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How Long Is Life? Neoliberalism and Islamic Piety

Humeira Iqtidar

“My brother thinks counting his sins . . . turning his back on politics is what Islam is all about. . . . It is certainly an easier route to salvation!” Abdul Basit said slightly sarcastically as his older brother, Abdul Baqir, sat with his head bowed and a slight smile on his face.¹ Both Abdul Baqir and Abdul Basit were united in their conviction that leading an Islamic life was important. But for them to agree on an interpretation of the good Muslim life, however, was not as easy. The two had chosen different paths: one brother was a member of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and vociferous about the importance of state-oriented political struggle as an integral part of religious life. The other had joined the Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), a pietist, almost vehemently apolitical group, after an initial brief link with the JI. The clamor of arguments about Islamism and its potential conflict with liberalism, modernity, and democracy have drowned out other conversations. This essay is an attempt at tuning in to a more muted but no less transformative harmony between one particular strand of Islamic thought and practice—mass Islamic pietism—and neoliberalism by focusing on the ideational constellations supported by the pietist, mass proselytizing group, Tablighi Jamaat, which is the largest organized grouping of Muslims in the world today. To evaluate the exact numbers of those affiliated with the group is hard given

1. The names in this essay are pseudonyms in accordance with standard anthropological norms. I am grateful to Saba Mahmood, Robin Douglass, John Dunn, Leigh Jenco, Joshua Simon, Adrian Blau, Adam Tebble, Gregory Starett, Kamran Asdar Ali, Elena Zillioti, and the anonymous reviewers for generous and incisive feedback on earlier versions of this essay. The essay was presented at conferences and seminars at SOAS, King’s College London, and Cambridge University. I am grateful for the questions and comments raised by the audiences. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

the organization's reticence, but a reliable estimate ranges from twelve to eighty million in 150 countries of the world.² More importantly, both scholars³ and European and North American policymakers⁴ see the TJ as promoting a version of piety that does not interfere with secularism and thus as preferable to the aggressively political stance of the Islamists. I am not interested here in rehashing concerns about secularism and jihadism, private religiosity versus public religious expression, but to argue for closer attention to the ongoing transformations of contemporary Islamic political thought with relation to broader structural and global ideational changes. As I shall explain below, the TJ predates neoliberalism, but the argument is not for a causal relationship. Rather, the unexpected coming together of strands of Islamic political thought and practice in a mass proselytizing movement with neoliberalism have given significant traction to neoliberal sensibilities. The question is not of Islamic piety in general but of a very specific kind of mass pietism. Critically, the relationship between TJ and neoliberalism remains far from seamless, and a key area of friction is the difference in their conceptions of time, which I shall discuss at the end.

Critics of economic liberalization of the last four decades, under the rubric of neoliberalism, have highlighted its imposition under false pre-

2. See Pew Research on Muslim Networks in Europe, "Tablighi Jama'at," www.pewforum.org/2010/09/15/muslim-networks-and-movements-in-western-europe-tablighi-jamaat/. TJ annual meetings in Pakistan and Bangladesh bring together close to two to three million people, about the same number as the mandatory pilgrimage to Mecca for all practicing Muslims.

3. See Yoginder Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi Jama'at (1920–2000): A Cross-Country Comparative Study* (New Delhi, 2002), and Paul Heck, "Knowledge," in *Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Bowering (Princeton, N.J., 2015), p. 10 contend that TJ is compatible with and may even promote secularism because the movement's disinterest in this-worldly affairs is largely compatible with it. Their main concern is about the foregrounding of a Muslim identity that the TJ supports and its possible implicit support for jihadist activities.

4. See the Pew Forum, "Tablighi Jama'at," which records that TJ members in Europe number close to 150,000 and in many European cities have worked closely with city authorities. Such numbers in any other Islamic organization would provoke extreme anxiety, but because authorities see the TJ as promoting primarily individual, privatized piety it is considered relatively benign. In recent years, some concerns about TJ indirectly supporting jihadism among Muslims have surfaced; see, for instance, Alex Alexiev, "Tablighi Jama'at: Jihad's Stealthy Legions," *Middle East Quarterly* 12 (Winter 2005): 3–11. But these concerns have not made a significant impact on TJ's presence in the North Atlantic world.

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tenses,⁵ the subversion of democratic politics that has accompanied it,⁶ and the exclusion and poverty that flow from it.⁷ However, a critical aspect that has remained understudied is the ideational constellation that might support and embed this liberalization in everyday life, building on existing ideas and practices such that criticism of neoliberalism is increasingly carried out within a market paradigm. This reach of neoliberal ideas is not linked primarily to their logical superiority but is, at least in part, due to their elision with other preexisting ideas and practices. How precisely ideas travel and move into different directions remains a complex phenomenon. Aspects of the general problem of studying ideational change in the contemporary context have bedeviled analysis of neoliberalism.⁸ Critics of neoliberalism have assumed too much coherence and linearity at two levels. First, the majority of critics have not recognized adequately the variations within neoliberal thought. An emerging strand of scholarship is beginning to address that particular gap.⁹ Second, and more importantly, critics have not paid much attention to the contradictory political subjectivities produced by locally mediated, still unfolding versions of neoliberalism. How are neoliberal ideas embedded in vastly different political contexts? What particular combinations gain salience in specific historical-regional configurations? What kind of political actions are made less or more likely? Or to use William Connolly's term, what are the distinctive "knots" of neo-

5. See Ha-Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective* (London, 2003).

6. For instance, see Atul Kohli, *Poverty Amid Plenty in the New India* (New York, 2012), and Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York, 2015).

7. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York, 2005), and Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York, 2002).

8. See Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (New York, 1996), and Sheri Berman, "The Primacy of Politics versus the Primacy of Economics: Understanding the Ideological Dynamics of the Twentieth Century," *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 3 (2009): 561–78 and "Ideas, Norms, and Culture in Political Analysis," *Comparative Politics* 33 (Jan. 2001): 231–50.

