

Anthropological Theory

<http://ant.sagepub.com/>

Immanent critique and Islam: Anthropological reflections

Irfan Ahmad

Anthropological Theory 2011 11: 107

DOI: 10.1177/1463499611398188

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://ant.sagepub.com/content/11/1/107>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Anthropological Theory* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ant.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ant.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://ant.sagepub.com/content/11/1/107.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Apr 14, 2011

[What is This?](#)



Immanent critique and Islam: Anthropological reflections

Irfan Ahmad

Monash University, Australia

Anthropological Theory

11(1) 107–132

© The Author(s) 2011

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1463499611398188

ant.sagepub.com



Abstract

This article offers an anthropological outline of immanent critique in Islamic traditions. In addressing the question – what is immanent critique? – it dwells on the interrelationships amongst the Enlightenment's notion of reason, critique, and Islam. My main contention is that to construe the Western notion of critique derived from Enlightenment's specific conceptualization of reason as critique per se is misleading for there are non-Enlightenment modes of critique such as the Islamic one this article proposes for further discussion. I also discuss the objectification of culture, social distance and a new sense of temporality as significant factors facilitating the condition for critique to become particularly salient under modernity. Based largely on ethnographic-historical materials from South Asia, I argue why immanent critique is a useful analytical tool to understand the dynamics of Muslim cultures and societies in their diverse milieus.

Keywords

Asad, critical theory, critique, Islam, reason, South Asia, Taj Mahal, tradition

Introduction: Taj Mahal and immanent critique

On 24 July 2008 Hindu nationalists wearing saffron scarves entered the Taj Mahal to perform worship (*pūja*).¹ In performing *pūja*, they claimed that the Taj Mahal was originally a Shiva temple, 'Tejo Mahal'. The timing of this 'ruckus' was significant; it took place three days prior to '*urs* (commemoration of the death day of a Sufi/pious person) held every year on the Taj campus (*The Times of India*, 25 July 2008). The claim that the Taj Mahal is a Hindu edifice is not novel. As early as 1969, P.N. Oak had marshaled archaeological and other 'evidence' to claim that the Taj was a Hindu palace.

Corresponding author:

Irfan Ahmad, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, Caulfield Campus, Melbourne, Australia
Email: Irfan.Ahmad@monash.edu

That archaeology and monuments are implicated in religious nationalism is well explored (El-Haj 1998; Van der Veer 1994). My interest in Taj Mahal is for a different reason. I got drawn to Urdu poetry early on. One poet who fascinated some teenagers like me from different villages of North Bihar to its capital, Patna, was Sāḥir Ludhīyānavī (d. 1980). His poems embodied a delicate fusion of romance and rebellion. One such *nazm* was 'Taj Mahal', wherein Sāḥir implored his beloved to meet him anywhere but at the Taj. For Sāḥir, the Taj Mahal symbolized the 'exhibition of love' by an emperor – an exhibition the countless poor like him could never orchestrate. As the poem progresses, the reader is led to feel the horror of despots who built imposing palaces and mausoleums by squeezing the blood of the poor. In the last stanza of the *nazm*, Sāḥir shows how the emperor Shahjahan had made a mockery of the love of 'us poor' by 'erecting such a magnificent Taj Mahal'. The *nazm* concludes with the plea: 'O my beloved, meet me elsewhere [but not at the Taj]'.

Shakīl Badāūnī (d. 1970), another renowned Urdu poet and a graduate of Aligarh Muslim University, saw the Taj differently. Shakīl extolled it. By building it, the emperor had indeed given the 'whole world an insignia of love'. Describing the Taj as a candle of love, Shakīl wrote that the butterflies hovering over it included the poor as well as the rich. In the arms of Taj, he felt that life was nothing else but love. For him, it was a living dream of a poet; its very fiction testified to its reality.²

The Taj Mahal has not only attracted the imagination of poets; the essayist and Islamist ideologue Abul Ala Maududi (d. 1979) also wrote about it. Chiding Muslims who presented the Taj as the shining symbol of Islam, he argued that it was un-Islamic to bury the dead in the acres of occupied land and the millions of rupees spent to erect a monument thereon. From an Islamic framework, he averred, 'a major part of the achievements of these people [like the Mughals] have to be written . . . in . . . the catalogue of crimes' (2001: 138).

Maududi's argument may surprise many a reader; so would perhaps the view of the poet Dil Tājmaḥlī, a resident of Agra where the Taj Mahal is based and in whose affairs he played a role. For Tājmaḥlī, it is precisely the Islamic content of the Taj that bestows an eternal beauty on it. Contra Shakīl, he believes that if it was a monument of love, couplets of Hafiz and Rumi would have been inscribed on its walls. According to Tājmaḥlī, at the time of its construction 400 *ḥuffāz* (those who have memorized the Qur'an) recited the Qur'an to protect it from any danger. The acclaimed divines from Bukhara were invited to pray for the endurance of the Taj. It was not love, but the devotion to Islam, which drove Shahjahan to build it. The Qur'anic verses are encoded on every portion of the Taj. It is due primarily to this Islamic nature of the Taj that whereas thousands of other imperial mausoleums have faded and stand deserted, the Taj is awash with light and visited by thousands every day. It was an earthly sample of the divine paradise (Tājmaḥlī 2006).

The argument

For most of us, the Taj Mahal *stands out* as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The question I wish to pose before us is: what does the Taj Mahal *stand for*?

The four different positions I presented above merely exemplify the enormous complexity and diversity of meanings the Taj has been invested with. I submit that the debate over the Taj rehearses the practice of immanent critique within Islamic traditions. The aim of this article is precisely to recognize and elucidate such contours of immanent critique in Islamic tradition. Its counterpoint is the reigning assumption according to which Islamic traditions are bereft of and hostile to critique. In interrogating this assumption – dominant as it is in Orientalist as well as much of anthropological scholarship – I discuss how the Western notion of critique is tied to a distinct history and culture, the generalization of which has limited, if any, analytical efficacy in other contexts. Building on and critically engaging with several important recent anthropological works (e.g. Asad 1993; Bowen 1993; Eickelman 1985; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Fischer and Abedi 1990; Kresse 2003, 2008; Marcus and Fischer 1999; Marsden 2005; see below), my key contention is that the Western notion and practice of critique is not critique per se in its totality but simply one among several of its modalities such as the Islamic one this article seeks to unpack and illustrate for further discussion.³

In my view, a fascinating example of immanent critique is Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) which, together with Susan Buck-Morss' (2003) essay on Islamism and Critical Theory, partly inspired my postdoctoral project. Horkheimer and Adorno employed Enlightenment's power of reason and critique to critique Enlightenment itself. Their goal was 'the critique of Enlightenment' aimed at securing 'a positive concept of Enlightenment which liberates it from its entanglement in blind domination'. They saw 'Enlightenment as mass deception' (2002: xviii, 94). Horkheimer and Adorno endeavored, to quote Brunkhorst's (2000: 134) curious phrase, 'to enlighten Enlightenment'. For long there has been massive investment to Islamize Islam. Across and beyond the Middle East, the 'heartland' of Islam, Muslims have been passionately striving to be Muslim from around the mid-18th century.

So, *what is immanent critique?* By immanent critique, I mean a form of criticism that uses tenets, histories, principles, and vocabularies of a tradition to criticize it in its own terms.⁴ It may be better explained when juxtaposed with 'transcendental critique'. A critique becomes transcendental when it evaluates the subject of criticism based not on its own principles but from those outside of or beyond it. A pertinent question here is: can we precisely say when does a critique cease to be immanent and become transcendental, or vice versa? Put differently, what is *outside* or *beyond*; who determines what is *its own*, or internal? The short answer to this question is 'no'. As a socio-cultural phenomenon, criticism as a practice is in perpetual flux. Hence an analytical move to fix or foreclose the boundary between 'immanent' and 'transcendental' is doomed to fail because of the shifting nature of the field which immanent critique seeks to grasp and analyze. The task of the analyst is to identify, by a combination of disciplinary interventions, those very mechanisms of drawing, blurring, erasing, and re-erecting of the boundary between 'immanent' and 'transcendental'. That is, we need to pay attention to why and when practitioners of a discourse regard something as 'internal' or 'external' to

themselves. It will be rewarding, for example, to comparatively investigate why and how a certain cultural practice is regarded as internal in one social context and external in another (this question can also be posed diachronically about the same society).

On a more substantive plane, this entails conceptualizing the field of Muslim societies and cultures as dynamic processes of multi-layered interactions with the resources and traditions from within as well as those from without. Differently put, immanent critique as a method of analysis will not posit the Muslim subject as a bearer of a culture/religion that deterministically encloses her; rather, it will lay bare the conditions of interactions – socioeconomic, political, intellectual, religious, and so on – and levels of interactions – local, regional, national, transnational, global, and so on – which go into defining, provisionally as it always does, what is immanent or not.

