also clear from the above analysis therefore that the focus of such contestation is the unitary and institutionalized form of religion and not the popular lived religion. In this sense this study underlines the way in which popular religion does not have sufficient representation in the public sphere, while by contrast the political and institutionalized forms of Islam are manifestly visible. It also highlights the way in which this

contestation over religion takes place in public spaces, the media, academic settings , linguistic affiliations, over the bodies of women and even on the characters of iconic national figures. This study however shows that these two contesting worldviews are largely irrelevant to ordinary people and are not representative of the popular 'thick' Islam, which is a very personalized, localized and contextualized phenomenon for individual believers.

Furthermore this study shows that there is extensive conflation of social categories which leads to misidentification and misrepresentation of actual popular orientations and outlooks in the public sphere. Most Pakistanis seem to uphold tradition and modernity in equal measure and the diverse expressions of Islam in Pakistan shows that it has the inherent capacity to engage with both. It also highlights the need to transcend the western religious-secular binaries as the current sensibility of Pakistani people shows that both are irrelevant to them. Ultimately the discussion in this paper shows that such categories are elitist discourses and ordinary Pakistanis do not consciously affiliate themselves with such enforced identities. However the space or the choice available to be able to conform to neither of these categories seems to be shrinking increasingly due the contestation of religion in the public sphere. In this sense this paper argues that organizing peoples religious experiences into neat reductionist categories and forcing them to conform with either 'secular' or 'religious' identities is extremely problematic because of the risk of silencing voices which do not identify with these categories or representations, and in the process something is lost. Therefore this paper concludes that narratives of religion that emerge from the contestation between the dominating 'lifestyle liberals' and the Islamic civil society' stifle and constrain the creativity of the popular debate on religion, by not allowing it adequate space for meaningful articulation in the public sphere.

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