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**Review: Nile Green, Terrains of Exchange. Religious Economies of Global  
Islam, London 2014**

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**Green, Nile:** *Terrains of Exchange. Religious Economies of Global Islam.*  
London: Hurst, 2014, xvii + 395 S., ISBN 978-0-1902-2253-6.

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Can religious change be grasped through the lens of the market metaphor, i. e. the model of the “religious economy”? Nile Green, Professor of History at UCLA, shows in his most recent book that the idea of the market place greatly improves our understanding of the ways in which a globally expanding brand of missionary Christianity influenced and thoroughly changed its Muslim competitors during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For Green, religious markets are metaphors for the spaces in which specific sets of religious beliefs are advertised and supplied to their customers and in which religious entrepreneurs exchange techniques and tools to promote their respective beliefs. Green’s book is thus mostly unconcerned with religion’s relation to capitalism. It is about encounters, adaptations and, last but not least, competition in a process of the globalization of religions.

The terminology of the book is at first confusing. Green tries to establish a set of analytical categories which correspond to the market metaphor – as he already did in his previous book *Bombay Islam* (2011). Religious societies become “firms”, missionaries are “entrepreneurs” and practitioners are described as “customers”. While this may lead the reader to some misunderstandings in the beginning, it fulfils the purpose of making her rethink the language and categories through which Islam and religion are generally understood. Green’s purpose, as he states it, is to conceive of Islam not as a discursive tradition in Talal Asad’s understanding but “as an internally competitive field of social actors and organizations” (p. 10). He challenges the idea that there exists a single global Islam and insists that, on the contrary, locally differing forces of supply, demand and competition led to very heterogeneous forms of Islam.

*Terrains of Exchange* is a contribution to global history, written in seven micro-historical case studies broadly connected to the Iranian and Indian contexts. These episodes are organized in a roughly chronological order ranging from the early nineteenth century up to the eve of the Second World War. They form three larger segments entitled “Evangelicals” (ch. 1–3), “Innovators” (ch. 4–5) and “Exporters” (ch. 6–7) which highlight a trajectory leading from early Muslim responses to the Christian missionary challenge to adaptations and

re-inventions of Islam in local market places on to the global propagation and spatial expansion of new forms of Islam. Underlying this trajectory is the assumption that the British Empire from the early nineteenth century onwards should be understood as an “evangelical empire” in which numerous actors endeavoured to convert Asia to Christianity. Green contends that the impact of the Christian missionary movement among Muslims was significant although the number of converts remained small. This is important since the significance of Christian missionaries and their relation to the imperial project remain a topic of controversy.<sup>1</sup> Green’s book is an impressive reminder that missionaries and the urge to proselytize should not be overlooked in the study of imperialism.

Chapter one takes the reader to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge where professors of Oriental languages like John David Macbride and Samuel Lee did not only pursue scholarly interests but were deeply engaged in missionary activities. What is ironical is that in order to refute Islam and translate the Bible into languages like Arabic or Persian they needed assistance from Muslim co-operators and converts and laid the foundation for the emulation of their methods in Muslim lands.

Chapter two deals with Christian missionary printing in the Arabic alphabet and the spread of print technology to Iran and the Middle East. It mainly follows the activities of the Iranian student Mirza Salih Shirazi who was sent to Britain in 1815 where he got exposed to Christianity and the evangelical enterprise. Mirza Salih chose to make use of the opportunities which missionary endeavours towards Muslims offered and became an apprentice Bible printer, learning how to print Christian works in Arabic and Persian. Returning to Iran, he managed to take a printing press with him and later went on to pioneer the first Iranian newspaper.

Chapter three moves the scene from Britain to Iran and to the Russo-Iranian border where European missionary societies had outsourced the work of translating the Bible into Persian. Looking at several examples Green demonstrates how “a series of talented, ambitious and mobile Muslim translators used Bible work as an opportunity to access missionary firms’ technologies, contacts and capital and to redirect them towards their own agendas” (p. 109). Native co-workers in the translation projects could hope for knowledge and language skills, social capital and not least financial benefits.