This insight is basic to Fredrik Barth's writings on ethnic boundaries and cultural differences. In proposing his model, Barth argued that 'the critical focus of investigation . . . becomes the . . . *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses' (1969: 15; italics in original; also see Barth 1994). In *The Nuer*, Evans-Pritchard had anticipated this mode of analysis nearly 30 years before Barth. Evans-Pritchard put relationality at the center of identity. A group is a group only in relation to other groups. It is worth quoting him: 'political values are relative and . . . the political system is an equilibrium between opposed tendencies towards fission and fusion, between the tendency of all groups to segment, and tendency of all groups to combine with segments of the same order' (1969 [1940]: 147–8). This also explains the boundary between immanent and transcendental critique.

Since the term 'tradition' is central to my argument about immanent critique in Islam, let me explain how it is at once indebted to and departs from Talal Asad's notion of 'Islamic tradition'. I agree with Asad's critique of anthropological writings which construed Islam in terms of tribes, armed nomads, unarmed merchants, illiterate peasants, literate clerics and so on. Likewise I endorse Asad's positing of Muslims as thinking (contra Gellner's behaving) subjects. Asad's broadside against Gellner and Geertz for dichotomizing Islam into Little and Great Traditions (also see Gellner 1992: 10) is equally convincing. Where I disagree with him is in his concept of tradition. Having presented a persuasive critique of the dominant scholarship, he says: 'if one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates to the founding texts of the Qur'an and Hadith' (Asad 1986: 14).

Clearly, Islam's founding texts are important. However, one should note that the scripturalization of Muslim traditions, for instance, of customary laws (Hansen 1999), itself is a rather recent development. Moreover, Muslims also refer and relate to other texts – oral and written – which are not necessarily and always the founding texts. To give an example, in the South Asian imaginations myths of Lēla-Majnūn, Shīrīn-Farhād, or Taj Mahal are integral to Muslim traditions.⁵ It seems to me that Asad, wittingly or otherwise, textualizes tradition and

religionizes texts. Historically speaking, textual tradition definitely included religious texts, but it also included several others. In Muslim tradition, as the historian Muzaffar Alam observes, the meaning of sharia itself varied from one context to another. Sharia was not simply a body of theological edicts. In medieval India it also included writings of *akhlāq* (ethics) texts by philosophers. In his writings, Khawaja Nasiruddin Tusi (d. 1274) departed from conventional sharia. He drew on 'Hellenic philosophical writings and blended them with his own "Islamic" view of man and society'. In this tradition an ideal ruler was one who 'ensured the well being of the people of diverse religious groups, and not Muslims alone' (Alam 2004: 47, 49; also see Ahmad 2009b).

I thus propose that Muslim tradition, *pace* Asad,⁶ ought to be so conceptualized that it includes as diverse views as those of Sāhir, Shakīl, Maududi and Tājmaḥli (ergo, several others). Islam as a discursive tradition – rather, a set of traditions – is not exhausted by its relation to and inclusion of the founding texts: the Qur'an and *hadith*. Here I join John Bowen (1993: 10) in his criticism of Asad's definition of tradition as being rather restrictive and his consequent call to broaden it.⁷

This article is divided into five sections. In the first section, I discuss the notion of critique in Enlightenment and Foucault's comment thereon. Next I discuss the dominant Western imaginary of Islam as being hostile to reason. In the second section, I critically dwell on important anthropological writings on Islam to show how they are reluctant to recognize critique in Muslim tradition because of the Enlightenment premise of critique being essentially against, not within and from, religion. Against this, in the third section, I outline the possibility of analyzing Islam and reason as being interwoven. Here I show how immanent critique has been central to Islamic histories and cultures, and stress its efficacy as a method of analysis. In the next section, I dwell on the condition under which immanent critique became salient as a phenomenon. I focus on objectification of culture, social distance, and new temporality as important factors. The fifth section presents historical ethnographic illustrations of immanent critique, both in the realms of 'high traditions' and everyday life. I conclude with some general observations about the idea of immanent critique and the study of modern Islam.

Enlightenment, reason and critique

When and if Islamic traditions are broadly conceptualized, as I proposed above, a key question is: what is the place of critique within such traditions?

As a conscious practice, or vocation, critique is regarded as a sign of Enlightenment (Kontopoulos 1995: 6). 'Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism', wrote Immanuel Kant, 'and to criticism everything must submit' (2007: 37n.3). Kant thus is an ideal candidate with whom to open the discussion. In his 1784 essay 'What Is Aufklärung?', Kant characterized enlightenment as 'man's release from the self-incurred tutelage' and 'the freedom to make public one's use of reason at every point' (2007: 29, 31). In my reading, Kant's essay is

mainly concerned with the religious Europe of his time, where he found men not using their own reason and submitting themselves to the tutelage of priests (my word) or what he calls 'outside directions'. His age being the age of criticism,⁸ everything, most notably religion, had to submit to criticism and reason. Religion here appears as the obverse of reason. It is unclear from this essay what precisely he meant by 'we' when Kant asked 'Do we now live in an *enlightened age*'? (2007: 35; italics in original).

Nearly two centuries later, in 'What Is Critique?', Foucault commented on Kant's essay. Equating critique with Kant's notion of Enlightenment, he observed that the cultural form of critique was 'born in Europe' and that critical attitude was a 'specific attitude in the West'. To Foucault, Reformation was thus the first critical movement and 'critique is historically biblical' (1996: 384, 386, 385). In the essay, delivered first as a lecture in 1978, nowhere did he mention practices of critique in Muslim histories. The implication of such a position is not ambiguous. Critique is seemingly not part of the non-Western traditions, including the Muslim ones. It probably couldn't have been. Foucault construed critique as 'the art of not being governed so much'. The mission of the critic was to enact 'desubjugation' in the wake of all-pervasive governmentalization of European lives from the 16th century onwards when the state took on pastoral power to regulate every sphere, including the intimate zones of sexuality and care (also see Butler 2003). The function of the critic was to critique the rationalization of lives conducted under the flag of reason. Against Kantian universalism, Foucault thus argued that a critic was a 'specific intellectual' and that 'one dimension of criticism for the specific intellectual is the critique of universality per se' (in Caputo and Yount 1993: 8).

It is well known that in most of Foucault's writings Islam (nay, the non-West at large) is generally absent. However, less than a year after his lecture, he visited Iran and wrote about its Islamic Revolution wherein he saw an elemental expression of 'political spirituality' (in Almond 2004: 18). If the West embodied reason and rationality, the Revolution, and *mutatis mutandis* Islam, symbolized spirituality. He saw the Revolution as authentic for it was untouched by any exogenous force, certainly not by the West (Stauth 1991). He also observed 'forms of life which have been immobile for a millennium' (Almond 2004: 20). Iran, for Foucault, was timeless, with a pristine essence radically different from that of the West.

My aim is not to depict Foucault as a typical Orientalist but to underscore a connection between what Charles Taylor (2004) calls the 'social imaginary' of the West, which portrays Islam as lacking reason, or inherently hostile to critique, and the historically dominant trope of Orientalism (on which see Said 1995). In many ways, the popular image of Islam from Martin Luther up to the present bears it out. Luther (d. 1546) likened Muslims (Turks) to Antichrist (Quinn 2008: 43). Linking the immobility of Muslim societies with their intellectual traditions, Ernest Renan wrote: 'Islam is the disdain of science...restricting the human mind, closing it to all delicate ideas...to all rational research' (in Kurzman 1998: 1). Indeed, he argued that Islam and knowledge could not go together (Nomani 1955: 168).⁹ Similarly, William Muir observed that the Qur'an is one of

'the most stubborn enemies of Civilization, Liberty... which the world has yet known' (in Lester 1999: 46). In a tone of lament, Watt (1988) argued that Islam has been closed since the Middle Ages. Without multiplying examples, I wish to stress that the imaginary of Islam as being hostile to criticism remained dominant until the Cold War when communism became the vilified other. Perhaps the most robust example of this attitude is Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1969). The hallmarks of Popper's (1972: 14, 16) open society were 'free debate', use of 'reason', and 'protection of freedom', all of which he saw (in abundance) in the United States.

With the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the collapse of communism, the Renan-like imaginary about Islam resurfaced; Gellner's *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* is perhaps its most succinct illustration. Gellner saw religious fundamentalism in all its shades as opposed to the 'secular wisdom of the age' and 'Enlightenment rationalism'. However, he felt impelled to add that 'in our age fundamentalism is at its strongest in Islam' (1992: 4). The Rushdie Affair – with its transnational ramifications – the publication of *Lajjā* by Taslima Nasreen in the early 1990s, the series of writings and speeches by the Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, including the film *Submission* (Moors 2005), whose script she wrote, the horrendous murder of Theo van Gogh who directed it, and writings, for example, by tenure-seeking prophets like Hirsi Ali and Irshad Manji have only reinforced this image: Islam is inimical to criticism.

