Book Reviews

Political Islam and the State in Africa

Hussein Solomon, Akeem Fadare, and Firoza Butler, eds.
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Political Islam has been under the scholarly spotlight for over two decades. The events in the Muslim heartlands and beyond have caused scholars to critically investigate the relationship between religion and politics throughout the era of secularism; some arguing that religion is on its way out, and others stating that it is gradually gaining ground in the public arena. For the western-trained scholar, the religion-politics divide is a *sine qua non*; however, for those outside the scholarly circles, religion has always been connected to and intertwined with politics. This has been the case with Islam. The editors of this text, which focuses on the nature of political Islam and the nation-state on the African continent, have brought together a crop of scholars with divergent views. It consists of nine chapters, an introduction coauthored by Hussein Solomon and Akeem Fadare, and a conclusion coauthored by Solomon and Firoza Butler.

Given the supposed focus on political Islam and the state, I expected a concentration on the relationship between these two aspects during the contemporary period. However, reading Is-haq Akintola's opening chapter, "Islam in Africa,"provides us with a sociohistorical and political excursion of Islam with much of its focus on Islam's early formation and development. Unfortunately, it stopped short of evaluating the connection between political Islam and the contemporary nation-state and thus does not fit into the book's central theme.

The second chapter, Ashraf Docrat's "Sufism and Political Islam in Africa," is somewhat disappointing in that it shifts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the late twentieth century without ever satisfactorily analyzing Sufism as a form of political Islam. For example, he renarrates in summarized form the stories of Uthman ibn Fudi (d. 1817) and Muhammad Ali As-Sanusi (d. 1859), two influential Muslim scholars from West and North Africa, respectively, to highlight the ties between Islamic thought and

political activism. Instead of pointing out and expounding upon one Sufi order as an example of a form of political Islam, however, he merely outlines general characteristics before listing numerous noteworthy African Sufi orders. Prior to concluding his chapter, he casually refers to Sufis as agents of political change without providing any concrete examples and then talks about understanding Sufism and its potential role in American policy. Afis Oladosu, author of "Faces of Islam in Africa," considers the inside-out as opposed to the outside-in construction of Muslim identity. He thereafter highlights how Islam is being appropriated, identifies its various phases, and reflects upon its internal dynamics on the continent. In addition, he shows how different Muslim strands, namely, the ulama, Sufis, Tablighis, and Muslim women, translate theory into practice. The three afore-mentioned panoramic chapters offer a backdrop to the six case studies that follow.

Bjorn Moller's "Political Islam in Kenya," the first informative case study, employs statistical data to cogently and critically argue against the (American foreign policy) assumptions that Kenya and other East African states are being transformed into "hotbeds and breeding grounds for international terrorism" (p. 93). He discusses religion and conflict in East Africa before analyzing the status of political Islam in Kenya. When turning his focus to Kenya, he offers a background sketch, describes and discusses the various representations of Muslims in Kenya, and identifies the different Muslim political groups. He concludes by responding to the question of whether Kenya will be affected by "radicalization and/or terrorism in the future" (pp. 120-21). His chapter shows that while there is "a certain latent potential for Islamic revivalism," the available evidence does not support the view that Kenya's Muslims are being radicalized.

Lubna Nadvi's "Islam and the State in South Africa" demonstrates the nature of the religion-state relationship in a post-apartheid democratic state. She narrates the story of political activities within South Africa's Muslim community since April 1994 in respect to six areas: [internal] political campaigns, social activism, law enforcement, Muslim personal law, international solidarity campaigns, and the Anti-Terrorism Bill. All of these underscore the freedom within which the Muslim and other religious communities can participate openly and freely in sociopolitical activities without being impeded by the state apparatus. This Muslim minority's experience is undoubtedly very different from the political experience of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, and other Muslim organizations.

"The Muslim Brotherhood and the State in Egypt" is the central focus of Laurence Caromba and Hussein Solomon's contribution. They trace its history and refer to the Mubarak regime's repressive policies designed to

contain its growing influence. While they correctly conclude that the regime has contributed to the export of religious fundamentalism, I cannot fully agree that the organization has evolved into "a quintessential illiberal democratic movement" (p. 176). Regrettably, the Brotherhood has not been given the chance to show its ability to contribute effectively to forming and maintaining a democratic state and a liberal environment.

In their "Libya: Gaddafi and the Rise and Demise of Militant Islam?" Solomon and Gerrie Swart chart Gaddafi's emergence and almost forty years of autocratic rule as well as recount how this maverick of sorts proposed and imposed his fanciful "Third World Theory" and his peculiar notion of Islam as captured in his infamous *Green Book*. Although he experimented with his brand of Islam, the authors argue that Gaddafi realized he was up against a well-established tradition and was therefore forced to adjust and retract some of his earlier thoughts on the Qur'an. Even though the authors identified a few fringe militant groups, they did not say much about the influential non-militant role played by the National Salvation Front over the years. In fact, the presence of militant Islam was generally absent and those who claim to represent these strands are indeed miniscule.

In the last two case studies, Faten Aggad looks at "Islam and the State in Algeria: The Role of Religious Forces in the Conduct of State Affairs" and Akeem Fadare writes about "Islam and the State in Nigeria." Aggad unpacks the ambiguity of political Islam in Algeria and opines that religious movements have been – and continue to be – key actors there. She highlights the fact that non-represented religious elements seem to have had a greater impact upon its sociopolitical developments, rather than those who enjoy official representation, and opines that the rise of political Islam, which remained a contested issue, may be attributed to a handful of charismatic Muslim personalities who came under the Muslim Brotherhood's profound influence. In the end, they and their followers advocated "the re-Islamization of Algerian society" (p. 215). After discussing the emergence of such groups as Takfir wal-Hijra and the Armed Islamist Movement (MIA), who were dissatisfied with the gradualist approach, she recounts how Algeria descended into civil war and concludes that a compromise exists between the state's current political leadership and the religious groups. This, she avers, bodes well for the future.

Fadare, being conscious of the complex nature of Nigeria's political terrain, opens by assessing Islam and politics in the Nigerian landscape before renarrating its experience under colonial rule. While he briefly analyes the position of religion vis-à-vis the state during the various republics, he pauses and pays attention to the status of religion/Islam within the state's constitu-

tion. Fadare highlights the contradictions among the religious and political leadership and addresses the sensitive question of the Shari`ah, which has been used for pure political ends. He winds up with an appraisal of Islam and democracy and concludes that Muslim theologians and the intelligentsia need to engage in serious discussions on sociopolitical and economic justice.

In closing, it is a pity that the editors did not include a user-friendly index to benefit the inquisitive researcher and student of political Islam. Nonetheless, despite this shortcoming and some of the criticisms raised concerning some of the early chapters, this edited work is a helpful scholarly contribution to the (southern African) social science arena, where political Islam remains an issue of debate.

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