Week 11: Religion and Secularism in the Middle East
Iran, Egypt, Turkey

• Sami Zubaida: After the initial ‘charismatic’ period of Islamic resurgence, in the 1970s and early 90s, Islamic movements have become integrated into the politics of their respective contexts and ‘routinised’ into modes of operation and adjustment to that context.

• Optimist view on political Islam
Messianic/Inspirational figures

- Emerged after the weakening of Arab nationalism and socialism, defeat in 1967 war

- Khomeini
  - Iran
  - Novel political interpretation of Shi’i doctrine

- Ali Sheriati
  - Revolutionary ‘red’ Shiism
  - Islamic Left: Marxist and Fanonist themes read into the Quran and Shi’I doctrine
  - Revolution and liberation with an authentic lineage

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• Sayyed Qutb
  – Egypt
  – Muslim countries not applying Sharia are in a state of Jahiliyya (ignorance, pre-Islamic)
  – Muslims are duty bound to overthrow such a state
  – Executed for refusal to rescind his positions
• After the Islamic Republic of Iran: routinisation of charisma, rationalization, disenchantment with the mullah who get rich, no socialist policies

• Egypt: Qutbist groups become isolated

• Olivier Roy: The Failure of Political Islam

• But what is political Islam
Ideal Types

I) Conservative Islam

– Morality and social control
– Like other conservatisms, enshrines the values of property, family, and order
– Only political insofar as impose these values through government and law
– Exemplified by Saudi Arabia (state example)
– AL-Azhar, mainstream Muslim Brotherhood (up to 2011, non state example)

Morsi at al Azhar
II) Radical Islam

- Qutbic groups in Egypt
  - Bin-Laden was a prominent devotee of Qutb’s work
- Transformation of society through direct action
- Command the good and forbid the evil
- Eliminate un-Islamic ruler
- Assassination of Sadat in 1981

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Ideal Types Cont.

• **Political Islam**
  
  – Ideas and programmes of socio-political transformation based on Islam
  
  – Iranian Revolutionaries
  
  – Modernist Islamists within Muslim Brothers
  
  – Likely to embrace democratic practices but not principled democrats
Iran

• Nearest to the Christian church separate from state

• Imbued with religion and religious symbols
  – See Muharram, pre-Islamic spring festival of Nowrooz

• Anti Clericalism in modern Iranian history
  – Secular enlightenment as well as persecuted heretical movements such as Babism (later Bahaism), rationalist movements

• Modernization under the Shahs, emphasis on Persian superiority of “barbarism” of the Arabian Peninsula
Iranian Revolution

• Haphazard conjuncture of secular movements, labor and others
• Not organized by religious movements
• However, religious actors had the religious and bazaar institutions and networks to take advantage of the power vacuum
  – Funding
  – Millions of recent, dissatisfied urban dwelling immigrants from rural areas
  – Khomeini, charismatic and messianic

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The Agenda

• *Velayat-i faqih* – guardianship of the jurist
  – Enshrines Sharia as the privileged source of all legislation
  – So what did the Prophet have to say about traffic laws?

• 1980s: On controversial issues such as land reform, wrangles between conservatives and (Islamist and secular) leftists

• 1988: Khomeini rules the government heir to the authority of the Prophet => government can suspend Sharia in the name of public interest

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Women and Family

• Under Khomeini
  – Enforcement of niquab
  – Family planning illegal
  – Family law overtly favors men (custody, control, alimony etc.)

• Women's groups and economic interests reverse many of the draconian measures
  – Exploding population causes about face on the family planning law

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Post Khomeini

- No unitary leadership or central power prevailed
- Khamenei known to be political appointment, not a marja (source to imitate, ultimate religious authority)
- Elements of ‘civil society’ are developing
- Institutionalization/bureaucratization decreases sanctity of religion
- Strong appeal of westernization, especially amongst younger population

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• Move away from Islamic government

• Move away from political Islam but not necessary Islam

• Post-2000 developments disprove Zubaida?
Muslim Brotherhood

• Founded 1928 by Hassan Al Banna
• Founding coincided with the decline of craft-related Sufi organizations
• Under monarchy, one among many political forces, liberal, secular, nationalist, socialist parties
• Suppressed under Nasser
  – Despite playing an important part in his revolution
• Resurgence after collapse of secular ‘Naserism’
  – 1967 loss to Israel
  – Sadat and his struggle against the Nasserists
• Gama 'at al Islamiyya, violent anti-state Islamic group dominates headlines in the 1980’s
  – Gain control of large parts of Upper Egypt (the southern part) and poorer sections of Cairo
  – Authorities eventually evict, enervate the movement
• Sadat made Sharia source of the law
Turn of the Millennium