So how and why has this social imaginary gained currency and credibility? Perhaps the most important factor has been the all-pervasive perception that critique is by definition secular and hence inhospitable and antithetical to religion, certainly to Islam. One of the standard narratives of Enlightenment has been the dethroning of religion and superstition by the crowning of reason and rationality. The foundation of Enlightenment, argues Melzer (1996: 344), is 'the critique of Christianity'. In other words, for critique to be properly qualified as critique, it has got to be secular and grounded in reason.¹⁰ Such a perception was not only true for 18th-century France, the theme Melzer writes about. It is true about contemporary times as well. In 2007, the Social Science Research Council (of the US) organized an online symposium titled 'Is Critique Secular?'. The participants included well known academics of diverse persuasions, including Charles Taylor and Talal Asad. One such participant was Stathis Gourgouris (2008a), who responded to the symposium's question as follows: 'Yes, critique is secular'. He further argued that 'If the secular imagination ceases to seek and to enact critique, it ceases to be secular'.¹¹

Anthropology of Islam and the meaning of critique

It is perhaps because of this highly secularist investment in the concept of critique that anthropologists working on Muslims have been rather reluctant to use it. For example, in his rich ethnography of Gayo society, John Bowen (1993: 18, 8; cf. Kresse 2003) chooses to name the intense exchange of arguments amongst and

deeply reflective comments on certain rituals and practices by Muslims as 'religious disputes', 'debate and discussion', not as work of critique. Even the highly critical contributions of learned ulema of different persuasions in Gayo qualify as 'debates' (1993: Ch. 3) and as 'genealogy of divergent understandings' (as the first part of the book is christened), never as critique. To take another example from Indonesia, in discussing the thoughts of Abdurrahman Wahid (d. 2009) and Nurcholish Madjid (d. 2005) as embodiment of what he called 'neo-modernism', Greg Barton (1997) described them as 'intellectual ulema'. The premise – fundamental to Shils' (1972) secularist conceptualization of who is an intellectual – is that ulema as a group don't qualify as 'intellectual' because they don't engage with the Western intellectual canons. In contrast, both Wahid and Madjid were an exception among ulema because while Wahid, in addition to being a lover of French cinema and soccer, read social theory and philosophy in English and French, Madjid studied with Professor Fazlur Rahman at the University of Chicago. Both were thus sufficiently exposed to and engaged with the Western tradition based on reason as opposed to the Indonesian/Islamic traditions based on faith. Hence Barton's description of them as 'intellectual ulema'! Eickelman's (1985: 13) historical ethnography of Moroccan ulema is a fine exception; contra Shils, he recognizes them as intellectual.

Michael Fischer's and Mehdi Abedi's book is another case in point. They title their book *Debating Muslims*. The implication appears to be that Muslims debate but they don't critique. This is so because the reference of their debate remains revelation. If my interpretation is plausible, it gains further salience because, before publishing *Debating Muslims*, Fischer (with George Marcus) had published *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. Its aim was to rehabilitate the promise of anthropology as 'a form of cultural critique', by which they meant harnessing 'the portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways' so as to interrogate 'common sense and make us reexamine our taken-for-granted assumptions' (1999: 1). In attempting to re-inscribe this promise of anthropology, Marcus and Fischer make it unambiguous that the work of critique is enacted by the privileged position of the anthropologist, not by the people themselves with whom the anthropologist works. This is so because the anthropologist travels from one culture to another, and the aim of cultural critique is to 'apply both the substantive results and epistemological lessons learned from ethnography *abroad* to a renewal of the critical function of anthropology as it is pursued . . . *at home*' (1999: 112, emphasis added). That the notion of 'home' or 'abroad' is not self-evident but highly problematic is an issue for debate in its own right. Let me focus here on the method Marcus and Fischer offer for pursuing cultural critique: the method is de-familiarization which can be put to use in two ways. First, de-familiarization by way of cross-cultural juxtaposition. An example is Margaret Mead juxtaposing Samoan and American cultures to critique the latter. Second, de-familiarization by epistemological critique. Among others, they cite Geertz's *Negara* as an example. Through an exploration of Balinese politics, Geertz offers an epistemological critique of the very ways in which the West has conceptualized the political.

While the first form of cultural critique, de-familiarization by cross-cultural juxtaposition, has been more popular (exemplified in the figure of Mead), Marcus and Fischer seem to accord salutary weight to its second form – de-familiarization by epistemological critique. In *Debating Muslims*, Fischer and Abedi (1990: xxxi) state that the book addresses the first form of cultural critique and not the second one. Hence, they describe their approach as one of *critical hermeneutics*, not of critique. Critical hermeneutics, they hold, furnishes the *space* for critique, but not the critique *qua* critique. The assumption is that the subjects of the book – as they discuss the Qur'an, *hadith*, the ritual of Hajj and so on – don't offer epistemological critique for they operate within the overarching framework of religion. For instance, in striving to preserve the originality of the oral Qur'an, Muslims dismiss the salience of reason, 'aql (1990: 105). That is, they debate; they don't – or is it that they can't? – critique.

It is evident that the notion of critique is tied to the standard narrative of Enlightenment which is premised on the reified dualism of reason on the one hand and religion on the other. All that is uncritical or unreflective is often assigned to the religious whereas reason comes to signify freedom and all that is supposedly good. Based on our discussion so far we can now proceed to disentangle critique from the secular and Enlightenment notion of reason. This disentanglement is necessary to recognize the parochialness of that which passes as the universal. It is only through this act of recognition that we can begin to unravel and appreciate different notions and practices of critique and reason at work in Islam – an enterprise undertaken by Talal Asad. In his seminal book *Genealogies of Religion*, Asad (1993: 208) urges us to take into serious consideration 'forms of criticism' that 'are integral to many non-Enlightenment' societies.¹² He persuasively shows how through the medium of *naṣīḥa* (advice) the young ulema (in the wake of the Gulf War) offer engaged critique of the Saudi Arabian state and society. For these young ulema as well as Asad, far from being antithetical to each other Islam and critique indeed inform each other. More to the point, the Islamic notion of *qalb* (literally heart) is far more holistic and complex than the truncated reason of Cartesian cogito. Unlike the Enlightenment dualism between heart and reason, mind and body, intellect and affect, in Islam, the Arabic and Urdu term *qalb* encapsulates both intellect and feelings (Haj 2002: 350–2; Ramadan 2004: 14).

Islam as critique

To see the modern age as the age of criticism, as Kant did, is in some ways to celebrate 'us moderns'. Criticism as a practice, however, is as old as probably humans themselves. It may, therefore, be somewhat flawed to think of critique and reflexivity as the *sole* property of Enlightenment and modernity (Walzer 1988). If we can't decipher the contour of critique in pre-modern times, it is unwise to assume there was none. Buddha was a critic of his times. His teachings and practices contested the foundation of the hierarchical social order legitimized by the divine logic of *jati* or caste division. Those at the bottom of the caste

hierarchy were thus drawn to Buddhism (Singh 1972: 45ff).¹³ If Buddha was a critic, so was the Prophet Muhammad. The proposition that Islam and critique or reason can't cohabit is thus false. Indeed, one can begin to conceptualize Islam as permanent critique.

Muhammad was a critic of the Meccan social order. This critical enterprise didn't die with his death. An ordinary woman had no hesitation to question and reprimand Caliph Omar during his public address on what she regarded as his mistaken interpretation (Shaz 2006: 122). The exile of Abu Zar Ghaffari (d. 652), a companion of the Prophet and one of the first five people to embrace Islam, to what is now Syria was a consequence of his critique of growing tendencies among the ruling elite to amass wealth. In refusing to have any personal savings and leading an ascetic life, Ghaffari's was an embodied critique of the violent asymmetry of the Arabian social order (see Shariati 1979; Rahnema 2007). Scholars like Joseph Sachedi, J. N. D. Anderson, H.A.R. Gibb and Watt (who I discussed above) maintain that critical approaches such as Ghaffari's did not last long. Around the close of Islam's third century, so goes the argument, the gate of *ijtihad* got shut. In an influential article, Hallaq (1984: 1, 9) shows the fallacy of such a view. Marshalling and drawing on textual sources from subsequent centuries, he deftly demonstrates the constant employment of 'human reason' in the ongoing process of *ijtihad*, 'the exertion of mental energy in the search of a legal opinion to the extent that the faculties of the jurist become incapable of further effort'.¹⁴ Hallaq's focus is the category of Islamic jurists, however. An example from the category of non-jurists would be in order here. In 16th-century India, the Raushaniya movement was remarkable in many ways. Its followers asked: why can we pray only in Arabic when God understands any language?¹⁵ Clearly, they used reason to critique what they regarded as unreasonable. It is interesting to note that the followers of this movement considered their leader as *pīr-e-raushan*, leader of the light (Ahmed 1982). Resisting the temptation to furnish more examples, let me state my point. My proposition is that reason and critique are integral to Islam. The point is how to unpack its forms, salencies, workings, and manifestations. Immanent critique might well be an appropriate answer.

