

Political Islam

By Charles Butterworth and I. William Zartman, eds.
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This volume surveys the complex roles Islamic ideologies play in the politics of the Muslim world. The authors are distinguished scholars in Islamic history, philosophy, and law as well as specialists in the sociology and politics of various Muslim countries. Despite their varied disciplinary backgrounds and the vastness of their subject, the book features a remarkable degree of interconnection and does not sacrifice the analytical specificity needed for each essay.

The volume's fourteen articles are grouped into six broad categories:

History of Islamic Political Theory and Practice. These essays offer two interpretive histories of the evolution and current status of Islam's role in the political sphere. Ira Lapidus argues that Islamic political theory has been governed by two paradigms, each grounded in a separate vision of the Islamic "golden age." The first paradigm is the "seamless" Islamic ethos, a holistic conception of law, politics, and personal morality that existed at Madīnah under the Prophet and his four immediate political successors. Even though this period lasted for barely four decades, it continues to serve as the vision of the Islamic ideal, especially for the recurrent revivalist movements and thinkers who have based their appeals upon this "first golden age." The second paradigm is characterized by differentiated religious and secular institutions. Despite attempts by medieval jurists to maintain the theoretical church-state unity, Islamic societies developed tacit and clearly articulated spheres of religious and secular authority. This made it possible for the early Islamic empires to absorb and then live with non-Islamic traditions and peoples (i.e., Persians and Turks). This "second golden age" is epitomized by the Ottoman Empire, which recognized Islam as the "official" religion and whose ruler was accepted as the titular caliph. Nevertheless, the fusion of religion and politics was never complete, as reflected in the emergence of distinctly "religious" institutions parallel to those of the state.

Modern Muslim states, Lapidus argues, are proof of the triumph of the second over the first paradigm. "Modern states can be seen as an expression of the historical separation of state and Islam All hope of salvation has been concentrated in the nonstate realm, in the religio-civil community, and in personal piety" (p. 23). As a result, states are not viewed by their own people, by and large, as the bearers of their religious

values. Their significance and legitimacy is derived primarily from such functional considerations as military security and political order. Authoritarian and patrimonial regimes flourish in an atmosphere of popular moral indifference toward the ethical foundations of the state.

The central role of Islamic values today, Lapidus suggests, is played out in the realm of civil society. "Despite the success of secular national states, Middle Eastern identities have never been secularized" (p. 24). Instead, Islamic values continue to shape community life, not only as a code of personal piety but also as the basis for the creation of such civic institutions as welfare and charitable trusts, economic cooperatives, schools, and clinics. Thus, in one sphere, Islam plays a highly public, although not necessarily political, role.

The decisive struggle in many Muslim countries today is the attempt by various Muslim movements to fuse civil society and the state. The problem here is that Islamic history offers very little instruction for the would-be creators of an "Islamic state." As Lapidus has pointed out, while the first paradigm may be the guide of the Islamist movements, Muslim societies have been far more conditioned by the extended application of the second paradigm.

Charles Butterworth complements Lapidus with a detailed discussion of the contribution of such great medieval political philosophers as al Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sīnā', and al Fārābī to the development of classical Islamic political theory. He makes it clear that the legacy of these theorists within modern Islamic political theory is ambiguous. While such modernist thinkers as 'Abduh and Riḍā frequently cite the medieval philosophers as evidence of Islam's rich philosophical heritage, such latter-day Islamist ideologues as Mawdūdī, al Bannā, Quṭb, and Khomeini rarely, if ever, refer to them. In general, Butterworth says, the Islamic political discourse is characterized by a serious rupture between the "classical" and contemporary periods of political philosophy. During the past two centuries, Islamic civilization has not produced any writer whose work offers a sustained, systematic, and comprehensive political theory. Thus, such issues as civil rights, political obligation, resistance to oppressive rulers, and legitimate war remain largely moribund according to medieval formulations.

Popular Manifestations of Political Islam. This section presents surveys of "nonofficial" expressions of Islam and their impact upon the politics of several countries. Patrick Gaffney examines "popular" Islam—the religion of the street or the masses—as opposed to the "official" Islam of the ulama and state authorities, which he identifies as being present through much of Islamic history. He sees a tension in "popular" responses to political Islam: while Islamic militancy seems to be largely rejected by the masses, appeals for politicizing Islam is great at the popular level.

