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Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: the Taymiyyan Moment.
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Islam has not come to terms with politics yet. Although modern political institutions and ideas irreversibly changed the political settings in Muslim countries, a majority of Muslim thinkers still resist secularization. Salafism, a powerful Muslim intellectual response with various interpretations, believes that the perfect Muslim city is the one built by the early Muslim community. One cannot count the number of fallacies Salafism commits here. For example, it appeals to the past, imagining a perfect community on the basis of transmitted traditions. Unsurprisingly, this community is accredited with all virtues.

In Salafi thought, the name of the jurist and traditional theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) emerges as the leading thinker. Since the 18th century, Modern Islamic intellectuals and movements have become fascinated with Ibn Taymiyya. Armed with an intractable temper, he promoted traditionalism, opposed philosophers and philosophizing theologians (with some interesting views) and foreign invaders. Salafis depict Ibn Taymiyya as a traditionalist who fights on all fronts to restore the imagined community of early Muslims. They establish a false analogy between their fight against current regimes and westernization on the one hand and Ibn Taymiyya's own battles on the other.

Anjum adheres to the Salafi paradigm and Ibn Taymiyya's project with conviction and sophistication. In this book, he pursues three aims: sketching the history of Islamic political thought as a decline and a process of separation between politics and the community, reconsidering the history of theological hermeneutics as a conflict between reason and tradition (against the supposed hermeneutic unity of the golden era), and highlighting the contribution of Ibn Taymiyya to reconciling the community with politics and reason with tradition. The subtitle, *the Taymiyyan Moment*, suggests that this figure would be the focus of the study. However, Anjum dedicates most space to the general mapping of political thought and hermeneutics. There is an apparent flaw in this construction. The author spent 169 pages on the first two of his aims and only 90 pages on Ibn Taymiyya. Anjum's Salafi revision of intellectual history distracted him from Ibn Taymiyya. Besides, his Salafi revisionism pushed him to struggle against almost the whole range of Western scholars on law and politics in Islam. Anjum succumbs to the temptation of saying something about everything. In addition, attempting to revise political thought and theological hermeneutics at once tears the book apart.

The author makes several challenging claims in his study. Nevertheless, rarely does he support them with evidence as he assumes his reader would agree with his reconstruction of Islamic political thought *prima facie*. He first argues that law defeats politics in medieval Islam. The elementary difficulty with this thesis is that it is based on the premise that politics and law were separated. Any manual of Islamic jurisprudence would undermine this claim. Theoretically, jurists provided the juridical framework of several political institutions such as war, finances, caliphate, and vizierate. In practice, judges, who were jurists who accepted the office of justice, were appointed by political authorities and usually played significant roles in political conflicts. Whatever definition of politics one might endorse and whatever sense he or she gives to *sharī'a*,

laws were enforced on the community by the state, asserting by the same token its political authority. Despite the Salafi denial, corrupted politics are still politics. As long as law and politics take place in a city, they cannot be separated.

The author also maintains that genuine Muslim currents of thought remarried the politics of the community and the law of the state. Contrary to the majority of classical Sunni scholars, these authentic figures considered law to be a component of Islam rather than its core. For Anjum, Ibn Taymiyya represents these thinkers. If these original tendencies reconciled politics and law, and the major contribution of Ibn Taymiyya is precisely this, Ibn Taymiyya would not be an exception or an original thinker. In fact, these tendencies would not be able to reconcile the politics of the community and the law of the state because this disguised secularism cannot take place in a community governed by *sharīʿa*, the divine legal judgments guarded by the jurists and supervised by the state. Whether politics existed with or without the state, it is not coherent to assume that a jurist of the 14th century restored a unity lost in the 7th century.

Additionally, Anjum argues that two models of political life in Islam are to be observed: an explicit model in which a virtuous caliph leads a cohesive and effervescent religious-political community, and an alternate model characterized by a religious and spiritual life "innocent of politics". A formal discrepancy immediately strikes the reader. One cannot reconcile one with two as long as one is part of two. Since the explicit model represents the early ideal of Islam, joining together the two models necessarily include the early ideal of Islam imagined by traditionalists. At the outset, limiting the ideals to two is an artificial dichotomy as other models were embraced by different religious-political interpretations of Islam, such as that of the Twelver Shīʿa, the Ismāʿīlīs or the Khārijite, just to mention a few ones. The explicit model Anjum promotes is what every sect in Islam claims to be its model. For a critical historian of ideas, what matters is how these sects construct their political imaginary, interpret the political language and discourse on authority.

Furthermore, the author implicitly assumes that Sufism is innocent of politics. The author should be credited for giving a voice for Sufis, usually excluded by hardliner Salafis. All the same, it is a *cliché* to presume that Sufism is free of politics. The list of Sufis engaged in politics, killed or successful in establishing states is too long. What is more, recent studies underline how Sufism, as brotherhoods and individuals, is genuinely interested in high and low politics (as shown by the volume *Sufism and Politics: the Power of Spirituality,* edited by Paul Heck in 2007).

Perhaps the most salient feature of this book is that it gives a postmodern justification to a Salafi conviction. Anjum uses Sheldon Wolin's distinction between political philosophy and political ruling, to claim an increasing control of politics by the citizens. Wolin, inspired by Plato, describes the empowerment of the citizens of a liberal Western democracy in the last fifty years. Obviously, the setting is different. Neither Wolin nor Plato believe in cities where a supernatural being defines the laws for its inhabitants. Ibn Taymiyya's paradigm rejects any order *without scriptural law*. For him, an order could be considered Islamic inasmuch as it applies Islamic law and remains faithful to it. While it is interesting to note how a Salafi author interprets a Western post-modern political philosopher, it could have been more coherent to compare and contrast Ibn Taymiyya with al-Fārābī (d. 950) or any other Muslim political philosopher. Muslim political philosophy offers profound discussions on law in the virtuous city they modeled on Plato. Certainly, this city includes law although philosophers praise law less than does Ibn Taymiyya. It is regrettable that Anjum asserts that Muslim philosophers give a merely instrumental value to religion, preferring to follow the Greek wisdom on science and politics. Adherence to Hellenism

does not prohibit imagining a virtuous city that deserves consideration, especially the idea that prophethood is not instrumental but essential to this city.

Despite its weaknesses, this book is a recommended reading for several reasons. First, it provokes thought as it criticizes the findings of a century of research by Western scholars. Anjum shows several flaws in the standard views of Islam on politics and deserves to be read for this reason. Subsequently, Anjum should be credited for including Modern Muslim scholarship in his references. He gives the reader a picture of how Muslim scholars perceive political thought. In particular, he sets out to present the Salafi paradigm. Next, Anjum elaborates on Ibn Taymiyya and draws attention to some of his understudied texts. Finally, the book addresses a Western audience who wants to read an alternative history of Islamic political thought. A political philosopher might discover in it the major debates within Islam and within Islamic studies on politics and law.

As I see it, circuitously, the book shows the aspiration of Salafis today to free themselves from medieval Islamic institutions and embrace a sort of Islamic civil society; a risky move from Islamic law to a civil political ethics and secularism.

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