It is precisely this notion of immanent critique – to enlighten Enlightenment, to Islamize Muslims – which may enable us to recognize and analyze the practices of critique in Muslim cultures and histories. It follows that immanent critique is what Walzer (1987, 1988) calls 'connected' criticism. It is connected to the ethos of a culture even as it seeks to question it; it is connected to the tradition even as its goal may be to reconfigure it.¹⁶ It is a criticism from and of an ethical standpoint with a mooring in a given tradition that is neither monolithic nor static. Because of such an anchoring, it departs from the Kantian notion of critique. For Kant (1998a), reason was 'autonomous'. It was predicated upon no outside but itself. Rawls (1993: 100) puts it lucidly: 'Kant is the historical source of the idea that reason, both theoretical and practical, is self-originating and self-authenticating'. Immanent critique, I propose here, thus builds on the works of MacIntyre who suspects the autonomy of reason. He describes it as an

illusion to suppose that there is some neutral standing ground, some locus of rationality as such, which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions. Those who have maintained otherwise either have covertly been adopting the standpoint of a tradition and deceiving themselves and perhaps others into supposing that theirs was just such a neutral ground or else have simply been in error. (MacIntyre 1988: 367)

As this quote shows, critical inquiry presupposes a distinct tradition and historical anchoring. In Islam it is this form of immanent critique which has been the most dominant, and possibly also the most effective. Before I move onto the next section of the article, let me quickly say a word or two about the efficacy of immanent critique as a method or analytical tool. As a method (cf. Harvey 1990) it not only allows us to go beyond the Western stereotypes according to which Islam is inimical to criticism and debate; it also enables us to ask a series of interlocking questions: why is critique being made; who is making it; for what purposes? What is the condition which facilitates or hampers the practices of critique? What are the anthropological coordinates and power configurations – local, national, transnational and global – under which practices of immanent critique, of this or that variety, are undertaken? What are the streams of critiques and how do they, with their respective ideologies, utopias, and social capital, interact with one another? How do they define and use tradition? How is the boundary drawn between ‘self’ and ‘other’? Why are the networks of critics forged, maintained, or severed? To this end, what are the resources harnessed for dissemination, persuasion and resistance? Immanent critique as a method will also empower us students of Muslim cultures to explore many sites of criticism – literature and arts, collective movements and mobilizations, print culture and mass media, humor and laughter, versions of histories and visions of futures, politics of inclusion and exclusion, the articulations of cultures as a gendered reality, and so on. In disciplinary terms, such an endeavor entails a skillful interdisciplinary intervention. Disciplinary promiscuity, in short.

Conditions of critique: Objectification, distance, time

In this section I delineate the conditions facilitating immanent critique. As I previously stated, I don’t consider critique to be an exclusive property of ‘enlightened’ minds – Buddha and the Prophet Muhammad were critics of their own times. However, I want to introduce a qualification here. With the onset of modernity the sheer scale, magnitude and forms of criticism have changed. Put differently, several factors under modernity have produced the conditions for the practices of critique to become more salient, more pervasive, and therefore different from how it was conducted in pre-modern times. For lack of space, I will focus on objectification of culture and traditions, social distance and a new sense of temporality. Let me start with the objectification of culture and traditions.

In an important essay, ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’, Horkheimer (1972 [1937]) offered a program of how to practice critical theory, which he differentiated

from 'traditional theory'. According to Horkheimer, at the core of traditional theory lay the premise which enacted a radical separation between the subject and the object of analysis. Consequently, theory gets transformed into an enterprise of pure thought and the theoretician as an unbiased observer whose motto it is to unravel the world 'out there'. Traditional theory, as Horkheimer explains, considers the objects of analysis and cognition as a bundle of facts and the subject simply as an objective recorder thereof. Critical Theory, in contrast, subverts and transcends the radical separation between the object and the subject so as to see them in a dynamic relationship produced out of social praxis. For the purpose of this paper, an important insight of Horkheimer is to accord criticality to the object of analysis. That is, the object of inquiry is not *lex aeterna* but as contingent, contesting relations embedded in a complex social matrix. The object of inquiry is not passive, waiting to be activated. From the start, it is active, reflective, and yes, critical.

Contrary to the dominant scholarship (exemplified in Orientalism but not limited to it¹⁷), Muslims have rarely viewed their practices and traditions as *lex aeterna*. They have instead constantly interrogated their texts, traditions, histories, cultures and political templates. This process of interrogation grew intense and all-pervasive under Western colonialism. Colonialism – direct or indirect – was like a pebble thrown with ferocity on the calm water of certitude.¹⁸ What I wish to state is that, under the conditions of colonialism and modernity, immanent critique assumed a far more pervasive dimension as a result of what Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) have described as objectification of traditions. All that was previously certain, including the fundamentals, came under minute scrutiny. Calls for authenticity, utopia, reform, renewal, imitation, orthodoxy and orthopraxy were all born out of Muslim subjects' (with their diverse trajectories) immanent critique of the larger social world they inhabited. Criticism was no longer a choice, it became almost a necessity. Furthermore, it was not a vocation confined to the educated elite; it became a practice of the public – lettered and unlettered alike.¹⁹ By criticism I thus mean social criticism: criticism of culture as well as criticism as culture.²⁰

Integral to the condition of modernity is the sensibility and act of distance, which Edward Said foregrounds as constitutive of the very enterprise of criticism. Said takes the condition under which Auerbach wrote *Mimesis* as a glaring case. Auerbach wrote *Mimesis* as a refugee from Nazi Germany in exile in Istanbul. In Auerbach's own account it was this separation from 'home' which led him to embark on such a gigantic project. Auerbach lamented his distance from home because 'the most priceless . . . part of a philologist's heritage is still his own nation's culture and heritage'. However, he also distanced himself from home. He quoted Hugo thus: 'The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign land' (in Said 2000: 225).

As the essay moves away from the biography of Auerbach to its general theme, Said makes it clear that distance is the precondition of criticism. Indeed he speaks of 'distance, or what we might also call criticism' (Said 2000: 230). The rest of the

essay is devoted to exploring the interrelationships between *filiation* and *affiliation* as the basis of 'critical consciousnesses'. Auerbach represents the case of his filiation with the German culture, and by virtue of exile an affiliation with it. I take Auerbach's approach to his 'nation's culture' as an exercise in immanent critique. His distance from Germany and his exilic stay in Istanbul does not turn him into an outsider. As I understand it, Said is not speaking of territorial distance (though it precisely is); it is a social distance. For this social distance to occur, territorial separation from home may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition. It is my argument that such a distance informs modern Muslim cultures and histories. And this distance is not the privilege of literary giants (the focus of Said's essay); it is intrinsic to modernity itself because through objectification of traditions distance is wedged, and at the same it is the distance that creates the condition for culture to be objectified.

In *A Faith for All Seasons*, Shabbir Akhtar urges Muslims to 'leave, if temporarily, the House of Islam . . . to venture beyond dogma and unargued assumptions' (1990: 202). Akhtar issues this plea quoting the British author G.K. Chesterton, who opined that 'there are two ways of getting home; and one of them is to stay there' (1990: 202). Leaving aside the possible objection that this plea seems to have a patronizing ring, I think that Akhtar somehow misses the point that such a process has already been at work for a long time. The three towering figures of Islam in south Asia in the 20th century – Muhammad Iqbal, Abulkalam Azad (d. 1958), and Maududi²¹ – all had come home after leaving it. Their return routes to home were markedly different and, therefore, their home also became different. What I find even more interesting, however, is that many Muslims since the 19th century began to feel homeless despite being home. That is, 'to venture beyond dogma and unguarded assumptions' does not always entail leaving home; one may not feel at home despite being at home. This indeed has been the case in modern Islam, immanent critique being one of the most potent consequences.

A significant enabling factor for this distance has been the new temporality bequeathed by modernity. As Koselleck (2004) observes, in the medieval cosmology there was no neat demarcation between the past and the present; they coalesced into each other. Contemporaneity was tied to timelessness, the former being mere staging of the latter. As a notion the future did exist, but it was a 'prophesied future': pre-determined and definite. For Luther, waging the battle against the Turks, anti-Christ in his word, was akin to fulfilling the Christian prophecy of leading to the end of the world, the Final Judgment. The movement from 'prophesied future' to 'predictable future' is mediated through temporalization of history, which Koselleck characterizes as the *sine qua non* of modernity. Humans no longer 'participate' in a pre-determined history; they 'produce' it (2004: 21, 196). This temporalization of history presupposes a new conceptualization of time – the past, the present and the future get liberated from the grip of cosmological play. The future becomes the pivot of human interventions.

