

Maria-Magdalena Fuchs (Dept. of Religion, Princeton University)

**Act in the Living Present: the Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam Lahore
and the Quest for a “Modern” Islam**

My presentation at the AAS 2018 in Washington, DC was based on my dissertation project, which explores how Islam was understood and debated by people affiliated with the Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam (AHI, Society for the Defense of Islam), the largest and most popular Muslim voluntary association of colonial Punjab. Established in 1884 in Lahore by religious scholars, the AHI was soon taken over by representatives of the new colonial middle classes. By establishing schools, colleges and welfare institutions and actively using the printing press, the AHI created a platform for debating ideas on and spreading versions of a “modernist” Islam. Throughout its history, well-known Muslim thinkers were affiliated with this organization, such as Shibli Numani, Muhammad Iqbal, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Asad, and Abul Ala Mawdudi.

In my conference paper, I tried to shed light on the AHI's activities in the field of education, particularly the integration of religious instruction into its curricula. I rested my analysis on hitherto untapped Urdu sources, such as the association's meeting minutes and annual reports, textbooks, the AHI's monthly journal, and writings by its members. In the AHI's schools, “western” education was combined with the teaching of religious content and a style of “educated piety” that was expressed through social activism, public preaching and charitable activities. The AHI employed Islamic symbols in an effort to create a coherent student body, and by extension, to fashion a larger Muslim community or *qaum*. At the center of this pious model was an emphasis on ritual practice as an act of collective behavior, the performance of prayer in a group and not merely as an individual, the reduction of religious teaching and knowledge about scriptures to a basic set of questions and answers, the teaching of religiously inspired morals and ethics, and the public propagation of one's own faith. Islamic theology and its traditional interpreters, the *‘ulamā’*, however, were outright rejected, sidelined and relegated to a separate sphere. Instead, lay people took it into their hands to determine what it meant to be a good Muslim and how to live and practice one's faith. The fact that many of its graduates later staffed offices and posts in Pakistan places this organization squarely within the intellectual genealogy of the Pakistani nation-state. By tracing the history of the AHI's educational activities, I attempt to contribute to ongoing discourses about Muslim socio-political, intellectual and religious life in colonial north India, and debates about Muslim modernity, colonialism, and eventually nationalism.