9. See Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton, N.J., 2012), who suggests that there are three distinct phases so far. The first phase (1920s–1950s) was characterized by the work of Frederick Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Karl Popper. During the second phase (1950s–1980s) Milton Friedman gained prominence and political leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan began to put neoliberal ideas into practice. Chicago school economists also broke away from the more nuanced analysis of the earlier generation of neoliberals to present the market both as a means and an end in itself. The third phase (1980s to the present) saw the roll out of these policies at a global scale through international agencies and accords such as the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the North American Free Trade Agreement. See also *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, ed. Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).

liberalism with existing traditions of thought and practice in specific contexts?¹⁰

In this regard, the role that religious groups may have played in sustaining aspects of neoliberalism is an important one and requires some careful excavation given the ready association of religion with an abstract morality.¹¹ In particular, the relationship between neoliberalism and contemporary Islamic thought remains largely unexplored. This is a somewhat puzzling lacuna given the not insignificant academic interest in Islamic thought in recent decades. Much of this interest has been driven by a desire to understand the relationship with the West and liberalism specifically. Heavily focused on the Middle East¹² much recent work on modern Islamic political thought has usefully corrected the ready association with reaction and of Islamic practice with violence. An initial interest in interrogating *Islamist* thought (associated with those who have the explicit aim of taking over the state) rather than *Islamic* thought (associated with those who place themselves within a wider tradition) has, in recent years, branched out fruitfully. Here, building on these attempts to move beyond the binary of Western and Islamic political thought, I propose to explore the mutual imbrication of Islamic political thought with neoliberalism—a very particular and specific form of contemporary liberalism.

It is important to separate out neoliberalism and liberalism, to define *neoliberalism* more concretely. The term is used exclusively by its critics

10. William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, N.C., 2008), p. 37.

11. Religious groups appear to have reacted to neoliberalism in complex ways. While some groups have provided critical challenges to the idea of human life pervaded by a market mentality, others have appropriated and celebrated it; see *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Durham, N.C., 2001); Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago, 2009); and Salwa Ismail, "Piety, Profit, and the Market in Cairo: A Political Economy of Islamisation," *Contemporary Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013): 107–28. At the same time, large corporations have often attempted to harness moral discourses produced within various religious traditions to foster novel work ethics and labor practices in tune with the demands of global markets; see Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Walmart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009); Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (New York, 2006); and Daromir Rudnyckj, *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2010).

12. See Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton, N.J., 1999); Michaelle L. Browers, *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought: Transcultural Possibilities*, (Syracuse, N.Y., 2006); and Andrew March, "Taking People as They Are: Islam as a 'Realistic Utopia' in the Political Theory of Sayyid Qutb," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (2010): 189–207. Notable exceptions to this Middle Eastern focus include Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (New York, 2012), and Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2005).

now, and its abandonment by its proponents causes some confusion about its distinction from liberalism.¹³ Neoliberalism is broadly identified with a set of policies that entail the repudiation of Keynesian economics and the institutionalization of various free-trade agreements. One of the key aspects of neoliberal ideas is the vilification of the state as a vehicle for social and individual transformation. The question is not of more or less state—even though this is how much of the debate has been framed—but of decoupling individual transformation from political processes at the level of political imagination, an attempt at rendering invisible the heavily militarized state that neoliberalism and corporate globalization actually require to function. Neoliberalism supports the idea of the market as the vehicle of individual transformation and, indirectly, of social reformation. This is linked to the second key aspect of neoliberalism that entails a naturalization of inequality, presenting it as a result of individual behaviors and choices in an economized social life rather than within politico-economic structures. There is some complexity here to consider because neoliberals have not shied away from structural reforms, and certainly the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Plans have had a dramatic effect. However, as these reforms have been premised on the philosophy of liberating the individual to pursue her or his interests in a free market, the most efficient vehicle of her or his transformation, they privilege the individual and the market in an unprecedented manner, making the political mechanisms of structural change disappear. Neoliberalism radically focuses on the individual, going beyond the conflicted vacillation between the individual and the community that liberalism entails.¹⁴ Liberalism is a more fractured ideology than neoliberalism. Liberal states can be expansive or minimalist; they can be welfare states as well as highly militarized ones. Neoliberalism takes away that ambivalence within liberalism to make it much more narrow. Thus, what defines neoliberalism and separates it from liberalism is this radical focus on the individual and the decoupling of political transformation from individual transformation through an economization of social life.

Economization of social life is a significant feature to consider. Wendy Brown suggests that “neoliberal rationality, while foregrounding the mar-

13. In their analysis of 148 journal articles, Taylor C. Boas and Jordon Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44 (2009): 137–61, have rightly pointed out that the term is used too loosely and requires greater definition if it is to play an analytical role. I am grateful to Sven Gerst for suggesting this article.

14. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London, 2013), and Morton Schoolman, “The Moral Sentiments of Neoliberalism,” *Political Theory* 15, no. 2 (1987): 205–24.

ket, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social actions, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player.”¹⁵ Neoliberalism is, then, not just about specific economic policies but about a worldview, an approach to social and political life. At the very least, neoliberalism is not without a soul, as Bethany Moreton suggests: “To understand enthusiasm for economic visions that do not pay off, we need to stop imagining *Homo economicus* at the center of the story. It should be self-evident that emotional or spiritual interests regularly trump material ones.”¹⁶ How are spiritual and emotional interests so articulated that they resonate with the Washington Consensus is the question that Moreton explores through the relationship between Walmart and Christian Evangelicals in the American South. This is a very useful approach, not least because it helps us think about the contours of moral ideas and neoliberalism in specific settings. To assume that neoliberalism has had exactly the same trajectory in every context—something that otherwise excellent critics such as David Harvey are prone to doing—is to forgo all options for subversion and negation. While some attention has been paid to the role of the ideas among policy makers, not enough attention is paid to the changes in the ideational constellations of those at the receiving end of these policies or to how neoliberalism might fuse with existing ideas and practices in different contexts. To elaborate this fusion, I turn now to the Tablighi Jamaat and start with a brief history of the Tablighi Jamaat to elaborate the context and content of the particular arrangements of ideas that undergird its practices, moving then to discuss its vision of personal piety that establishes political participation as a sullied, divisive activity unrelated to the project of personal transformation.

Converting Muslims to Islam: Origins of the Tablighi Jamaat

Mass proselytizing had not been a feature of Muslim life prior to the colonial period and the encounter with Christian missionaries. Founded as a proselytizing organization in 1926 in the outskirts of modern-day Delhi, the Tablighi Jamaat had remained relatively marginal until the late 1980s. Its founder, Maulana Ilyas, was perturbed by what he perceived to be an un-Islamic way of life amongst nominal Muslims in the rural areas surrounding Mewat, close to Delhi. With the aim of distancing individuals from the web of local social influences that were to him, strikingly anti-Islamic, Ilyas

15. Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” *Theory and Event* 7, no. 1 (2003): 7.

