

Ulasan Buku / Book Review

Hamdeh, Emad. 2021. *Salafism and Traditionalism: Scholarly Authority in Modern Islam*. Cambridge University Press, DOI: 10.1017/9781108756594

MOHD AL ADIB SAMURI, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, three main groups emerged in the Muslim world: Islamic Modernists, Traditionalists, and Salafis. As these groups compete for authority, they argue that contemporary Muslims have been strayed from the true teachings of Islam and should return to Islamic sources - the Quran and Sunnah. The question becomes: Who has the authority to interpret Islam? This book, penned studiously by Emad Hamdeh, pays particular attention to the two competing groups: Salafis and traditionalists.

Hamdeh argues that several factors led to the emergence of Salafism in the Muslim world. Since traditionalists adhered slavishly to the classical interpretation of madhhab, they lost engagement with society and could no longer address the changing situations. A shift in educational practices, together with the advent of the printing press, resulted in the proliferation of purist Salafi critiques of traditionalism, which found an audience in print, cassettes, TV, and the Internet. Against this backdrop, Salafi movements were so popular for their promotion of critical methodology and challenge to traditional authority.

The author identifies the commonality between the two groups; both held al-Quran and al-Sunnah as the most authoritative legal sources. Nonetheless, traditionalists argued that legal texts could only be understood by following the methodology established by the madhhab. The Salafis, on the other hand, did not rely on the madhhab nor classical scholars for their methodology but rather did so based on authentic sources. Salafis promote their religious interpretation without any reference to madhhabs and human interpretations. For many decades, both groups have engaged in lengthy debates and polemics about numerous Islamic creeds and jurisprudence questions.

Salafism has produced several renowned scholars, but this book discusses one of the most controversial Salafi scholars, al-Albani. Al-Albani's criticisms of madhhabs, discrediting their methodologies, oversimplification of hadith interpretation, preference for the authentic hadiths over the madhhabs opinions have been harshly criticized by the traditionalist. According to al-Albani, his authentic-hadith-based understanding was the correct one while accusing other juristic opinions

based on the non-authentic scripture as "heretical innovations in the religion," known as *bid'ah*. He attempted to deconstruct the traditionalist methodology in jurisprudence and hadith and introduce his own hadith-based fiqh through his many published books.

Salafis argued that following a madhhab is a religious innovation. Salafis condemn traditionalists for following the madhhab, but Hamdeh points out that by bypassing the methodology of the madhhabs, Salafis were effectively establishing their own madhhab. Salafi anti-madhhab rhetoric can be understood as a reaction to their time's social, religious, and political circumstances. Even though Salafis are generally critical of the practice of *taqlid* as it is observed among many followers of the madhhab, it appears that many Salafis adhere to the views of al-Albani, his legal opinion, and his works on the grade of hadith. As Hamdeh finds, Salafis, who claimed to follow authentic sunnah called *ittiba'*, were biased.

As a result of his reputation, approach, and vocal attitude, al-Albani received a wide range of counterattacks from several scholars, political groups, and religious groups throughout the Middle East and South Asia. Al-Albani was critical of the Saudi-based Salafi scholars because of their nexus with the Hanbali school of law. His critical views of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and several controversial fatwas, especially on the niqab, sparked controversy in Saudi Arabia. al-Albani, who many Saudi religious scholars dismissed, had a profound influence on religious students and the general public as his ideas renewed interest in the reevaluation of hadith grade. The quietist stance he took has attracted the ire of Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, for which he has maintained that any type of political organization, whether it is peaceful, democratic, or violent, is forbidden since it can cause internal conflict within the Muslim community. Although al-Albani attacked two ideologues of the Muslim Brotherhood for their political opinions, he never excommunicated any. al-Albani also engaged in heated debates with numerous contemporary ulama in many places, exchanging harsh words and labels while one claimed to be the authentic version of Islam and the other misguided. Despite his lack of credentials in traditional Islamic

studies, as his critics have asserted, al-Albani's teachings and writings spread throughout the Muslim world, and he became one of the most prominent Salafi figures of the 21st century.

The book also highlights the approach Salafi took to interpreting legal texts. Salafi legal arguments were based on the assumption that texts are clear and do not require legal interpretation. Hamdeh argues that al-Albani sought to minimize human involvement in interpretation and to require the fatwa to have an explicit scriptural basis. Several controversial fatwas, opinions, and writings are discussed in the book to illustrate al-Albani's mistakes and the differences he took. It was al-Albani's mission to correct traditional scholars who contradicted authentic hadiths or passages from the Quran. Salafi approach to authentic

scriptures and conviction-driven practices has some appeal to modern Muslims who prefer certainty in religious practices.

Hamdeh's work makes a substantial contribution to recent scholarship on the Salafi movement, as the academic milieu has been flooded with the discourse on Salafism and jihadism from the perspective of counterterrorism. This book provides an in-depth examination of the development of Islamic law in the contemporary context in which the author managed to present the topic objectively and from a balanced perspective. The Salafism movement has profoundly shaped the legal discourse and religious practices of the Muslim community throughout the world. This was made possible by Salafi activism and strong funding for religious schools, literature, and mosques.

Mohd Al Adib Samuri,
al_adib@ukm.edu.my
Sharia Law Reserch Centre & Institute of Islam Hadhari,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
MALAYSIA

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