

Conference, Symposium, and Panel Reports

Islamic Thought and Secular Modernity

The Summer Institute for Scholars 2016, held at the IIIT headquarters in Herndon, VA, from August 8-13, 2016, brought together a group of scholars to address “Islamic Thought and Secular Modernity.” In order to present as many of their ideas as possible, the wide-ranging and thought-provoking comments of the chairs and the discussants are not recounted here.

Introductory Lecture and Discussion. Sherman Jackson (University of Southern California) “Beyond Halal, Sharia, and the Challenge of the Islamic Secular.” Sherman Jackson discussed the reach and purpose of the Shari‘ah, whether it extends beyond the scope of revelation, and whether *mubāḥ* means that God either defined the matter as neutral or did not address it. He cited statements by Ahman ibn Hanbal (as quoted by al-Tabari), al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Ibn Abidin that the Shari‘ah does not cover everything. He then discussed opinions related to whether good or evil can be known in the absence of revelation, the “Islamic secular,” and how a single-minded focus on *ijtihād*, including a focus on *maqāṣid*, misses the point because they do not address the non-*sharī* realm.

Humeira Iqtidar (Kings College) and **Mohammad Fadel** (University of Toronto) served as discussants. **Ermin Sinanović** (IIIT) moderated the session.

Special Panel: “Islamic Traditions and Reformulations.” In her “Tradition and Islamic Thought,” **Humeira Iqtidar** explored non-liberal notions of tolerance in Maududi’s thought as presented in his highly controversial *Jihād fī Islām*. There are two notions of jihad: war to defend Islam and war to suppress *fitnah* (oppression). Maududi considers *fitnah* a test or trial that is just if created by God and unjust if created by man, for then its goal is to oppress and degrade people. Remarking that Maududi is invoked as an example of an intolerant Muslim because his central focus is on justice, which does not fit into the fold of western liberal thought, she reminded the audience that he wrote this book before Hitler and the Japanese detention camps, and that associating tolerance with liberalism is a post-WWII development. He attempted to impose justice

through state power, not through social norms, which put him in opposition to earlier Islamic thought. **Ahmad Atif Ahmad** (University of California, Santa Barbara) opened his “*Maqāṣid*, *Ḥaraj*, and ‘*Urf*” by asking whether Muslim populations, whose numbers are too large to ignore, have any role in lawmaking. He cited Ibn Abidin’s (d. 1836) theory of ‘*urf* (custom), which he views as an anomaly in Islamic legal theory. Considerations in establishing the existence of a custom are how long it has lasted, how many people in the community practice it, and its reconcilability with the law. The goal of building a civilization is to protect the population. Stating that belief is like desire, for one can believe what he believes and want only what she want, he asserted that *fiqh*’s purpose is to regulate actions. The Shari‘ah contains authority for the lay population and for the scholars, if one can reconcile the custom with the law, for there is a category of human knowledge that changes.

Sherman Jackson and **Mohammad Fadel** served as discussants. **Ovimir Anjum** (University of Toledo) moderated the session.

Book Discussion: *Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle over Islam is Reshaping the World* (St. Martin’s Press: 2016). **Shadi Hamid** (Brookings Institution) spoke about how living for six of the last twelve years in the Middle East gave him a better understanding of the role of religion in power by getting to know the various movements’ leaders and their motivations. He also realized that people cannot really tell you where religion ends and politics begins. Islam is indeed exceptional in terms of how it relates to law, politics, and governance, as well as its resistance to privatization and authority. Given that mainstream Islamism is an attempt to reconcile pre-modern Islamic law with the modern nation-state, it is a modern phenomenon. The challenge is to make Islamism less polarizing, and the goal is to normalize Islam in politics.

Dalia Fahmy (Long Island University) served as discussant. **Mohammad Fadel** moderated the session.

Special Panel: “Islamic Thought, *Maqāṣid*, and Secularization.” **Mohammad Fadel** “*Maqāṣid*, Islamic Law Reform and Secularization: Is *Maqāṣid* Simply a Synonym for *Fiqh* or is it a Synonym for Secularization?” Fadel claimed that twentieth-century reformers defended their reforms on the grounds of public benefit to the general community. More conservative scholars expressed grave doubts about the legitimacy of using *maṣlaḥah* and *maqāṣid* in such a broad manner. Remarking that secularism has multiple definitions and roles in the modern world, he explained how the medieval church used *seculum* and how the modern concept of secularization is rooted in canon law. He also mentioned various opinions on whether God was restricted by rational