16. Moreton, “The Soul of Neoliberalism,” *Social Text*, no. 92 (2007): 106.

encouraged his first few followers to go on proselytizing missions, develop a dramatic distance from the immediate social and political context, and acquire an otherworldly attitude. He conceived of *tabligh* (proselytizing) as a mechanism for strengthening ultimately the belief of the *tablighi* (the proselytizer) rather than the converted. The primary aim of TJ members remains the conversion of their coreligionists, other Muslims, to what they perceive to be the right kind of Islam. Ilyas also emphasized the importance of oral transmission in an age when the medium of print was becoming a key vehicle of religious reform in South Asian religions, including both Islam and Hinduism.¹⁷ TJ was particularly successful among the local traders' community who helped spread the organization's reach along their networks in Africa and Southeast Asia.¹⁸

Some measure of TJ's modest growth and lack of political attention in its early years can be made by contrasting it with the influential Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami, founded in 1941, in Lahore. Both organizations had their origins in a political and cultural milieu of increasingly politicized religious identities fostered by progressively centralizing colonial control and a significant insecurity experienced by the Muslim elite of North India who had lost much of its power since the fall of the Mughal Empire. Indeed, during the 1930s Ilyas and the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, Abul A'la Maududi, had expressed support for each other's efforts in supporting an Islamic revival.¹⁹ However, the Islamist JI became much more prominent in these early years, in large part due to its interest in political contestation and public debate.

This Islamist focus on political contestation meant that even though it was founded about twenty years after the TJ, much has been written about JI from the 1960s onwards.²⁰ The TJ only started receiving similar levels of

17. See C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (New York, 2012), and Francis Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 229–51.

18. See Christian Troll, "Two Conceptions of Da'wā in India: Jamā'at-i Islāmi and Tablighī Jamā'at," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 39 (July–Sept. 1994): 19.

19. However, despite his praise for Maulana Ilyas in his essay on the TJ, Abul A'la Maududi is quite clearly thinking of the organizational and political potential of this work that Ilyas was not interested in developing further; see Abul A'la Maududi, "Aik ahm deeni tehreek" (1939), in *Tablighi Jamaat: Mushahidat aur Tasurat*, ed. Shabeer Ahmed Mewati (Lahore, 2007), pp. 75–87.

20. See Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1961); *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in the Honour of Maulānā Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī*, ed. Khurshid Ahmed and Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester, 1979); Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York, 1996) and *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-I-Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1994); Irfan Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami* (Princeton, N.J., 2009); and Humeira Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists? Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamaat-ud-Dawa in Urban Pakistan* (Chicago, 2011).

academic attention from the late 1990s onwards.²¹ This lack of attention is driven in part by a level of secrecy that pervades the TJ. Many members will insist that they are not part of an organized entity as such. On being asked about their affiliation, members often reply, at least initially, that they are working in the path of Allah and not for any organization. The lack of material published by the TJ also makes it a difficult entity to study. The organizational claim “na parcha, na charcha, na kharcha” (no publication, no publicity, no expenditure) captures the emphasis on oral transmission that lies at its heart.²² It also necessitates an expanded methodological repertoire for the study of political imaginaries and intellectual history. I rely here upon ethnographic research²³ supplemented with records of speeches by some TJ leaders to allow a fuller understanding of the ideas that undergird TJ practices. The only text that is used frequently and regularly by the TJ in South Asia, for proselytizing and training purposes, is the *Fazail-e-Amal* (Blessings of [Virtuous] Actions).²⁴ Comprised of ten chapters, it was written by Maulana Mohammed Zakariya²⁵ (nephew of Maulana Ilyas)²⁶ in 1938 and is known as the *Tablighi nisab* or “curriculum.” The book has been in continuous print since the 1930s, although there are several slightly different versions of the book combining Maulana Zakariya’s

21. See Barbara Metcalf, “Travelers’ Tales in the Tablighi Jama’at,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588 (July 2003): 136–48 and “Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jamaat,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 3 (1993): 584–608; Farish Noor, *Islam on the Move: The Tablighi Jamaat in Southeast Asia* (Amsterdam, 2012); *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighī Jamā’at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*, ed. Mohammed Khalid Masud (Leiden, 2000); Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi Jama’at (1920–2000)*; Dietrich Reetz, “Keeping Busy on the Path of Allah: The Self-Organization (*Intizām*) of Tablighī Jamā’at,” in *Islam in Contemporary South Asia*, ed. Daniela Bredi (Rome, 2004), pp. 295–305; and Thomas K. Gugler, “The New Religiosity of Tablighi Jama’at and Da’wat-e Islami and the Transformation of Islam in Europe,” *Anthropos* 105 (July 2010): 121–36.

22. The organization has no official publications wing, unlike the Islamists. However, current or ex-affiliates are publishing an increasing number of travel accounts, biographies, and instructional pamphlets.

23. See Banu Bargu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* (New York, 2014), and Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists?* for a similar use of ethnography for political theory and political thought.

24. See Mohammed Zakariya Kandhalwi, *Fazail-e-Amal* (Lahore, 1996); hereafter abbreviated *FA*.

25. Maulana Zakariya was an accomplished scholar who wrote in Arabic and Urdu. While his lighter writings in the form of the *Fazail* series are much more popular, his scholarly credentials rest on a six-volume Arabic commentary on Imam Malik’s *Muwatta* and Urdu commentary on Imam Tirmizi’s work. He was a prolific writer, trained primarily in the *madaris* at Gangoh and Saharanpur under Deobandi influence, and is the author of more than a hundred books.

26. TJ leadership roles have tended to stay within the extend family. After Maulana Ilyas, Maulana Yusuf Kandhalwi and then another relative, Maulana Inam-ul-Hassan, have led the organization.

writings on the importance of prayers (*Fazail-e-Namaz*), Ramzan (*Fazail-e-Ramzan*), and the Quran (*Fazail-e-Quran*).

The key aim of the book is to provide *qisas*—incidents and stories—from the life of the prophet and his companions to inspire virtuous behavior among the readers. While Maulana Zakariya drew upon his extensive knowledge of Islamic history and *hadith* to write this book, he claims he wrote it while recovering from an illness that prevented him from the rigors of “mental work”: writing his more academic commentaries (*FA*, p. 8). The format is simple: a title indicating the key activity in the story (for example, “Hazrat Umar’s Migration”), a narrative over two or three paragraphs, and then the author’s conclusion of the key insights from the *qisa*.