This new temporality is both the cause and effect of criticism. Walzer (1988) rightly observes that criticism – connected criticism in his case – is oriented towards

the future. In 15th-century India Sayed Mohammad Jaunpuri (d. 1505) proclaimed himself to be Mehdi. For him the world was nearing its end (Mujeeb 1967: 101ff.; Qureshi 1970: 60). Jaunpuri's notion of the future was 'prophesied future'. With the transition from 'prophesied future' to 'predictable future', criticism became future-directed. This is illustrated in the biography of the 19th-century reformer Dipti Nazeer Ahmad (1831–1912). In a lecture delivered in 1895, he spelt out why he stood opposed to the translation of the Qur'an. No matter how sophisticated the effort, he observed, the meaning in the original Arabic (*asīl*) could never be transferred into the language of translation. He also feared that the translation itself might become the substitute of the original Qur'an. In the same lecture, however, he went into greater detail to tell his audience why he himself chose to translate the Qur'an into Urdu (he was one of the first to do so). Setting the paradox of his choice aside for another occasion, what is relevant here is his prediction about the relevance of his translation. He predicted (not so modestly) that not only in his lifetime but in the next century and in the subsequent century too it would be his translation that people would consult (1918: 39). In another lecture on religion delivered three years later, Ahmad offered a fascinating reading of the divine intention. God has created every religion, he argued, for the betterment of humans in accordance with 'time and locality'. The words time and locality are transliterated in the original Urdu (1918: 198). The temporality in Ahmad's prediction of 'predictable future', it is evident, is substantially different from Jaunpuri's end-of-the-world cosmology, i.e. 'prophesied future'. This is so because as a result of the break with the past and traditions, avers Bourdieu (1979; also see Harvey 1990), societies desire to take hold of the future by human interventions. This new-found consciousness about the self-production and self-transformation of the social order (Touraine 1985) is the key terrain on which immanent critique plays itself out. In the following section I will offer some examples.

Some illustrations: High traditions versus everyday

Before I set out to illustrate some cases of immanent critique, a clarification is in order here. I take criticism as social phenomenon and cultural practice. Intellectuals are surely part of this phenomenon, but by no means the sole actors. As I see it, immanent critique is as much a practice of intellectuals as it is of the ordinary subjects. I do recognize the importance of Gramsci's observation that the valence of intellectuals as professionals has a different function and consequence in comparison to that of a non-professional intellectual. However, I wish to stress his observations that 'all men are intellectuals'.²² It is impossible to separate *homo faber* (Man the maker, or tool-bearer) from *homo sapiens* (Man the thinker), and that 'each man . . . is a "philosopher"' (1996: 9). In what follows, I will first discuss the forms of immanent critique as expressed in the 'high traditions' of intellectuals and then move on to immanent critique in everyday life by ordinary subjects.²³

The terms '*ma'rūf*' and '*munkar*' have been perhaps two key Qur'anic terms to receive great scholarly attention. Maududi, the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami,

used them as the foundation of his theorizations about the gender question, human rights, pious self, democracy and so on. During my fieldwork in Aligarh, a university town located some 125 km southeast of Delhi, I met a former member of the Jamaat, Akram Zurti. Aged 80 or so, Zurti had retired as a reader from Aligarh Muslim University (henceforth AMU). He had heard Maududi deliver, in 1940, a speech at AMU. This speech transformed Zurti into a Jamaat member. Around the mid-1960s, however, he resigned. As a student of chemistry, he couldn't endorse Maududi's rejection of Darwin. He instead believed that the Qur'an supported evolutionism. In Zurti's view, the Qur'an was a book of ethics (*ikhhlāq*) and justice for all of humanity, regardless of religious divides. The Jamaat had, by contrast, turned it into a book for 'Muslims' as an ethnic group. Thus, by backing the Urdu-speaking West Pakistan against the Bengali-speaking East Pakistan in the 1971 war, in Zurti's narrative, the Pakistani Jamaat degenerated, coming to equate Islam with one language.

By ethics, Zurti meant what was morally good: love, kindness and care for the poor. So pivotal is ethics to the Qur'an that it calls prayer 'fraud' if a prayer-doer disregards compassion. Zurti cited *sura al-ma'ūn* where Allah chides worshippers who are unkind to their fellows. For Zurti, the Qur'an is also a call for action, at the heart of which lies the obligation to command *ma'rūf* and forbid *munkar*. The words *ma'rūf* and *munkar* are taken to mean 'right' and 'wrong' (e.g. Cook 2000). In Zurti's reading, they had different meanings. For a thing to qualify as *ma'rūf*, it should (a) be popular (*ma'rūf*), acceptable (*maqbul*); (b) accord with Allah's feature (*sifat*): justice and compassion and (c) stand to reason. Further, Zurti stressed that since Islam is dynamic, with societal change the notion of *ma'rūf* would also change. He defined *munkar* as the 'other' of *ma'rūf*. As he considered Islam a religion for humanity, *ma'rūf* was beyond religious borders. He held that in the modern West many ideas of *ma'rūf* had developed: human rights, democracy, freedom and women's equality. So had ideas of *munkar*: slavery and colonial loot, for instance. It was Muslims' duty, Zurti held, to embrace *ma'rūf* and shun *munkar*. He argued that not only did women have the right to vote in elections but that they could also become prime ministers. Against Maududi, he didn't consider women to be intellectually inferior. Arundhati Roy, he said, is brighter than any man. He lamented that Muslims had not produced a Roy (whose lecture at AMU in early 2004 was a big event). In Zurti's view, women were also entitled to equal shares in property. Today, he continued, women's education, including in co-educational institutions, and their participation in the public domain were *ma'rūf* (Maududi called co-education 'poison'; Ahmad 2009a). In India, they could also uncover their head and wear a half-sleeve blouse, as both were *ma'rūf*. Rejecting popular practices of the age, he warned, would flout the Qur'anic call to command *ma'rūf*.

Clearly, Zurti departed radically from Maududi. In his account, Maududi confined women to the home because he took an ethnic, not a universalist, approach to Islam. Had Maududi's approach been universal, he would have welcomed Western *ma'rūf* about women. According to Zurti, Maududi also ignored justice – a feature

(*ṣifat*) of Allah. As Allah desires justice, he contended, how could He deny the right to vote or run a state to women? He called Maududi's commentary on the Qur'an, *Tafhīm al-Qur'an*, as a piece of 'sheer ignorance (*niri jāhiliyat*)'. He lamented that none – from Ibn Taimiyah (d. 1328) to Maududi – understood the Qur'an because commentators had thus far interpreted it through the hazy lenses of mostly distorted *hadith* and medieval jurisprudence. The sole authentic book was the Qur'an, the writing of whose commentary, in its own terms, was his mission.²⁴

Another example of immanent critique is the hermeneutic war over the term *khalīfa*. In the writings of two key Islamist ideologues, Maududi and Egypt's Syed Qutb, this term indeed is the foundation. If simplified, their argument would read: The Qur'an describes humans as vice-regent or deputy (*khalīfa* or *nā'ib*) of Allah on earth. Since there would be no Prophet after Muhammad, as vice-regent of Allah, Muslims should compulsorily strive to establish His will on earth, namely install an Islamic state or Caliphate. Such an understanding (given stability by 'experts' of Islam) is like the alphabet to most Islamists. However, is this only an interpretation? More importantly, is it an Islamic interpretation?

In *Is Man Vice Regent of God?* Sabihuddin Ansari (1988) argues to the contrary. God is creator of every particle in the universe. He is capable of extinguishing the world in the twinkling of an eye. As Almighty He rules over and nourishes the whole universe. To think of Allah as requiring His deputy or vice-regent to enforce His laws is to make a mockery of His omnipotence. This credo, Ansari says, is utter falsehood (*bātil*). Giving a linguistic explanation, he says that the root of the word '*khalīfa*' is '*khalaf*', meaning that which follows: '*khalaf*' is thus the obverse of '*salf*', which means that which precedes. To Ansari, in the Qur'an and *hadith* '*khalīfa*' is used to mean 'successor', 'replacement', 'inheritor', or 'substitute' (1988: 2). To say that the human is Allah's *khalīfa* implies the death or absence of God who is followed or substituted by man. To so conceptualize Allah, Ansari avers, is *shirk*, polytheism (pp. 10–11, 41–3). In his reading, Ibn Taimiyah held a similar view. In his *fatwas*, Taimiyah declared that those who used terms like '*khalīfatullāh*' and '*nā'ibullāh*' were guilty of committing 'open (*ṣarīh*) *shirk*' (p. 60). Ansari not only contests this understanding of '*khalīfa*' made popular, among others, by Maududi and Qutb. He actually turns their argument upside down. He contends that it is not man who is Allah's *khalīfa*; on the contrary, Allah is man's *khalīfa*. To this end, he quotes several sayings of the Prophet. When undertaking a journey, the Prophet used to pray 'O' Allah, make my journey easy and... in my absence you [Allah] are the caretaker (*khalīfa*) of my house' (p. 82).

