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Final Draft

Introduction: Tolerance in Modern Islamic Thought

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Decolonizing knowledge production and consumption is a project fraught with unforeseen challenges. The epistemological and ontological standards for recognizing 'knowledge', particularly that which may claim the supposedly vaunted status of theory, needs to be transformed quite fundamentally as part of this move. However, the precise contours of this transformation are difficult to establish in advance. For instance, even when one recognizes that the project of decolonizing political thought requires that we acknowledge Islamic political thought as providing resources for generating generalizable theoretical insights, rather than knowledge only for Muslims, it is not clear what kind of materials and sources are valid for such an intervention. Does the marked overlap of juridical and philosophical writings in many Islamic texts limit their ability to provide some general solutions to common problems? Are we degrading standards of scholarly practice in political thought by taking seriously the ideational constellations of ordinary people? It is only through a serious and critical engagement with a range of material from canonical texts to oral histories that we may begin to refine this corpus and perhaps necessarily, our methodology.

Such a move, endorsed in this special issue, comes at an exciting time to be engaging with modern Islamic thought as scholars are beginning to bring insights from anthropology, sociology and history to bear upon political theory and political thought. This stems, at least in part, from the difficulty of containing analyses of contemporary Islamic politics within strict disciplinary bounds. On the one hand, ideology and ideas have been used as a key explanatory variable in Muslim politics. On the other, the variation in practice- everyday, varied and contradictory- has generated conflicted assessments of what can be deemed Islamic. In fact, whether it is appropriate to use the term Islamic, Islamicate or Muslim here remains an area of debate. My own use of the term Islamic here needs some clarification too, particularly when included in this special issue is a reading of a thinker like Laroui who does not

foreground his Muslim identity. Similarly Yasmin Saikia's paper that focuses on the term *insāniyat* does not present it as a uniquely Islamic notion. One option in this situation would have been the term Islamicate. Marshall Hodgson's suggestion that Islamicate might be a useful term to distinguish from Islamic, where the latter is that which is explicitly religious and Islamicate is that which is linked but does not explicitly draw upon religious principles, has been immensely influential. However, despite his own attempts to move beyond a narrow Euro-centrism, this distinction rests on a notion of religion as easily identifiable, universally defined category. Accepting this definition is to accept once again the universalization of a particular European experience of 'religion' (Asad 2003), and to attribute to the religious/Islamic a narrow range of possibilities. Such a move would, in important ways, reduce the potential for imagining other modes of being and thinking by trying to continuously parse out the religious or the scriptural from the rest.

The relationship between thought and practice, that Islam seems to refuse to simplify, is all the more complicated to study in the contemporary period, given the difficulties of establishing clear connections in their messy, ongoing imbrications. This methodological and epistemological problem of engaging both thought and practice in the contemporary period has a much wider resonance in the study of ideas and political action beyond the focus on Islamic politics. This collection makes a modest contribution towards widening the methodological gate and expanding the ontological range of political theory through a serious engagement with modern Islamic political thought reflected through the prism of the concept of tolerance.

The papers collected here were first presented at a conference held at King's College London in March 2015 and with funding from the European Research Council for the project "Tolerance in Contemporary Muslim Polities: Political Theory Beyond the West". The larger project had two distinct strands. One engaged with the thought of two influential Islamic thinkers, Abul Ala Maududi and Javed Ahmed Ghamidi, while the other explored vernacular conceptualisations of co-existence among precarious groups such as refugees and migrants from the tribal areas of Pakistan into the country's urban centres. The conference brought together these two strands in multiple ways. In particular, the conference brought together political theorists and intellectual historians with sociologists and anthropologists to explore the very meaning of tolerance rather than counting its manifestations in Islamic thought and

experience. Thus, a basic impulse was to move beyond an apologetic stance to a more critical and analytical one: one that opens up the notion of tolerance at the same time as engaging with a range of Islamic thinkers, ideas and everyday practices. We did not take as given either a hermetically sealed Islamic identity, or a clear trajectory to opening political theory beyond its rather parochial Western emphasis.