While the *Fazail-e-Amal* had wide circulation within TJ circles since the early 1940s, it only started appearing in mainstream bookshops in Pakistan in the last two decades. With the rapid rise in TJ membership over the last three decades²⁷ the *Fazail-e-Amal* has become much more ubiquitous. This period also coincided with the entrenchment of neoliberal policies in much of the world and specifically, for our purposes here, in Pakistan.²⁸ Since the late 1970s, the Pakistani state has increasingly operated within what Michael Sandel has called a “market mimicking governance,”²⁹ one in which areas previously considered outside the domain of the market and market transactions are reorganized within a market framework. While a small segment of the middle class has moved up, the overall impact has been a substantial increase in inequality, as well as net poverty. This increase in inequality and poverty accelerated in the last decade in keeping with global

27. Exact figures are hard to calculate, but from their own accounts TJ had grown from a few thousand members in the 1970s to between two and three million within Pakistan by the early 2000s.

28. In Pakistan the initial round of liberalization was introduced in 1978–79 soon after General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq imposed martial rule over the country. The government denationalized some industry and privatized public sector activities such as education and health. Critically, it signed up for IMF Trust Fund loans in 1979–80. In 1987–88 the IMF imposed a restrictive set of conditions, including limits on budget deficit, extensions of general sales taxes, and exchange rate reforms. A second intensive round of reforms was introduced in 1993–94 by an interim government of technocrats and past World Bank employees. This government agreed to a raft of far-reaching conditions under the rubric of Structural Adjustment Plans, including the reduction of trade tariffs, the reduction of subsidies for agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, and the extension of a tax net to include almost all the items on the list of “tax free” goods and further excise duties on utilities. See Shahruxh Rafi Khan and Safiya Aftab, “Structural Adjustment, Labour, and the Poor in Pakistan,” research report for the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (1995), www.sdpi.org/publications/files/R8-Structural%20Adjustment,%20Labour.pdf. Pervez Musharraf’s regime (1997–2008) as well as subsequent democratic governments have further entrenched these policies.

29. Michael J. Sandel, BBC Reith Lectures, 2009, downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/radio4/transcripts/20090630_reith_anewpolitics.rtf. See also his *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York, 2012) for more detailed treatment of markets and governance.

trends. In 1992 26 percent of the Pakistani population lived below the poverty line, but by 2007 the figure had risen to 44 percent.³⁰

The concurrent rise of the neoliberal state in Pakistan and of TJ cannot be seen to imply a straightforward causal relationship, but the correlation does require some investigation. While the TJ had originated earlier than neoliberalism, they seem to have developed a symbiotic relationship that influential work on Muslim piety does not explore or recognize.³¹ Unlike the mosque movement that Saba Mahmood has studied, and the *ulema* (scholars) that Muhammad Qasim Zaman has focused on, TJ members do not engage in any significant manner with Quranic exegesis.³² Meetings are spent primarily discussing *karguzari* (the experience of proselytizing). *Karguzari* accounts follow a formulaic pattern of seemingly insurmountable difficulties, their resolution through divine intervention, and the immense emotional and spiritual gains felt by the narrator. Similarly, while there is a veneration of the knowledge and wisdom of *ulema* within the TJ, there is very little direct engagement or understanding of the debates they conduct. Not just the organizational form of Tablighi Jamaat with its emphasis on mass proselytizing and simplified oral transmission but more importantly its radical distancing from sociopolitical struggles transform the implications of piety.

Piety against Politics

A key feature of modernity in predominantly Muslim polities has been the increase in the variety of options for leading the life of a good Muslim. The multiplicity of options in how to be a good Muslim is often bewildering and a cause of much heated debate.³³ Within this deeply contested terrain, the TJ comes under frequent attack by other revivalists, particularly the Islamists, for turning its members explicitly away from engagement

30. In 2008 the government of Pakistan changed its accounting mechanisms and miraculously lifted several million people out of poverty. According to the new metrics, close to 30 percent of the population was living under the poverty line in 2013; see World Bank, "Pakistan," data.worldbank.org/country/pakistan. See Ghulam Mohammed Arif and Shujaat Farooq, *Poverty, Inequality, and Unemployment in Pakistan*, www.isdb.org/irj/go/km/docs/documents/IDBDevelopments/Internet/English/IDB/CM/Publications/Partnership_Strategies/Pakistan_MCPS_Background.pdf, p. 3.

31. See Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J., 2005), and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, N.J., 2002).

32. Zaman, *Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, p. 185, notes the close contact that TJ leadership maintains with Deobandi ulama and the respect for the tradition as mediated by them. While this respect is transmitted to the lay preachers who form the mass of the TJ, the content of their debates are not.

33. Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists?* pp. 98–129, discusses some implications of this competition among contending ways of being a good Muslim.

with questions of power, political decision making, and legitimacy of political leadership.

The differences in political imaginaries bound up with these two very different Islamic revivalist movements was made explicit to me during fieldwork in Lahore through interaction with two brothers who lived in adjoining houses in a lower-middle-class neighborhood. As mentioned earlier, Abdul Basit and Abdul Baqir were affiliated with two very different organizations. Every evening for the last fifteen years, Abdul Baqir has been going out for *tabligh* (proselytizing), dividing his week into days spent in his own neighborhood, adjacent neighborhoods, and at the Raiwind national *markaz* (center). Running a shop with his brother allowed him much flexibility in taking off for these long *tabligh* trips. His brother, Abdul Basit, was equally committed to an Islamist party, participating in political campaigns and electoral canvassing for the Jamaat-e-Islami. He found his brother's lack of commitment to political change deeply problematic and did not let any opportunity go without chiding him for taking the "easier" path: the path of depoliticized religiosity and of an individualized focus. In response Abdul Baqir never engaged in debate with his brother.

One area of immediate and everyday concern and of debate during my fieldwork was the lack of energy—more specifically the lack of electricity and gas—in their neighborhood. The differences in how the two brothers approached the issue is a stark reminder of two different imaginaries. Abdul Basit would blame the lack of electricity on the government—the corruption of the political parties, the bureaucracy, and of specific politicians. However, he contended that behind all of them were the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, forcing Pakistanis to take on energy producing arrangements that plainly were not working. He hashed out the details of these arrangements in many different ways depending upon the listeners and the setting. Sometimes he discussed kickbacks to specific politicians; at others he would focus on the ways the IMF and the World Bank "blackmail Pakistani politicians through the threat of US power"; and often he derided the incompetence of the Pakistani elite.