Yet another example of immanent critique is the differing, contesting meanings of the term *ijma'* (consensus), an important methodological principle in Islamic jurisprudence. In a fascinating article, Zaman (2006) demonstrates how this term has been subjected to multiple interpretations. It is striking to note that there is hardly any census on the principle of consensus itself. Along with the Qur'an and *hadith*, *ijma'* has historically been regarded as one of the cardinal sources of law in Sunni Islam. The question Zaman raises is: whose consensus? Is it the consensus of opinion among the select ulema (religious experts) or of the Muslim community at

large? What is the scale of consensus? Is it at the level of a particular locality, or the global *umma*? As Zaman observes, under modernity the principle of *ijma'* came under intense criticism. Modernists like Fazlur Rahman described it as the main cause of Muslims' stagnation and 'traditional authoritarianism' (2006: 154). What is even more interesting is the way he demonstrates the lack of consensus on *ijma'* not among the so-called modernists, but also among the category of ulema. In sharp contrast to the classical understanding of *ijma'* which construed it as consensus among the ulema themselves, Zaman shows how, for example, Rashid Rida (influenced by Muhammad Abduh) enlarged the concept of *ijma'* to include the non-ulema. Basing their argument on the logic of 'public interest', Abduh and Rida saw an assembly of the elected representatives as the most appropriate site of undertaking *ijtihad*. For Shahtut, the rector of the Azhar, *ijma'* meant 'the agreement of the people of discernment (*ahl al-nazar*) in matters of public interest' and *ijma'* in contemporary times a 'collective *ijtihad*' (p. 160; also see Zaman 2002). Clearly, many would not agree with such a view of *ijma'*. For my purpose what is important is that ulema critique each other in interrogating what precisely is the meaning and structure of *ijma'*. Another compelling illustration of immanent critique!

Let me conclude this section with some examples of immanent critique from the everyday life of ordinary Muslim subjects (cf. Asad 1993: Ch. 6). Wearing of a beard is often regarded as typical of Muslimness. Do we sufficiently know what it connotes, however? Let me go back to Aligarh. On the university campus a beard was looked at in many ways. For those who grew it, it was a sign of deep piety. Some clean-shaven students, however, told me: 'the greater the length of the beard the more hypocritical and selfish the person is'. Clearly, criticism is at work here: does Islam value appearance or essence; is symbol more important than substance (i.e. ethics)? It was not simply the difference between a beard and the lack of it that mattered. Interestingly, what was fervently debated was also its size and shape. Most Tablighi Jamaat (a reformist movement launched in colonial India, see Masud 2000; Metcalf 2002) activists grew a full beard and had their moustache either fully or partially trimmed. Students from the Barelvi group (considered 'traditionalist' and Sufism-oriented; see Sanyal 1999) also had a full beard but their moustache was rarely trimmed. By contrast, Islamists had a fairly short beard and untrimmed moustache.

To capture the poetics and hermeneutics of a beard, consider this joke narrated by a Tablighi Jamaat supporter. Once a bus full of Muslim passengers was stopped at Jawahar Tunnel, a check-post on the way from Jammu to Srinagar, capital of Kashmir. The police checked all of them. The passengers were of three kinds in appearance – fully bearded, clean-shaven and short-bearded. The first ones were gently let free on the ground that they were a truly spiritual lot concerned with the life hereafter (*ākhirat*), not with this world (*dunya*). The second ones were also let free as they were considered modern and non-trouble-makers. The short-bearded passengers were ruthlessly interrogated and detained. In the eyes of the police, so went the joke, the short-bearded passengers were the dangerous lot, responsible for

insurgency in Kashmir. Such practices of criticism are not limited to the university campuses. They also flourish in everyday life outside of the university. In his arresting ethnography, Magnus Marsden brings to life the everyday debate in Chitral, otherwise a backwater of Pakistan. A barely educated peon says:

My philosophy is my heart . . . There are two things. One is a believer (*momin*) –somebody who . . . believes that God watches him twenty-four hours a day. The other is a Muslim – a liar . . . who believes by tongue only. They pray and have beards just to show things to other people, but their thoughts are different. They are ready to eat bribes. . . . *In Pakistan there are many Muslims but no believers.* (Marsden 2005: 97; italics mine)

Conclusion: Taj Mahal and modern Islam

My primary aim in this article has been to critically interrogate the received wisdom in academic scholarship, including in several of the important anthropological writings, on the interrelationships between Islam and critique. To this end, I have discussed the Enlightenment's notion of critique and reason and the ways in which critique has been practiced in Muslim cultures and societies. It has been my contention that to equate the Western notion of critique derived from Enlightenment's specific conceptualization of reason with critique per se is seriously misleading as there are non-Enlightenment modes and templates of critique such as the Islamic one this article unpacks and illustrates. Dispelling the commonplace perceptions that Islam is hostile to reason and critique, I have demonstrated that there is a different working and salience of reason in Muslim traditions, namely immanent critique. Many factors under modernity furnished the condition for the practice of critique to become more salient than it was in the pre-modern times. I focused on objectification of culture and traditions, social distance and a new sense of temporality as important factors. I also discussed why immanent critique might be a useful analytical tool to unravel the modalities and complexities of Muslim cultures – in the realm of historical and contemporary thoughts as well as everyday lives. Based on materials drawn largely from South Asia, I offered historical and ethnographic illustrations of immanent critique. In short, this article is an invitation to reexamine the dominant Western narrative of critique and reason so as to appreciate and situate the role, significance, place, and the specific modes of critique in the Islamic traditions.

Returning to the Taj Mahal with which I began this article, Sāhīr, Shakīl, Maududi and Tājmahli all spoke of it. In the very act of speaking about Taj Mahal, it seems, they at once built a new monument and bulldozed the existing one. Sāhīr's plea to his beloved to meet him elsewhere but not at the Taj was due to his outcry against the exploitation of labor in fashioning the Taj, which the poor couldn't build to orchestrate their love. His romantic rebellion was about: *with whose blood and sweat was the Taj built?* Shakīl was unmusical about how it was built; his interest lay in what it was

built for. It was built as an 'insignia of love'. He thus moved away from the process of labor's exploitation in building the Taj to its *symbolization* and *spell*.

Unlike Sāhīr and Shakīl, Maududi went into the *legality* of the Taj. Does *sharia* allow an emperor to occupy acres of land and spend millions of Rupees to erect a monument thereon? It was un-Islamic acts such as these which, he held, led to the downfall of Muslims. Hence his judgment that such an act should go into the 'catalogues of crimes'. Like Maududi, Tājmaḥli is also concerned about Islam, but for a radically different reason. His question is: why do thousands of other princely mausoleums stand deserted today whereas the Taj is awash with divine light and visited by thousands every day? His answer is simple: divine miracle. Beginning with its construction, the Taj was under constant supervision by mystical power. The divine verses on its walls bestow on the Taj the miracle that it is. Unlike Maududi, Tājmaḥli is concerned with the *un-faded endurance* of the Taj Mahal.

Eickelman and Piscatori (1996), and also others (for example, see Robinson 2008), have written about the fragmentation of religious authority in Islam. They argue that the ascendance of the 'new religious intellectuals' has led to the fragmentation of religious authorities which previously were the monopoly of ulema. One may wonder somewhat if Islam ever had a centralized authority. I thus take their argument of fragmentation as an illuminating example of immanent critique of and by religious authorities. If this sounds plausible, it seems to me that fragmentation is simply one side of the immanent critique; this very fragmentation also leads to the consolidation of the category called Islam. Just as the immanent critique of the Taj Mahal by Sāhīr, Shakīl, Maududi and Tājmaḥli fragments as well as consolidates the Taj Mahal as a symbol, likewise immanent critique disassembles as well as solidifies Muslim cultures. Due precisely to the critical, reasoned deconstruction of Islam as a category under modernity, Islam has become a more salient, more effective signifier. In this article I have attempted to write a preface (a bit longish, perhaps) to this dialectic of modern Islam.

Acknowledgements

This article is a revised version of the concept paper presented at the international workshop 'Understanding Immanent Critique: Cultural Politics and Islamic Activism' I convened at Leiden University, The Netherlands (28–9 November 2008). This workshop was part of my postdoctoral project, funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) through the Rubicon Grant, titled 'Contesting Islamism: Immanent Critique of Jamaat-e-Islami of India, from 1941 to the Present'. I subsequently presented versions of this paper at the Anthropology Seminar, Monash University (15 October 2009), and at the Sociology Department, Jawaharlal Nehru University (11 February 2010), Delhi. For their critical comments on the draft of this paper and their participation in the workshop, I am thankful to Rizwan Ahmad (Qatar University), Kamran Asdar Ali (University of Texas-Austin), Greg Barton (Monash University), Thomas Blom Hansen (Stanford University), Kenan Çayır (Bilgi University, Istanbul), Marc de Leeuw (Sydney), Michael Janover (Monash University), Jeanette Jouili (University of Amsterdam), Michiel Leezenberg (University of Amsterdam), Magnus Marsden (University of London), Annelies Moors (University of Amsterdam), Samuli Schielke (Centre for Modern Oriental Studies, Berlin),

Benjamin Soares (African Studies Centre, Leiden), Caroline Osella (London University), R. Santhosh (Mangalore University, India), Frank Peter (University of Bern, Switzerland), Martin van Bruinessen (Utrecht University), Peter Van der Veer (Max Planck Institute, Göttingen), and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton University). The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, and Forum (a Dutch organization) awarded financial grants to organize the workshop. I thank them.

