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Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil — Islamic Education and Local Traditions in Afghanistan

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Summary

This paper explores the role of higher education in the ongoing value discourse about local traditions and interpretations of Islamic orthodoxy in Eastern Afghanistan. It focuses on the educational trajectories of Afghan students, graduates and teachers of Islamic academic subjects, which often start across the border in Pakistan. Biographical data suggest that students attain a more differentiated understanding of both their religion and of society on their way up from Islamic school (*madrassa*) to university. The combination of a traditional and modern education leads many of them to change their perspective on certain traditions, ones which in their eyes contradict Islamic principles — most of which are related specifically to the treatment of women. However, to translate these ideas into the local context of Eastern Afghanistan has proven difficult, since certain social values and hierarchies constrain their further spread. Nevertheless, the combination of religious and secular education provides students of Islamic subjects with both practical and intellectual resources that they can draw upon in discourses about local traditions. Beside the emerging trend in the region of linking traditional and modern education, the paper shows the significance that transnationalism and migration continue to have for the educational system of Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Pakistan, tradition, Islam, migration, education, shari'a

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