Abdul Basit's analysis may be lacking in specifics, but it did identify critical areas of concern in Pakistan's energy policy. Salman Khalid and Kamal Munir have pointed out that "the blackout in Pakistan is a policy failure, a result of the disastrous privatisation undertaken by the government at the behest of the World Bank."³⁴ The privatization of electricity generation under the 1994 power policy was based on the structure developed for the

34. Salman Khalid and Kamal Munir, "Pakistan's Power Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (June 2012): 27.

Hub Power Project, a 1,292 megawatt, 1.6 billion dollar project that was celebrated widely amongst global investors, first as the deal of the year and then the deal of the decade, and long supported by the World Bank. This energy policy was commended by then-US Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary as a model of energy privatization. She travelled to Pakistan with eighty American businessmen primarily from the energy sector, and the state visit resulted in sixteen contracts worth nearly four billion dollars.³⁵ One of the key features of this policy is that it has entailed contracts that oblige the Pakistani government to not just buy electricity at a much higher rate from the Independent Power Producers (IPP) set up as a result of these contracts but, more damagingly, pay the IPPs even when no electricity is being produced. The costs associated with the policy have been passed on to consumers, who are now paying close to 530 percent more in rupees since the 1990s in addition to suffering through daily electricity outages for several hours.

During conversations about the energy crisis in the country and its impact on daily life in the neighborhood—children unable to concentrate at school due to interrupted sleep, employees absent and late, exacerbated health problems and anxiety levels, extra expenditures to organize private alternatives such as generators and Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) units, and so on—Abdul Baqir would sit silently and offered neither an alternative explanation nor an affirmation of any argument. He was careful to let the listeners know that he did not think these were important matters but also that he was too polite to say this outright. His resolutely distant stance would anger Abdul Basit, who would often recount how in his youth Abdul Baqir too had been “an aware” and political person but now had decided to pursue only his own salvation rather than working towards a collective one. However, at some point in such conversations Abdul Basit would often extol the value of having good Muslims as leaders. If the politicians had been “good Muslims,” he would argue, they would not have been as easy to blackmail or bribe. This was the only point that both brothers seemed to agree upon. Yet the role imagined for the good Muslim ruler was different for both.

The debate about the value of rule by good men versus governance through well-designed laws continues to be an important one in many non-Western contexts.³⁶ Both TJ and JI value personal piety as a key quality

35. See *ibid.*, p. 25.

36. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 161–93; Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York, 2013), pp. 48–60; and Leigh K. Jenco, “‘Rule by Man’ and ‘Rule by Law’ in Early Republican China: Contributions to a Theoretical Debate,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 1 (2010): 181–203.

in rulers, but while JI explicitly values organizational capabilities and policy analysis as well as having a structured procedure to choose such a leader, the TJ does not concern itself with thinking through the form and content of political leadership.³⁷ It is perhaps no coincidence that the position of the *amir* of JI, its highest office, has been held by men from a range of ethnic backgrounds, while the TJ leadership remains concentrated largely within the family of Maulana Ilyas.

The TJ is not alone in valuing piety as the most important qualification for a ruler, or ruling class, but its description of a virtuous leader remains sparse. In the *Fazail-e-Amal* the section that has any direct bearing on the conduct of rulers is chapter 4, titled “The Piety of the Companions” (*Sahaba Ka Taqwa*). This chapter provides neither an exhaustive list of attributes for the good ruler nor any guidelines for what just rule might mean, but it does provide a strong indication of the sensibility that should guide all in positions of power. It comprises ten incidents in which the Prophet Muhammad and some of his companions agonize over their responsibility to halal (permissible) consumption and earning. A key obligation for all Muslims is to earn a halal living, that is, one that is not contaminated by wrongdoing and ill-intention.

One potent example from the book that was also used in several *dars* meetings that I attended is about the honesty of Hazrat Umar (the second caliph) while in office (634–44 CE). Hazrat Umar received an official consignment of musk from Bahrain. His wife offered to measure it out for distribution. Umar did not respond. The issue came up again, and she offered once again, and again he did not respond. The third time she raised it he said, “I don’t want that you should hold the musk and put it on the scales, and then rub these hands over your self. Even this would be more than our share” (*FA*, p. 61). The caliph did not raise questions about propriety, procedures, or legal injunctions. His concern was about an inadvertent gain and his wife’s *niyyat* (intention) in performing an act of public service.

Maulana Zakariya provides either very brief commentaries after each narrative or none at all, holding the narratives to be self-explanatory. After recounting the incident about Umar he points out that “this is the level of caution (*ehtiyat*) that these companions and submitters to Allah exercised” (*FA*, p. 61). Here Maulana Zakariya’s writing is emblematic of the TJ ap-

37. After Maududi’s death in 1979, the JI started practicing more thoroughly the mechanisms he had envisioned for meritocratic leadership. In keeping with JI’s Leninist-inspired structure, leaders are selected from amongst the existing members of the central committee or *shura* through voting by the members. Notwithstanding its failures in other spheres, JI is today the most internally democratic national political party in the country, with leadership drawn primarily from the middle to lower middle class.

proach. The writing is simple and direct. Rather than presenting a detailed argument, he makes the point through the use of examples from the lives of the Prophet and his companions who represent the best form of Islamic virtue. This is complemented with evocative language and rhetorical assertions. Those who submit their will to perfecting virtuous behavior are constantly at tenterhooks, in continuous doubt about whether they have done enough. They scrutinize their own intentions mercilessly and do not assume any office, any benefit without questioning their own motives. Maulana Zakariya's intention is to portray this doubt and this desire to constantly challenge oneself, not to explain why this is important. He wants to inculcate a sensibility rather than win an argument, and to that extent the choice of simple narratives and real-life examples is entirely apposite.

Ulema (religious scholars) have long debated the characteristics of just political leaders and built upon the experiences of the early Islamic state as well as the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs to provide depth through examples.³⁸ However, in some contrast to the TJ, many *ulema* saw and continue to believe that their responsibility is to bind political action to the foundational texts in a way that would limit the capriciousness of misguided rulers.³⁹ The TJ thus carries forward an important strand in Islamic political thought: identifying piety as a key attribute of the just ruler, but in a particularly denuded manner, the TJ does not recognize the completely transformed context that the introduction of the modern state with its new forms of power ushered in.

The debates about the piety of rulers in Islamic political thought have depended heavily on what Wael Hallaq has called "paradigmatic" Islamic governance: one that is infused by sharia not just as a set of guidelines for legal decisions but as a moral force that shaped social, political, and economic relations.⁴⁰ This moral force rests on the belief that if God prefers one member of the community over another, it has to be by virtue of the quality of his or her *taqwa* (piety; respect for Allah) rather than class or race. The quality of a leader's *taqwa* would reflect itself in his or her actions over the long term. A pious leader would try his or her best to be just to all subjects. If at times the ruler undertook seemingly unjust actions, it was important to consider the *niyyat* (intention) behind these actions.⁴¹ Ultimately, the task of the *ulema* and the subjects of the state under the ruler

38. See Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity, and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge, 2001).