A note about the reception of this paper is in order here. I faced sharp disagreement over, even stiff opposition to, the idea that Islam and reason are not antithetical and that the Islamic tradition has its own mode of critique. Its most eloquent expression came in the form of editorial rejection of the proposal for a special issue – comprising select papers from the workshop mentioned above – I submitted to the journal *Thesis Eleven*. The proposal consisted of the Call for Papers, an earlier version of this article, Michiel Leezenberg's paper 'Critique as a Contested Concept', and titles of other papers and the names of their authors. The editors of *Thesis Eleven* rejected the proposal, saying 'any discussion of immanent critique in Islam must first confront the basic failure of the Islamic world over the last three centuries to translate immanent critique into a process of reformation' (email dated 19 March 2010). I found the response curious, if 'curious' is the proper word to describe it. Responses such as *Thesis Eleven*'s only emboldened me to present my thesis, however. I am indebted to the two anonymous referees and Jonathan Friedman of *Anthropological Theory* for their highly encouraging and, yes, immanent critique of the manuscript.

Notes

1. In transliterating Urdu and Hindi words, I largely follow the *Annual of Urdu Studies* guidelines 2007, also available on the journal's website.
2. For lack of space, I do not give English translations of the poems. Sāhir's poem is available on <http://www.shairoshairi.com/poems.php?poet=Sahir+Ludhianvi&songtitle=taj+mahal> and Shakīl's on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TehJFYrDFJw>
3. Anthropological works I cite here often tend to question the doxa that Islamic traditions lack reason and debate. For instance, writing about men of traditional learning in Morocco, Eickelman (1985: 134) mentions that it is 'incorrect' to call them 'non-rational'. However, in these writings seldom is the subject of inquiry 'critique' in its own right – the precise theme of this article.
4. Nussbaum and Sen (1989) use 'internal criticism' in a similar sense; also see Gaonkar and Taylor (2006).
5. Central to this debate is the very definition of Islam, which Hodgson addressed by differentiating *Islamic* from *Islamicate* (1974: 56–60). Also see Smith (1946: 304–5) and his criticism by Khurshid Ahmad (2000).
6. My reading is also based on Asad's *Formations of the Secular* (2003: esp. Ch. 7). On my conversation with Asad, see the Introduction to my *Islamism and Democracy in India* (Ahmad 2009a).
7. On the concept of tradition, see Shils (1981). For the meaning of tradition in Islam, see Nasr (1987). To Graham (1993), the two distinct features of tradition in Islam are *Ittesāliya* (unbroken continuity) and *Isnād* (the degree of accuracy).
8. Though interchangeably used, critique differs from criticism in that the former is a 'sustained criticism' of a position or argument. Marx subtitled *Capital* as *A Critique of Political Economy* to better understand the working of capitalism while also showing its limitations (Macey 2000: 76).

9. A colonial officer in India remarked that Muslims' heads were unfit for mathematics (Ahmad 1918: 79). Describing the European as a 'close reasoner' and 'natural logician', the British Consul-General of Egypt, Baring Cromer (d. 1917), likewise held that: 'The mind of the oriental... is eminently wanting in symmetry... [and] singularly deficient in the logical faculty' (in Nasr 1999: 564).
10. Religion has a place in Kant (1998a) in so far as it remains within the limits of reason. For Kant, Protestantism, unlike Judaism and Islam, was the consummate rational religion (Turner 2007: 501–3).
11. See the exchange between Mahmood (2008) and Gourgouris (2008a).
12. Asad's theoretical project is situated in a milieu where the Enlightenment's notion of reason and its universalist claims were challenged from a range of perspectives. For instance, feminist scholarship demonstrated the 'maleness' of reason and philosophy at large (see Grimshaw 1986). Lloyd (1984) discussed the isomorphism between maleness and Western philosophy. In her call to gendering reason, Rooney (1991: 98) contended that 'it [reason] has propelled itself, not by the power of reason... but by the power of a [male] myth'. Professing a 'distinctive Afrocentric epistemology', black feminist scholarship went further to describe it as 'white' and 'Eurocentric' (Collins 1989: 755–6).
13. On criticism and debates in 'Indic' religions – Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism – see Sen (2005), Jaiswal (2000), Sangari (1990), and Heesterman (1985).
14. On the use of reason in the explanation of an Islamic notion of prophecy, see Frank Griffel (2010), who describes how Muslim philosophers – Al-Farābī, Ibn Sīna, and Al-Ghazālī – offered a rational explanation of prophecy using the Greek philosophical postulates.
15. The Indian sociologist J.P.S. Uberoi mentioned this point in a different context during an informal lecture at JNU in November 2000.
16. Thus in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, Butler reflects on her original manuscript: 'I understood myself to be in an embattled... relation to certain forms of feminism, even as I understood the text to be part of feminism. I was writing in the tradition of immanent critique that seeks to provoke critical examinations of the basic vocabulary of the movement of thought to which it belongs' (2007: vii).
17. As a representative example, consider what Lewis says about the state. '[In Islam] the state does not create the law, but is itself created and maintained by the law, which comes from God' (2002: 31).
18. Thus the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) penned the following line: 'The storm of the West made Muslim, Muslim' (in Ali 1980: 8).
19. My formulation departs from Walzer's (1987, 1988), who, like Marcus and Fischer (1999), is reluctant to consider a commoner as a critic. His *The Company of Critics* includes a list of 11 well known critics like Orwell, Camus, and Foucault. I also disagree with his anchoring of an effective critic within the precincts of the nation-state (1988: 234–8).
20. From this standpoint, literary criticism is a part of, rather than being coterminous with, criticism itself. Consider Spivak's observation: 'I am a literary critic: the only thing empirical for me would be a short story' (1990: 168). On literary criticism see, among others, Barthes (2004) and Davis and Schleifer (1991).
21. On Azad's loss of faith and return to Islam, see Mufti (2007). Maududi had the following to say: 'If Islam were a religion that exists now among Muslims, then I would have also become an atheist. In reality, I am a born again Muslim' (1942: 15). On Iqbal, see note 18.

22. It is worth quoting the qualification Gramsci introduces after this statement: 'it can happen that everyone at some time fries a couple of eggs. . . we don't necessarily say that everyone is a cook' (1996: 9).
23. Clearly, I disavow the duality between 'high traditions' and everyday. I employ it only to dissolve it.
24. This section draws on my postdoctoral project on immanent critique; see Ahmad (2008: 559–61).