- Generational split among MB: older generation conservative, younger generation raised in sindicates political Islamist

- Hizb al Wasat (Party of the Center) has largely nationalist programme close to Nasserism
  - Meets with bureaucratic resistance

- Arrests, trials and harassment are common for Islamist political actors
• Radical elements participate in violence against state and tourist targets

• Conservatives oppose these because they value order and property

• Al Azhar became political actor since Sadat ruling

• Muslim Lawyers Association declared Nasr Abu Zayd apostate and annulled his marriage
Turkey

Source: Peter Schrank, The Economist
• Two distinguishing factors of Turkish political Islam

1. Struggle against a powerful and appealing elite entrenched in government, education and media

2. Competitive electoral system with relatively free associational life, including municipal government, private broadcasting and autonomous foundations
• Type 1 Conservative Islam prevalent among provincial bourgeoisie and reconstituted foundations and orders

• Type 3 Political Islamists prevalent among Welfare Party followers

• Type 2 Radical Islamists marginal
• National war waged against enemies identified by religion => implicitly Muslim secular Republic; nationalist Turkish Islam
• “Imbued and obsessed with religion”
• Kemalism
  – Restricted to important minorities of Istanbul and Ankara bourgeoisie, political, professional and media elites
  – Kemalism and being a “good Muslim” are compatible
  – Ataturk shared “zeal for religious purity” like the Wahhabis
    » With profoundly different outcomes
  – Religion subsumed by state

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• One party CHP rule ends in 1950
  – Democratic Party reverses some Kemalist “excesses”
  – Examples: call to prayer and dress code
• Turgut Ozal, 1980’s Motherland Party
  – Sufi background
  – Imam Hatip schools
• 1981: Military Coup
  – Resurgence of Islamists with the Refah Party
  – 1993 Ozal dies
Francesco Cavatorta: less optimistic view

• Hard power main instrument of US democracy promotion in Iraq etc.

• Civil society empowerment major instrument of EU strategy of democracy promotion in MENA

• Barcelona process, Euro-Mediterranean partnership

• Largely failed, why?
• Cavatorta: Because external actors “reinforce a domestic ‘clash of civilization’ between sectors of society with diverging and ultimately irreconcilable objectives.” EU strategies “
Democratization and Civil Society

• Civil society activism presents the greatest challenge to state authoritarianism

• Islamist parties are closer to civil society organizations than the western notion of “parties”
  – Example, Morocco, where voluntarism is a defining aspects of Islamic organizations

• Berman: definitions of civil society must not have normative traits, thus, we can’t exclude anti-democratic elements
Activism

• Competing actors are forced into cooperation under a dominant regime
  – United front such as the secular/Islamist alliance that brought down Mubarak in 2011
  – Morocco, disparate groups united over government unaccountability

• Upon disposing of authoritarian ruler, differences manifest themselves and the united front disintegrates (true in current Tunisia?)

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Activism

• Secular/Islamist alliances are short lived and superseded by competition
  – Camps are often divided over cooperation
  – Ideological beliefs and differences are strong
  – Associations and institutions involved are inveterate and goal oriented, often in very different directions
    – An Islamic charity and a Secular publication may support a similar cause but their paths will soon separate

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Ideologies

• Many Islamic groups have a final goal of an Islamic state, precluding many secular organizations
  – Pro-democracy groups are concerned about the implications of pro Sharia groups
  – Islamic groups are wary of ‘pro-European’ ideologies seen as counter to Islamic society
Tactics and Ideology

• Groups can’t know what their level of popular support will be ‘a-priori’
  – Groups cooperate because they must
  – Once they achieve independence, cooperation with a less influential co-conspirator is costly

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The Failure of Democratization

• MENA:
  – Islamic civil society
  – Divided nature
• Unwillingness to provide recourses to Islamist actors
• Islamic NGO’s are not taken seriously by outside actors
• Islamist actors have not proven their “pro-democracy” credentials

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