necessity, purposivism in the law, and whether one can speak about the moral value of a judgment in the absence of a revelation. **Mohsen Kadivar's** (Duke University) "Shari'ah and Secularization: Two Challenges for Islamic Reform" centered on "What is Sharia?" If it is values and virtues rather than law, the this problem is resolved, for the Qur'an calls itself the book of light not the book of rules. It is then erroneous to perceive its few rules, rather than its virtues, as permanent. He then asked if there is such a thing as an "Islamic" and, drawing on the work Talal Asad, Wael Hallaq, and Abdullah al-Na'im, argued that running a state is a secular act involving duties apart from religious teachings and rituals. He opined that secularism in the sense of church-state separation, as opposed to *laïcité*, will benefit Muslim societies. He then analyzed the areas of seeming inconsistency between Islam and modernity; the role of traditional *ijtihād* and structural *ijtihād*; and the applicability of rules during the time of the revelation to the modern era.

Humeira Iqtidar and **Ahmad Atif Ahmad** served as discussants. **Asaad al-Saleh** (Indiana University) moderated the session,

Paper Session 1. Junaid Quadri's (University of Illinois at Chicago) "Sincerity, Hypocrisy and Authenticity in a Secular Modern World" focused on the growing emphasis on the authority of one's internal convictions: "Why do you say that which you do not believe." Earlier interpretations of this verse are rich, whereas more recent discussions are confined to the issue of sincerity. After presenting the views of al-Tabari, Maududi, and Sayyid Qutb, as to why this verse was revealed, the speaker says that this newfound emphasis on interiority reflects the importance of one's conscience and that the emphasis on hypocrisy as a moral failing distinguishes this from the non-Muslim writers discussed at the opening of his talk. **Ovamir Anjum** asked, during his "Can Islamic Tradition Define Secularism on Its Own Terms?" presented a "simple translation": *dunyawīyah*, or this-worldism. This is un-Islamic to the extent that it makes this world the primary determinant of values. Secularism as a denial of the significance of the afterlife was coined by atheists primarily to avoid the charge of atheism. The word *secular* can be used either as a neutral term meaning "apart from" or "opposed to" religion. Secularism could be philosophical, the same as atheism, or social, a reference to decline in church or mosque attendance. He analyzed the views of Talal Asad, Hallaq, and Farouk "Frank" Agrama on Islam and secularism, as well as various reformers and others.

Shoaib Ghias (University of California, Berkeley) and **Basit Kareem Iqbal** (University of California, Berkeley) served as discussants. **Ermin Sinanović** moderated the session.

Paper Session 2. In his “Facts, Values, Institutions: Notes towards a Critical Islamic Jurisprudence,” **Alexandre Caeiro** (Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, Hamad Bin Khalifa University) mentioned that the project’s first part concluded that chaos is too simple a term for a matrix of very complex phenomena. For example, it neglects how modern conditions have transformed the way fatwas are imagined. Contradicting fatwas are not new, but there is a new anxiety about disordered societies reflecting a modern concern about order. Perhaps this chaos could be resolved if Muslims scholars were to formulate a science of reality (*fiqh al-waqa’ā*) and integrate the social sciences into their framework. One problem in this regard is separating reality from its deceptive appearance. **Shirin Saeidi** (Editorial Board of Citizenship Studies) presented “The Islamization of the Social Sciences: Knowledge Production and the Iranian State since 2009.” In it, she asked how do Islamists who voluntarily lead security projects react to the mass uprisings that also challenge them? She related her experience in Iran after the 2009 protests over the elections in Iran, discussed how the Moroccan and Jordanian systems of repression incorporate a notion of pluralism, and remarked that Egypt moved to exclusivist projects. Basing herself upon the Islamization process in the social science framework, women’s rights, and cinema, she is researching how young people born after the revolution or even after the Iran-Iraq war relate to these. Relating that women have told her that “We don’t even know what our rights are,” she remarked that the constitution says one thing, Islam another, and yet another materializes when a certain line is crossed. Instead of finding “a dictator imposing a system on a people who want democracy,” she encountered what she believed to be ideologically committed activists, a general interest in Islamic revolutionary Shia ideology, and a demand for rights within clearly state-defined parameters.

Sarah Marusek (University of Johannesburg) and **Maslee Malik** (International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur) served as discussants. **Ermin Sinanović** moderated the session.