References

- Ahmad I (2008) Cracks in the 'mightiest fortress': Jamaat-e Islami's changing discourse on women. *Modern Asian Studies* 42(2–3): 549–575.
- Ahmad I (2009a) *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ahmad I (2009b) Genealogy of the Islamic state: Reflections on Maududi's political thought and Islamism. *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* (NS) 15: S145–S162.
- Ahmad K (2000) Maududi's model of Islamic revival. In: Mumtaz AM (ed.) *Modern Islamic Movements*. Kuala Lumpur: A. S. Noordeen.
- Ahmad N (1918) *Lekchroñ ka Majmū'a*. Agra: Mufīd-e-āam Press.
- Ahmed T (1982) *Religio-political Ferment in the N.W. Frontier during the Mughal Period: The Raushaniya Movement*. Delhi: Idāra-e-adabiyāt.
- Akhtar S (1990) *A Faith for All Seasons: Islam and the Challenges of the Modern World*. London: Bellew Publishing Company.
- Alam M (2004) *The Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200–1800*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Ali S (1980) *Allāma Iqbal aur Maududī*. Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Islāmī.
- Almond I (2004) 'The madness of Islam': Foucault's occident and the revolution in Iran. *Radical Philosophy* 128: 12–22.
- Ansari S (1988) *Kya Insān Allāh kā Khalīfa Hai?* Delhi: Maktaba Al-Fauzaan.
- Asad T (1986) *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (Occasional Papers Series).
- Asad T (1993) *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reason of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Asad T (2003) *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Barth F (1969) Introduction. In: Barth F (ed.) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Barth F (1994) Enduring and emerging issues in the analysis of ethnicity. In: Vermeulen H and Govers C (eds) *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries'*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.
- Barton G (1997) Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as intellectual Ulama: The meeting of Islamic traditionalism and modernism in neo-modernist thought. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8(3): 323–350.
- Barthes R (2004) *Criticism and Truth*. London: Continuum.
- Bourdieu P (1979) *The Disenchantment of the World': Algeria 1960*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowen JR (1993) *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Brunkhorst H (2000) The enlightenment of rationality: Remarks on Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. *Constellations* 7(1): 133–140.
- Buck-Morss S (2003) *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*. London: Verso.
- Butler J (2003) What is critique? An essay on Foucault's virtue. Available at: www.law.berkeley.edu/cenpro/kadish/what%20is%20critique%20J%20Butler.pdf.
- Butler J (2007) *Gender Trouble*. New York/London: Routledge.
- Caputo J and Yount M (1993) *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Collins PH (1989) The social construction of black feminist thought. *Signs* 14(4): 745–773.
- Cook M (2000) *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis RC and Schleifer R (1991) *Criticism and Culture: The Role of Critique in Modern Literary Theory*. Essex: Longman.
- Eickelman DF (1985) *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth Century Notable*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Eickelman DF and Piscatori J (1996) *Muslim Politics*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- El-Haj NA (1998) Translating truths: Nationalism, the practice of archaeology, and the remaking of past and present in contemporary Jerusalem. *American Ethnologist* 25(2): 166–188.
- Evans-Pritchard E (1969 [1940]) *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foucault M (1996) What is critique? In: Schmidt J (ed.) *What is Enlightenment?* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fischer M and Abedi M (1990) *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogue in Postmodernity and Tradition*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Gaonkar D and Taylor C (2006) Block thinking and internal criticism. *Public Culture* 18(3): 453–455.
- Gellner E (1992) *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Gourgouris S (2008a) De-transcendentalizing the secular. Available at: <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/01/31/de-transcendentalizing-the-secular/>
- Gourgouris S (2008b) Antisecularist failures: A counterresponse to Saba Mahmood. *Public Culture* 20(3): 453–459.
- Graham WA (1993) Traditionalism in Islam. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18(3): 495–522.
- Gramsci A (1996) *Selections from Prison Notebooks*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman.
- Griffel F (2010) Muslim philosophers' rationalist explanation of Muhammad's prophecy. In: Brockopp JE (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grimshaw J (1986) *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Haj S (2002) Reordering Islamic orthodoxy: Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahab'. *The Muslim World* 92 (Fall): 333–370.
- Hallaq WB (1984) Was the gate of Ijtihad closed? *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16(1): 3–41.
- Hansen TB (1999) *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Harvey D (1990a) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Harvey D (1990b) Introduction. *Sociological Perspectives* 33(1): 1–10. (Special issue on Critical Theory).
- Heesterman JC (1985) *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hodgson MGS (1974) *The Venture of Islam, Vol.1*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Horkheimer M (1972 [1937]) Traditional and critical theory. In: *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (trans. O'Connell MJ et al.). New York: Continuum.
- Horkheimer M and Adorno TW (2002) *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (ed. Noerr GS, trans. Jephcott E). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Jaiswal S (2000) Change and continuity in Brahmanical religion with particular reference to Vaisnava Bhakti. *Social Scientist* 28(5–6): 3–23.
- Kant I (1998a) *Critique of Pure Reason* (eds. Guyer P and Wood AW). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant I (1998b) *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings* (eds. Wood A and di Giovanni G). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant I (2007) What is Aufklärung? In: Foucault M, *The Politics of Truth* (ed. Lotringer S, intro. Rajchaman J). Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Kontopoulos K (1995) The dark side of fire: Postmodern critique and the elusiveness of the ideological. *Argumentation* 9: 5–19.
- Koselleck R (2004 [1979]) *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kresse K (2003) 'Swahili Enlightenment'? East African reformist discourse at the turning point: The example of Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Mazrui. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 23(3): 279–309.
- Kresse K (2008) Can wisdom be taught? Kant, sage philosophy, and ethnographic reflections from the Swahili Coast. In: Ferrari M and Potworowski G (eds) *Teaching for Wisdom*. Dordrecht/London: Springer.
- Kurzman C (ed.) (1998) *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*. New York/London: Oxford University Press.
- Lester T. (1999) What is the Koran? *The Atlantic Monthly* (January): 43–53.
- Lewis B (2002) *The Political Language of Islam*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Lloyd G (1984) *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Macey D (2000) *Dictionary of Critical Theory*. London: Penguin.
- MacIntyre A (1988) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Norte Dame: University of Norte Dame Press.
- Mahmood S (2008) Is critique secular? *Public Culture* 20(3): 447–452.
- Marcus G and Fischer MJ (1999) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences, 2nd edn*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marsden M (2005) *Living Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Masud MK (ed.) (2000) *Travelers in Faith. Studies of Tablighi Jamaat as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*. Leiden: Brill.
- Maududi SAA (1942) *Musalmān aur Maujudah Siyāsī Kashmakash, Vol. 3*. Pathankot: Dafter Risala Tarjumanul Qur'an.
- Maududi SAA (2001) *Tafhimāt, Vol. 1*. Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers.

- Melzer AM (1996) The origin of the counter-enlightenment: Rousseau and the new religion of sincerity. *The American Political Science Review* 90(2): 344–360.
- Metcalf BD (2002) *'Traditionalist' Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs*. Leiden: ISIM Papers.
- Moors A (2005) *Submission*. *ISIM Review* 15 (Spring): 8–9.
- Mujeeb M (1967) *Indian Muslims*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Mufti A (2007) *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nasr SH (1987) *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Nasr SVR (1999) European colonialism and the emergence of modern Muslim states. In: Esposito J (ed.) *The Oxford History of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nomani AS (1955) *Maqālāt-e-Shiblī, Vol. 3* (compiled by Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadwi). Azamgarh: Darul Musannefin.
- Nussbaum MC and Sen A (1989) Internal criticism and Indian rationalist thought. In: Kausz M (ed.) *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Oak PN (1969) *The Taj Mahal Is a Hindu Palace*. Bombay: Pearl Publication.
- Popper K (1969) *The Open Society and its Enemies*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Popper K (1972) On reason and the open society: Interview. *Encounter* 37(5): 13–18.
- Quinn F (2008) *The Sum of All Heresies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Qureshi IH (1970) India under the Mughals. In: Holt PM, et al. (eds) *The Cambridge History of Islam, Vol. 2A*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ramadan T (2004) *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rahnema A (2007) Ali Shariati: Teacher, preacher, rebel. In: Rahnema A (ed.) *Pioneers of Islamic Revival, updated edn*. London: Zed Books.
- Rawls J (1993) *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Robinson F (2008) Islamic reform and modernities in South Asia. *Modern Asian Studies* 42(2&3): 259–281.
- Rooney P (1991) Gendered reason: Sex metaphor and conceptions of reason. *Hypatia* 6(2): 77–103.
- Said E (1995) *Orientalism, 2nd edn*. London: Penguin.
- Said E (2000) Secular criticism. In: Bayoumi M and Rubin A (eds) *The Edward Said Reader*. London: Granta.
- Sangari K (1990) Mirabai and the spiritual economy of Bhakti. *Economic and Political Weekly* 25(27): 1464–1475.
- Sanyal U (1999) *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and His Movement, 1870–1920*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sen A (2005) *The Argumentative Indian*. London: Penguin.
- Shariati A (1979) *On the Sociology of Islam* (trans. Algar H). Berkeley: Mizan Press.
- Shaz R (2006) *Islam: Negotiating the Future*. Delhi: Milli Publications.
- Shils E (1972) *The Intellectual and the Powers, and Other Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shils E (1981) *Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Singh Y (1972) *Modernization of Indian Tradition: A Systemic Study of Social Change*. Jaipur/Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Smith WC (1946) *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Spivak, GC (1990) *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (ed. Sarah Harasym). New York: Routledge.
- Stauth G (1991) Revolution in spiritless times: An essay on Michel Foucault's enquiries into the Iranian revolution. *International Sociology* 6(3): 259–280.
- Tājmaḥlī D (2006) Taj Mahal...? *Bebāk Sālnāma* 64–66.
- Taylor C (2004) *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- The Times of India* (2005) Taj Mahal or Tejo Mai Mahal? 25 March. Available at: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1062264.cms>.
- The Times of India* (2008) Shiv Sainiks sneak into Taj Mahal, perform *puja*. Available at: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Shiv_Sainiks_perform_puja_at_Taj_Mahal/articleshow/3276025.cms.
- Touraine A (1985) An introduction to the study of social movements. *Social Research* 54(4): 749–787.
- Turner BS (2007) Minorities and modernity: The crisis of liberal secularism. *Citizenship Studies* 11(5): 501–508.
- Van der Veer P (1994) *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Walzer M (1987) *Interpretation and Social Criticism*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walzer M (1988) *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Commitment in the 20th Century*. New York: Basic Books.
- Watt MW (1988) *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*. London: Routledge.
- Zaman MQ (2002) *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zaman MQ (2006) Consensus and religious authority in modern Islam: The discourses of the Ulema. In: Kramer G and Schmidtke S (eds) *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*. Leiden: Brill.

Irfan Ahmad is an anthropologist and lecturer at the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, where he also helps lead The Centre for Islam and the Modern World. Before joining Monash (in 2009), Irfan taught anthropology and Muslim socio-cultural formations at the University of Amsterdam and Utrecht University. He won the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research's (NWO) prestigious Rubicon fellowship to complete his post-doctorate at the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM), Leiden University. Author of *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of the Jamaat-e-Islami* (2009), he is on the Editorial Committee of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* and is Associate Editor of the journal *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (from 2011). His essay 'Shared Horizon' was listed for Australia's Caliber Prize for an Outstanding Essay, 2010.