This tension is also explored in the two following essays. Mary-Jane Deeb surveys Islamist movements in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Palestine, and Lebanon. Her broad focus does not permit a detailed analysis of the specific circumstances of each movement. John Voll concentrates on one particular manifestation of "popular" Islam: the Sufi brotherhoods of North Africa. He is particularly effective in highlighting the central role that Sufi orders have played historically and continue to play today in providing a means for popular participation in civic society that is different from the "statist" policies of both the Islamist movements as well as their nationalist opponents.

Official Approaches to Official Islam. Nazih Ayubi and Shahrough Akhavi examine Islamic political theory and its application to contemporary problems. Ayubi focuses on the (re)definition of statehood in the Sunni and Shi'i approaches and, in particular, upon the question of religious minorities. He concludes by asserting the need and inevitability of "improvisation" and supersession of traditional Islamic approaches to political community. Akhavi discusses the political pronouncements and acts of the ulama in Egypt and Iran. His article offers an interesting comparative examination of the different roles generally played by Sunni and Shi'i ulama today. The former tend to be supported financially by the state and thus are rarely opposed to the regime's policies, as witnessed by al Azhar's responses to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the Gulf War. The latter, mobilized by the revolutionary ideology of Khomeini, are now in the forefront of politics in Iran and in other Shi'i populations.

Islam in Power. Ibrahim A. Karawan offers a useful analytical framework for studying Islam in power. He posits three regime types: conservative-dynastic (Saudi Arabia), populist-authoritarian (Iran), and military-authoritarian, as found periodically in Pakistan and currently in Sudan. His essay is important in demonstrating how religious ideology may serve a number of instrumental ends for regimes seeking popular legitimacy and the resulting difficulty in asserting a monolithic "Islamic" approach to politics. Lahaouri Addi addresses the tension inherent in what he labels the "Islamist utopia" and the democratic aspirations of many Muslims. His focus is Algeria and its ongoing battle over its political destiny. He concludes that Algeria has two options: a radical alteration of the economic status quo, which would remove the socioeconomic bases for the surging Islamist tide, or allowing the democratic process to unfold and the Islamic Salvation Front to govern. Once in power, the Islamist utopia would have to accommodate itself to the imperfect world of political power. But at what cost? asks Addi. The question may be academic, for the current army-backed authoritarian nationalist regime is not likely to select either option without first destroying the country.

Political Islam beyond the Middle East. This section offers fascinating and valuable analyses of the religious impact in regions largely neglected in studies of political Islam. Vitaly Naumkin considers the role of Islam in Central Asia under Soviet rule and the resurgence of Islamic movements in the newly independent republics. John Hunwick deals with communal politics in Nigeria and the increasing Christian-Muslim polarization as the Islamic impact upon Nigerian politics grows. Alain-Gerard Marsot argues the importance of studying Islam beyond the Middle East due both to demographic realities and the growing significance of Islamic parties in Asia. He highlights the universal as well as geographically determined factors that shape Islamic politics in Asia. Remy Leveau examines the emerging problem of Muslim immigration into Europe, particularly the North African presence in France, and calls for the European Community to discuss Muslim immigration and civil rights in Europe.

Islam and Democracy. The final essay, by I. William Zartman, addresses both western policymakers and students of political Islam. His topic is the meeting of what he describes as "two powerful currents": democracy and political Islam. While Islam is not intrinsically hostile to democracy, Zartman writes, contemporary Muslim political discourse is largely monopolized by men and movements who equate "democracy" with "western corruption, materialism, and decadence." He argues that neither western-style democracy nor Islamic fundamentalism is likely to triumph totally; the Muslim world is much more likely to witness "a turbulent mixture of the two in varying proportions." Just how turbulent the combination becomes will be determined by the policies of the peoples in each state as well as the western powers that back their rulers.

This volume offers a valuable synthesis and survey of the ideas, individuals, and institutions that have and continue to shape the impact of Islam in politics. A significant shortcoming is that no essay deals with Islam as a transnational force, a force that has an impact at levels beyond the state, a force that operates today or potentially in the future with its own dynamic within the international system. Instead, the main focus is on Islam within a particular country. However, the impact of Islamic ideologies that challenge and denounce territorial boundaries as inimical to Islamic values is surely significant for any survey of political Islam.

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