39. See Zaman, *Ulama in Contemporary Islam*.

40. Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, p. 8.

41. For some of these debates, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 27–44.

was made easy by the overarching moral obligations within which society functioned.

Hallaq places this paradigmatic state in direct contradiction with the modern state.⁴² It is, indeed, an intractable problem: how to infuse the modern state—with its reliance on legalistic procedures and discursive division of aspects of human life into religious, political, and economic spheres—with an Islamic sensibility that is not dependent upon laws and does not recognize such a separation? This is the challenge that Muslim revivalists and reformers have been wrestling with since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the particular case of South Asia, the twin introduction of the modern state and colonialism that led to the intensive regulation of individual selves, a new imaginary of community in terms of numbers rather than the strength of the social bond, and increased legalization of social interaction⁴³ led to a complete transformation of the mechanisms and institutions through which power is exercised, impacting South Asians across religious boundaries.

Operating within its framework of personalized piety alone the TJ does not explicitly recognize this changed political context of the modern state while the Islamists do. The Islamists, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, focused on the state as the vehicle of progress and transformation of the society in keeping with the dominant trends in global political imagination at the time. This is important to recognize, not just because more than a theological impetus drives Islamist politics,⁴⁴ but also because we must engage meaningfully with the political and intellectual context that created the conditions for the innovation in Islamic political thought that was Islamism. Founded in the late 1940s when the state was the dominant political idea in the global political imagination—political mobilizations from fascism to liberal nationalism, communism to socialism focused on taking over the state to transform society—the Islamists such as JI also framed their movements around the state⁴⁵ and continue to wrestle, albeit with

42. See Hallaq, *The Impossible State*.

43. Nationalism, religious or secular, as well as democratic politics are dependent upon this new imaginary, particularly on the quantified notion of a community that allows the calculation of a majority or minority. See Sudipta Kaviraj, "On Thick and Thin Religion: Some Reflections on Secularization Theory," in *Religion and the Political Imagination*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 314–36; Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, N.C., 2006); and David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1988).

44. The need for this move beyond theology without doing away with the power of ideas embedded in a tradition has been shown most persuasively by Talal Asad, *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity* (Stanford, Calif., 2003), and Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*.

45. See Iqtidar, "Colonial Secularism and the Genesis of Islamism in North India," in *Religion and the Political Imagination*, pp. 235–53.

varying levels of success, with the question of state power and an Islamic society.⁴⁶

Naturalizing Inequality

The TJ, founded only twenty years earlier than the JI, had chosen to ignore the growing importance of the idea of the state and quite explicitly refused to engage with questions of power in society. Given its emphasis on oral transmission, simplicity, and mass reach, and without the possibility of in-depth engagement with the wider historical and juridical context in which these ideas could ensure just rule, the TJ popularizes a view of leadership that has no engagement with the political and social dilemmas of contemporary life nor with the transformed context of the modern state. Contemporary political leadership is presented as that which is invariably corrupt and corruptible,⁴⁷ a result of personal corruption rather than policy failures. Thus, TJ continues to encourage high-profile individuals such as former presidents of Pakistan, high-ranking officials and bureaucrats, famous cricketers, and TV personalities to join. In fact, the number of high-ranking army officials, including serving generals and commanding officers who are members of the TJ, has steadily increased through the 1980s and has been a source of significant pride for the organization.⁴⁸ The Islamist JI on the other hand cannot boast of such an illustrious membership.

Some join the TJ because they are disillusioned with the more aggressive politicization of religiosity by the Islamists, particularly on college and university campuses in Pakistan. Often they cite disillusionment with state-oriented politics more broadly and with the JI specifically. The question is, of course, not whether this represents a depoliticization as some have argued,⁴⁹ but what the precise contours of politics are imagined to be. In contrast to the Islamists such as JI, the TJ shies away from any direct analysis of power and its manifestations in the context in which it operates. Within the TJ, then, even as the ultimate goal of a state led by pious Muslims is not renounced, there is no attention paid to the sources, uses, and

46. The emerging primacy of the market in the global political imagination has led to some changes in Islamist imagination as well; see Iqtidar, "Secularism beyond the State: The 'State' and the 'Market' in Islamist Imagination," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 3 (2011): 535–64.

47. See Mufti Roshan Shah Qasmi, *Hazrat Ji Kay Bayanat Ka Majmu'a* (Lahore, n.d.), esp. pp. 28–31, and anon., *Hazratji kay Safr-e-Pakistan kay Aakhri Bayanat* (Lahore, 2009), pp. 60–73.

48. See Shabir Ahmed Khan Mewati, *Tablighi Jamaat: Mushahidat-o-Tasurat* (Lahore, 2007), pp. 190–91, 232–33.

49. While most scholars have argued that it does represent depoliticization, a few, such as Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi Jam'at (1920–2000)*, have suggested that even though the TJ is apolitical the process of foregrounding an Islamic identity is likely to have long-term political implications.

manifestations of political power or the inequality that might flow from its concentration among a few.

TJ members are socialized to never engage in political debate partly so they are agreeable to those they are seeking to convert to their version of Islam (see *FA*, pp. 301–15).⁵⁰ However, this very manner of relating to others requires a radical reconceptualizing of the economic divisions and political polarization that exists in contemporary Pakistan. Inequality has risen sharply in Pakistan over the last three decades, and members of the TJ are conspicuous in their attempts to disengage with everyday conversations about inequality, unemployment, inflation, and normative state policies. The conception of society as an organic whole is an important and long-standing aspect of TJ ideology and again one with strong roots in Islamic political thought. The TJ braids this idea with an imagination of society where divisions are necessary and natural. Arguing resourcefully to negate leftist notions of contradiction and class that pervaded the urban cultural milieu in Pakistan during the mid 1960s, Maulana Yusuf Kandhalwi (son of Ilyas and leader of TJ after his death), declared, in a visit to Pakistan from India in 1965, that

