ISLAM AND POLITICS

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QUESTIONS

• Is Islamic political/legal system compatible with modern democracies?
• Which Islam, which democracy?
SHORT HISTORY OF MUSLIM POLITICAL MILIEU

• Prophethood, 610-632
  • Establishment of the Muslim community in Medina
  • Charter of Medina, 622 after his arrival of the city (Hijra)
    • (also known as the constitution of Medina)
    • Nine tribes including eight Jewish groups as one religious community.
    • Formed a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community

• Four successors of Prophet Muhammad’s political authority over Muslim community. (Four righteous caliphs)

• Sultans and dynasties

• Non-Muslim conquerors, (Mongols, Crusaders)

• 18th-19th centuries; Western Colonialism

• 19th- 20th centuries nationalisms and nation states
SULTANS

- Sultans and dynasties seized the political power but could never be the religious authority although they tried hard.

- Individual Scholars resisted the idea of transferring the religious authority to the sultans, even though sultans were calling themselves as Caliphs (successors) of the Prophet.

- Independent scholarly tradition became stronger and hold the control of the power over the society in various areas.
SCHOLARS

• Islamic Tradition is a “scholarly tradition”

• The “Mujaddid”

  • Abu Hurairah narrated that the Islamic prophet Muhammad said, “Verily Allah sends to this Ummah at the head of every one hundred years someone who will renew the religion for it.”

  - Sunan Abu Dawood, Book 37: Kitab al-Malahim [Battles], Hadith Number 4278.
SCHOLARS

• Independent individuals, get their authority from their knowledge and other scholars’ approval.

• Became experts of Islamic theology (Kalam) and philosophy, Exegesis of Qur’an (tafsir), Prophetic tradition (Hadith), Jurisprudence (Fiqh)

• They receive their education in the links of masters and disciples.

• Therefore gain popularity and credit among greater masses.

• Sultans have no or very limited control over them
Nevertheless, Islamic history is the history of clashes between scholars and sultans,

Many scholars were oppressed, tortured, exiled, killed by the hands of the sultans for their demand of taking over their legal power over the society

Many sultans followed the footsteps of the scholars and stayed in their limits.

Scholarly tradition remained independent throughout the centuries
DISTRIBUTION OF POWER

- Scholars controlled the legislative power; through their opinions and interpretations
  - Fuqaha/Muftis
- Also they control the judicial branch of the governing body. (Kadi)
- In some cases they were appointed by sultans but mostly they were independent or only dependent on other scholars’ criticisms.
OTHER ENGAGEMENTS

• Scholars were controlling;
• The educational system, madrasas, diplomas and work authorizations of the graduates. (ijazat)
  • Madrasas were named after their founding scholars.
• They controlled Vaqf endowments (foundations)
• Distribution of charity, (Zakat, and other charities)
• Mediating local economic conflicts, controlling marketplaces, prices etc.
• Kadi’s had local police forces to control and secure the peace
• Imams were the neighborhood leaders with similar powers in lesser degree
TURMOIL AND CHANGE

• Colonizers asked locals to centralize the system,
  • Codification of the law
  • Centralized education
  • Centralized Economical system and taxation

• Muslim communities followed new trends
  • Schooling system, universities, new professional elites
  • Parliaments, Centralized legislation and judiciary. Modern courts

• Civil society and local governing bodies lost their privileges and power
ULAMA’S RESPONSE TO THE MODERNITY

• Four reaction types by scholars;
  • Tried to establish an enclosed territory to keep the traditional society away from the influences of modernity.

• Returning back to fundamentals, renewal from within and clashes with the modern world

• Between tradition and Modernity, reconciliation of Islam and Modernity

• Modernist Islam, reinterpreting Islam according to needs of the modern world.
MODERN NATION STATE

• Nation as an imagined community as oppose to localities

• Reinvention of the sacred and new symbols; (nation, homeland, flag, national anthem, national heroism, etc.)

• Individuals’ loyalty to the nation state, as oppose to organized communities
MODERN NATION STATE

- Strong centralized system

- Political power divided into three branches but all of them are still within the centralized state system

- Education as a *state ideological apparatus*

- Centralized law enforcement,

- Abstraction of crime and punishments. (crimes against nation)
POSTMODERN WORLD
NEW PROSPECTS

- Revitalized, stronger civil society, organized religious communities
- G/localization
- New ways of checks and balances
- Political engagement and civil rights movements
PITFALLS

• State response, not giving up accustomed power structure

• Authoritarianization of the civil society organizations (i.e. Religious groups)

• Clashes between new demands and state habits

• Difficulty of transition and adapting new demands
FINAL THOUGHT

• Old state is impossible, we shall either adopt a new one or we will perish.

• Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1911)
FURTHER READINGS

Legislating Authority
Sin and Crime in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey

Ruth A. Miller

The Islamic Scholarly Tradition
Studies in History, Law, and Thought in Honor of Professor Michael Allan Cook

Edited by Asad Q. Ahmed, Bernam Sadeghi and Michael Bonner

The Impossible State
Islam, Politics, and Modernity’s Moral Predicament

Wael B. Hallaq

Islamic Philosophy and Theology

W. Montgomery Watt