

Alternative Subjectivities in Islamic Schooling: The Case of Urban Pakistani Parochial Schools

Sanaa Riaz

The post-9/11 association of Pakistani madrasas with terrorism, where brought much attention to madrasas (Islamic schools), also reduced institutions of Islamic learning and their patrons and proprietors to religious extremism and enemies of modern education isolated from the political and socioeconomic ethos of the society. In this paper, using data from my fieldwork conducted from 2004-8 inside private Islamic schools in Karachi, Pakistan, which combine modern secular education of private secular schools and traditional religious education of madrasas often through the prestigious British O-level examination system, and interviews conducted with administrators, teachers, students and their parents, I will critique this approach and bring scholarly attention to a new actor in debates about religious education and practice in Pakistan; the mainstream, urban middle and upper class Pakistanis.

I will provide the historical backdrop to the patronization of these schools with an overview of the state of education in the country and how the Pakistani state's fluctuating policies on Islamic education and practice have informed people's schooling choices. I will focus on how parochial Islamic schools cater to middle and upper class needs of maintaining continuity with their religious traditions, while steering away from state manipulation of traditional Islamic learning and how the resultant student subjectivities are simultaneously religious, class, sectarian, and professionally prestigious.