Just as god (*khuda*) has made man a complex of contradictions so too are human classes (*tabqat*) a collection of contradictions. The job of the Tongue is to speak, the rest of human body's job is to not speak. To speak or not to speak are the opposites of each other. The Brain has to think, the rest of the body to not think. They are also in contradiction with each other. . . . In the same way the Supreme Truth has made human beings into different classes. Not one but very different classes. If they work together then rich, poor, local and foreign, ruler and ruled, child and parents all come together like a body and even if they have very little of the world's goods they are successful. If they are not together then however much capital (*sarmaya*) they have, they are unsuccessful.⁵¹

Kandhalwi's reference to contradictions, capital and class divisions, and foreign and local rule is quite clearly picking up on the themes of leftist debates that had caught the imagination of postcolonial urban Pakistan in the 1960s as a result of the Chinese revolution, but he presents a very different resolution to this contradiction in direct opposition to the Marxist idea of their inherent irreconcilability. The cultural and political impact of Left mobilizations in Pakistan has been widely underestimated; Pakistan's Is-

50. See also Maulana Akram Ullah Jan Qasmi, *Da'ai ka Tosha* (Lahore, n.d.), pp. 39–41.

51. Quoted in anon., *Hazrat Ji Kay Safr-e-Pakistan Kay Akhri Bayanat*, p. 22.

lamist present casts too dark a shadow on its other histories, making possible contemporary assertions about the inevitability of religious violence for a state founded on religious nationalism. However, other histories and futures did exist. Of these, a vibrant Left presence in the cultural politics of urban Pakistan is beginning to receive academic attention.⁵² Kandhalwi, in opposing leftist arguments, insisted on viewing society as an organic whole in a faithful rendition of the traditionalist perspective but without the creative engagement with the transformations in society that are the hallmark of many other Islamic and Islamist thinkers.⁵³ In the same speech Kandhalwi went on to say,

Whatever the rich man has, the poor man should not steal it, or question it, or embezzle it. In fact, the poor should not even think that perhaps the rich will give something without asking. If the rich man wants to bestow a favour upon the poor man, he should reject it saying that the Prophet (Muhammad) was also a poor man. This is the Islam of the poor man. . . . Similarly for those who have wealth, Islam requires them to focus their effort on the poor and try to help their salvation. Point out the path to them.⁵⁴

A strong tradition of Islamic thought and practice stands on the foundations of the widely shared belief that in the eyes of Allah all are poor.⁵⁵ It has been argued that “the poor [are] at the heart of [Islam’s] economic universe.”⁵⁶ Unlike the divide between deserving and undeserving poor that developed in modern Christian thought, there is no such classification of the poor in Islamic thought, although there are specific categories of people identified as deserving of unstinting charity in the form of *waqf* (institutionalized charity through property), *zakat* (obligatory alms), and *sadqa* (voluntary almsgiving). Keeping this complexity in mind, it becomes all the more critical to recognize the relatively fragmented nature of the vision of personal piety being propagated by the TJ, limited as it is by its aim of mass proselytizing by simplifying ideas and practices and its organizational architecture of lay preachers. In premodern Islamic society, which

52. See Kamran Asdar Ali, *Communism in Pakistan: Politics and Class Activism 1947–1972* (New York, 2015).

53. In contrast, Iranian Islamist Ali Shariati and Pakistani scholar Khurram Ja Murad had already started engaging productively with the leftist critique.

54. Quoted in anon., *Hazratjij: Kay Safr-e-Pakistan Kay Akhri Bayanat*, p. 23.

55. See Surah Muhammad 47:38: “Here you are—those invited to spend in the cause of Allah—but among you are those who withhold [out of greed]. And whoever withholds only withholds [benefit] from himself; and Allah is the free of need, while you are the needy.”

56. Michael Bonner, “Poverty and Economics in the Quran,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35 (Winter 2005): 406.

was “permeated by the political concept of moral accountability,” a reliance on communal piety, a paradigmatic morality, to limit inequality or at least its worst social implications was perhaps a feasible option and, as Hallaq claims, may have resulted, on the whole, in much more egalitarian societies than European ones in similar historical periods.⁵⁷

In medieval and early modern contexts, all three Abrahamic faiths were combined in understanding poverty as something that cannot be eradicated and that giving to the needy was an act of piety, not of social transformation.⁵⁸ In the modern period, this changed dramatically. The belief that poverty and the inequality it represents can and should be eliminated or, at least, reduced to as low a level as possible, became widespread. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the state as a very specific configuration of power, a collection of interests and institutions, increasingly took on the job of addressing questions of poverty with varying levels of success. In the process, all states acquired methods and techniques to increasingly manage individuals as well as communities, although of course the Foucauldian state had different levels of penetration in different parts of the world. In South Asia, too, while institutions of incarceration and education were not as streamlined as the French state that Foucault writes about,⁵⁹ nevertheless a fundamental transformation in the relationship of the individual with the state did begin in the early nineteenth century and accelerated in the late colonial and early postcolonial period under the rubric of developmentalism and poverty eradication. It is this powerful new entity, the state, which TJ chooses to not understand. More critically, in a context where the paradigmatic notion of moral accountability pervading all social, political, and economic interaction cannot be assumed to remain untarnished by the break in tradition brought about by the colonial encounter,⁶⁰ a view of society as an organic whole seems incomplete at best. Nevertheless, this distance from the state, from political projects demanding accountability, and the view of an unequal but organic society as the natural order of things found particular favor in neoliberal times. Pakistan’s neoliberal governments have given relatively free reign to TJ to grow, hold public meetings, and access those in public office even when Islamists were under scrutiny; the TJ has tutored large segments of society to believe that engaging in political mobilization is a distraction for good Muslims.

57. Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, p. 69.

58. See Mark Cohen, “Poverty and Charity in Past Times,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35, no. 3 (2005): 347–60.

59. See Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, “After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (Jan. 1992): 141–67.

60. See Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973).

Time as Effort

Tablighi Jamaat reflects just one configuration in the rich Islamic tradition of thinking about the relationship between the individual and political power. This link with Islam also constrains Tablighi Jamaat's symbiosis with neoliberalism in important ways. In particular, TJ's disregard for power and its manifestations in this world, driven as it was by Maulana Ilyas's initial interest in distancing his followers from their immediate social and political struggles, has been sustained by a conception of time that limits the urgency of neoliberal self-making.