Paper Session 3. **Basit Kareem Iqbal**, “The Waning of Genre/Secularization under Trial,” answered his initial question of “How do we divide secular from religious?” by asserting the existence of a “certain consensus” that Islamic revival is about survival and that “political Islam” is what survives of Islam after all of the accidents of history and geopolitics. Saying that he wants to step away from the survival story, he discussed the relationship between history and religion as theorized by Max Weber, Karl Löwith, Carl Schmitt (on the closure of political theology), Hans Blumenberg, Janet Roitman, and Talal Asad. He contended that we should start with ambiguity and let traditions be

ethnographic objects and contextualize tradition against the ambiguities of modern life. In the Qur'an, history does not stand in judgment of time because there is a divine trial and trials in history are to be endured. This contrasts with both the disenchantment and the survival stories, and thereby provides an alternative vocabulary for understanding tradition. **Sarah Marusek's** "The Limits of a Neoliberal Resistance: Muslim Decoloniality in Lebanon," focused on the Lebanese Shia, who were historically oppressed, until recently marginalized, and remain objects of discrimination. Trying to take a decolonial approach premised on the view that colonialism is a state of mind rather than a regime, she is attracted to theologies of liberation, critical of claims of universality that tend to marginalize the oppressed, and finds the term *efficiency* deeply problematic. She wonders how and why charities affiliated with the Islamic resistance movement employ some aspects of western secular liberalism while resisting others. Trying to understand such movements on their own terms, she revealed that they are technically resisting capitalism and colonialism and yet negotiating with them as well. Their ultimate goal is creating a better world, but for whom, given that they are sectarian. She presented her interviews with Hajj Kassem Alleik (general director, Jihad al-Binaa) and the Imam Sadr Foundation, which is distinct for its embrace of economic liberalism and political liberalism.

Shirin Saeidi (Citizenship Studies) and **Ovimir Anjum** served as discussants. **Humeira Iqtidar** moderated the session.

Paper Session 4. In his "Constructing an Alternative Concept of Islamic Governance: A 'Maqāṣidic-Consequentialism' Approach," **Maszlee Malik** (International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur) referenced Maxime Rodinson (Islam is compatible with capitalism, but contains its own internal incentives for development), Umar Chapra (a society's wellbeing is both economic and depends upon the people's wellbeing), and Malik Ben Nabi (an understanding of Islam will create an understanding of the necessity to empower everyone and respect their rights). He concluded that it is essential to inculcate an Islamic understanding that appeals to the people's values and to develop a more dynamic yet normative *ijtihād*. **Doha Abdelgawad** (University of Warwick) used her "The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood: Secularization of Discourse and Intellectual Deficiency" to relate the political failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 to the analysis of Oliver Roy (the MB suffered from a crisis of imagination) and Asad Barat (the crisis would lead to a post-Islamist reaction to create a neutral state). The lack of internal democratic dynamics led to the silencing of especially the young members. Is this a secularization of Is-

lamist discourse or a renewal of the discourse? The establishment of a Shari‘ah Counsel was problematic, and the movement both retreated from its program and marginalized its reformist members. She then enumerated several factors that, according to her, had turned Islamist parties into a mirror image of secular parties, a misappropriation of Islam for political gains, and a departure from the inherent Islamic model to the coercive modern nation-state.

Muneeza Rizvi (University of California at Davis) and **Junaid Quadri** served as discussants. **Ovimir Anjum** moderated the session.

Paper Session 5. **Shoaib Ghias**’ “Is Pakistan an Islamic State?” addressed how the early formation of Sunni orthodoxy was the product of the ulema’s emergence as a dominant professional class, how colonialism interrupted this dominance, and how the post-colonial environment has renewed this historical struggle. Among other things, he summarized how the British disenfranchised the ulema, their movements that focused on resisting colonial reform, the reaction of Maududi and the *jamā‘*, whether courts review laws enacted by the legislature and declare them un-Islamic or unconstitutional, the empowerment of the Supreme Court and related events, the formulation of Pakistan’s constitution, Zia ul-Haq’s attempted Islamization, and how the ulema finally resumed their role without delegating authority to legislators or professional jurists to interpret the Qur’an and Sunnah. **Muneeza Rizvi** presented “Islam in the Impossible State: Qaradawi, Ghannouchi, and Islamic Statism in Palestine.” Remarking that Wael Hallaq’s framework emphasizes divergences between the modern liberal and Islamic discourse and thus does not allow for real examination of self-proclaimed Islamic states or the concrete attempts of some Islamists to develop states driven by Islamic imperatives, he asks how we can conceptualize specific Islamic engagements with the nation-state while taking seriously the theological claims and references of such state-oriented Islamists. He discussed the Islamist attention to state power, “illiberal state democracy,” Hallaq’s view that the Islamic state is essentially moral and the modern state is essentially political by a close reading of the Hamas charter.

Alexandre Caeiro and **Doha Abdelgawad** served as discussants. **Mohsen Kadivar** moderated the session.

Outcomes and Recommendations, the concluding session, was moderated by **Ermin Sinanović** and **Ovimir Anjum**.

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