Chapter four moves on to India and introduces the religious market of the princely state of Hyderabad in the early twentieth century. This market

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent contribution which denies a larger importance of missionary activity see Motadel 2014: 1–31.

was characterized by its plurality and the appearance not only of Christian missionaries but also of missionary Hinduism and different varieties of missionary Islam. The chapter traces the emergence of a purified, scripturalist and “disenchanted” Sufi movement under the leadership of Mu‘inullah Shah. In this episode, capitalism enters into the picture as Mu‘inullah’s success was partly due to the demands of the flourishing textile industry for a strong work ethic.

Chapter five then presents a very different, “enchanted” version of Islam which in this case is shaped by a Hindu, “showing that it is not necessary to identify or be identified as a Muslim to produce Islam” (p. 36). This is the story of how the prime minister of Hyderabad in his writings represented the former Muslim soldier Taj al-Din Baba, who after being diagnosed mentally ill was seen by many as a holy man, as a miracle-worker. In doing so, he not only satisfied his own spiritual needs but at the same time promoted Hyderabad’s project of Hindu-Muslim unity against growing sectarianist movements.

Chapter six looks at the activities of Muhammad Sadiq, a missionary for the Ahmadiyya movement in New York, Chicago and Detroit between 1920 and 1923. While he preached the Ahmadi version of Islam with considerable success especially among African-Americans the techniques and strategies he used were shaped by the experiences in the contested Indian market places. First inspired by Christian missionaries, they now found their way back into a Christian country.

Chapter seven retraces the construction of the first mosque in Japan by the Indian merchant community of Kobe. Here again, the skills used in planning and fund-raising were adapted from the model of church-building projects by Christian missionaries. Fittingly, the construction works were entrusted to a Czech architect who had proven himself in the building of several churches in Japan. The opening of the mosque in 1935 was hailed as a milestone in the global outreach of Islam and its emancipation vis-à-vis the other religions in Japan, not least as a missionary force.

Taken as a whole, *Terrains of Exchange* makes for a highly enlightening read and constitutes probably the best account of the sense of competition which drove and motivated religious actors during the long nineteenth century. It deepens our understanding about the emergence of modern missionary movements in Islam and about the ways in which local competition could lead religious actors to global action. Each chapter in itself is well-written and highlights an important stage in the reshaping and remodelling of Islam in the face of competition, with the outcome of different forms of successful Islams.

Minor points of criticism concern the composition of the last chapter where Green goes at considerable lengths to inform the reader about the role of religion

in Japan since the Meiji Restoration and the development relations between Japan and Middle Eastern Muslims. As not all this background information seems to be necessary to grasp the main points of the chapter some more stringency would have been beneficial. A rather amusing mistake is made in one of the illustrations of the same chapter, where the Russian Tatar pan-Islamist Abdürreşid İbrahim is confused with the Indian merchant V. H. Toorabally (p. 240).

A larger question which remains is whether the usage of the market metaphor leads us as stringently to the variety of different Islams as Green affirms. In the end, markets can also be conceived as creating standards and criteria to determine what should be labelled as “Islam” and what should not. In this sense the outcome of the market would not only be a set of different Islams but a new global understanding about the essence of Islam as well.

Another point which is not addressed satisfactorily in Green’s market framework consists of the identitarian aspects of religion and ultimately the question why Christian missionaries failed to convert larger numbers of Muslims or why Islam remained numerically insignificant in Japan. Why would most people not change their religious allegiance more often if they encounter an innovative product on the market? While Green in his case studies points to savvy local competition in Hyderabad or the nationalist environment in Japan which hampered foreign imports, this cannot serve as a general rule. Staying within the metaphor of the market, a general question would be in how far religions – conceived as products – are perfect substitutes or if there are deeper loyalties at play.

The positive impressions, however, far outweigh any criticism which can be made. This book cannot be recommended highly enough.

## Bibliography

- Green, Nile (2011): *Bombay Islam. [The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915](#)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Motatel, David (ed.) (2014): *Islam and the European Empires*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.