Most TJ *dars* and *karguzari* meetings start with the reminder that "time is the only capital (*sarmya*) we have for reaping profits in the afterlife." Notwithstanding the language of trade and accounting that is a distinctive feature of the TJ discourse compared again to the Islamists in particular,⁶¹ this conception of time is not entirely amenable to neoliberal thinking. Individual intellectual ability, physical prowess, material wealth, or superior birth are all rendered equally secondary to the decision to spend time on the path of *tabligh* in defining a worthwhile life. Time spent in *tabligh* is called *mehnat* within the TJ. In literal terms the Urdu word *mehnat* means effort or hard work, but in collapsing time and effort together the TJ has transformed time from a means for ordering events to defining the event. Thus the only meaningful hours, days, and months are those spent in *tabligh* activities. How to scale up the time spent is quite clearly defined. The minimum asked of every follower is clear: to proselytize at least two hours every day at home and in the neighborhood, three days every month in other neighborhoods or localities, and forty days every year potentially in a different province/country.⁶² While there is no upper limit, this redefinition of time as effort motivates the more committed to take out more and more time for *tabligh*. Abdul Baqir, the brother who had chosen TJ, once explained why he felt compelled to go out every evening despite his family's initial protests to spend more time at home: "How long is life? I can't know, but I think of it as the *mehnat* I can undertake. . . . After all, how long is life? Sixty years? Eighty years? A maximum of one hundred? And what is that compared to the life we will have after this one? We can't even imagine how long that life will be. Time will have no meaning then, but it has meaning now."

61. For a movement that has only limited engagement with print culture TJ is distinctive also for publishing a slim book extolling the value of trade; see Maulana Zakariya Kandhalwi, *Fazaail-e-Tijarat* (Lahore, 1979).

62. See Ahmad Ali Bashami, *Dawat-e-Allah aur Tablighi Ehab Kay Liyay Rehnama Asool: Tamam Muzakaray* (Lahore, n.d.), pp. 7–13, and Qasmi, *Da'ai ka Toshah*.

The notion that time will have no meaning in the afterlife actually transforms the meaning of time in this life.⁶³ The realization that time only has value during this life when it can actually be converted into effort carries two important implications. First, as discussed above, it changes the definition of time and equates it with effort on the path of *tabligh*. Second, it transforms the measurement of time such that it is not the coming week or the next decade but the afterlife that calibrates the scales. With the afterlife constantly on the horizon, many other deadlines and pressures lose their urgency. What remains instead is a curious blend of a much longer time frame for reaping the rewards of one's efforts—there may be no immediate results—and a sense of urgency regarding the importance of continuing efforts.

For TJ members this means that the unit of analysis is no longer an hour, a day, or a year; rather it is the number of persons converted. The TJ claims to be transforming Muslim lives one by one. In this it has been more successful than the modesty of this dictum would suggest; as mentioned above, estimates of its members range from fifteen to eighty million in 150 countries. The disdain towards this worldly time may be a crucial ingredient in its success, allowing as it does TJ members significant freedom in redesigning their lives, inculcating a disdain towards the entanglements of this life whether in collective political struggles, in consumerism,⁶⁴ or in a wholehearted support for the market. This is quite important because even though the TJ does provide more explicit support for trade generally, this conception of time limits the scope of economizing social life that is vital to neoliberalism. The TJ's emphasis on devaluing engagement with the subject's immediate political and social context and naturalizing existing inequalities to shift the focus away from collective endeavors has come together with neoliberalism to strengthen it but also presents an important limitation to urgent endorsement of it.

Conclusion

TJ, like neoliberalism, is a product of what has been called the liberal age.⁶⁵ Like neoliberalism, TJ and the political ideas it supports have been

63. It also transforms the difference between human history and natural history that Dipesh Chakrabarty has discussed productively in "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 197–222.

64. Some scholars have noted the turn away from consumerism among TJ members; see Metcalf, "Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jamaat," and the essays in *Travellers in Faith*.

65. Liberalism is not just Western even as it contains an indelible imprint of European history. Its life in other parts of the world, no doubt mediated through colonialism, is as authentic as in Europe. For liberalism in Arabic thought, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, and in South Asian thought, see Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*.

produced by a broader liberal framework even if both will curtail liberalism dramatically. The synergetic relationship between neoliberalism and TJ was not entirely predictable but is nevertheless significant. Because Ilyas believed that illiterate Muslims in Mewat needed a complete overhaul of social norms in the face of competing proselytizers, TJ isolated individuals from their given social structures and relied upon trade networks for growth. This attempt at reviving a sense of individualized piety embedded within existing traditions of Islamic thought and practice reflected Ilyas's own devotion to particular strands of this tradition. As I have argued above, this was an attempt at reviving the tradition without working through the precise nature of power dynamics in the late colonial period and through the cold war, and one that flourished dramatically with neoliberalism when delinking individual transformation from political engagement became the dominant ideational frame. My intention here is not to suggest that all attempts at reviving the traditional norms of piety are problematic or doomed to elision within neoliberalism. Rather, it is to suggest that the unique organizational and ideational architecture of the TJ has since the 1980s resulted in a closer imbrication of mass Islamic piety with neoliberalism than would have been possible otherwise. TJ has advocated a vision of individualized piety that does not engage with modern mechanisms of power, naturalizes inequality, and disdains political mobilization; neoliberal governments from Pakistan to UK have preferred TJ to the troublesome Islamists—the vast majority of whom are not militant, although contentious—and facilitated its flourishing.

This imbrication is not seamless. The broader and widely familiar tradition of Islamic piety does not allow a complete fusion of key ideas and practices to neoliberalism. A conception of time orthogonal to the neoliberal insistence on the economizing of social life is an important difference. Moreover, the task of building a new community of believers places some social limits upon the individual. From the development of Wahabism in late eighteenth-century Arabia to Shah Wali Ullah's revolution during the early part of the same century in South Asia there has been a discernable, although nonlinear, trend towards a redefinition of the relationship between the individual and the community in Muslim polities.⁶⁶ TJ makes a significant contribution to an unprecedented entrenchment of individualization within this context but with an inflection of asceticism borne out of a sense of urgency to prepare for the next life and a commitment to a new community of believers that does not sit comfortably with the neoliberal

66. See Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, and Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and the Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London, 2000).

primacy of the market in the political imagination. Understanding these points of elision and tension allows us to glimpse the political norms being crystallized in the contemporary Muslim world by the combined effect of neoliberalism and mass pietism. In contemporary South Asia, TJ and neoliberalism are knotted together by an emphasis on individual transformation (while inequality is unquestioned) by a notion of the polity infused with spirituality (while mechanisms for ensuring accountability remain under-examined) and by a radically free individual uninhibited by existing social obligations but bound nevertheless by some nebulous commitment to transforming other individuals. This quieter and quietist strand of contemporary Islamic thought is imbricated in transforming not just Islamic practice but also global political norms.