Over the last three decades the contours of liberal tolerance have been refined and debated but primarily with a focus on North Atlantic contexts (e.g. Mendus 1988; Kautz 1993; Murphy 1997; Walzer 1997; Brown 2008). The question for us here, of course, is not to find something that looks like liberal tolerance in Islamic thought and practice but to work through the specific delineations that allow or support co-existence with difference. How is difference defined and understood in the different strands of Islamic thought? On what terms and in what ways is peaceful coexistence supported, if at all, in modern Islamic thought? In fact, modern Islamic thought remains curiously unexcavated in western(ized) academia for these purposes. Perhaps due to the prevalence of the notion that Islam is a medieval religion in modern times, there has been more engagement with medieval Islamic thought on these issues. In the disciplines of religious studies and Islamic studies, pre-modern Islamic thought on the topic has received significant attention (El-Fadl, 2002; Jackson 2002; Friedmann 2003; Levy-Rubin 2011; Ridgeon 2012).

In similar vein, there is a considerable body of socio-historical studies of predominantly Muslim societies that has discussed the institutionalised mechanisms of peaceful coexistence among religious communities that several Muslim empires established. Karen Barkey (2008) has, for instance, provided a very detailed analysis of the Ottoman imperial state and its deliberate inclusion of various religious groups. Like many pre-modern empires the Ottoman state was not interested in managing individuals and instead focused on ensuring peaceful arrangements across religious communities. Similarly, the Mughal rulers in India worked strategically to include advisers and state officers from a range of religious traditions and ethnic origins into the state (Gilmartin and Lawrence, 2000). We know less about the social implications of such state policies, and at the very least, we need to steer clear of romanticized notions of completely harmonious existence. However, it does appear that these state arrangements did entail lack of any sustained political and social focus on religious difference. The rulers, in both the Ottoman and Moghul empires, were not interested,

by and large, in converting or persecuting their non-Muslim subjects. This is certainly in marked contrast to European wars of religions and religious strife. The *Reconquista*, Christian control of Muslim Iberia, cemented by the victory of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, coincided with the discovery of new people and lands in Americas by Christopher Columbus, the adventurer Isabella had sponsored. The inquisition that became a mode of governance in the ensuing centuries, with its institutionalised mechanisms for recognizing and then treating religious difference and deviation, was unparalleled in the Islamic world.

All this is not to make a nativist and essentialist argument about an alleged long running presence of tolerance in Islamic thought and practice but to suggest that religious difference did not have the same political valence in medieval and early modern Islamic empires as it did in Europe. Thus, the need to theorize or philosophise about it was also inherently singular to the European experience. This changed of course, with the rise of the nation-state but with important differences across the world. In Europe, the imperial prerogative to manage religious identity of the subjects that was encoded in the treaty of Westphalia (1648) left a legacy of entwining a specific religious identity whether Protestant or Catholic, with national identity. Nation making in Europe was not entirely the secularising enterprise many assume it to be. Rather strong religious identities were built into the definition of different nation states (Crepell, 2011; Van der veer and Lehmann, 1999) and we continue to see reflections of that in contemporary debates about immigration, national identity and the European Union. In contrast anti-colonial nationalist movements in many parts of the world tried to steer clear of ascribing a single religious identity to the new nation states, even though many anti-colonial movements also used religious language and imagery to mobilise mass participation (Hourani, 2014 [1962]; Chatterjee 1986; Bayly 2004). The two states that were founded as it were against the prevalent historical tide at that time by explicitly espousing religious nationalism, Israel and Pakistan, were easily identified as the exceptions (Devji, 2013). My suggestion here is that precisely because social coexistence was relatively more widely practiced in many non-Western societies, including those that were predominantly Muslim or led by Muslim rulers, elaborate theoretical justifications for religious tolerance did not have to be constructed (Iqtidar, 2016a).

With the introduction of modern structures of statecraft and governance, Islamic thought in the modern period had to contend with a new problem, the place of non-Muslims in a Muslim/Islamic state, not as subjects but as rights bearing citizens. This new political reality has been dealt with by immense creativity by Muslim thinkers. The papers in this collection point towards not only the diversity within modern Islamic thought but also reinforce, in different ways, the view that modern Islamic political thought cannot be seen in a simplistic opposition to ‘western’ political thought. Nils Reiken, in his reading of the thought of Abdullah Laroui (1933-), insists that we look beyond the representation of Laroui as being stuck in the logic of empire and modernity that invariably places Africans/Arabs/Muslims in the position of having to catch up to Europe. He argues that Laroui brings together a differently inflected Marxist historicism with an appreciation for modes of being that may be antithetical to modern European ones. Reiken suggests that Laroui proposes a novel form of comparison that does not fall into the trap of according hierarchy to any tradition of thought. Rather than assuming a fixed relationship between the universal and the particular, Laroui proposes a form of historicism that continually historicizes the observer as well as the observed. This, of course, requires a heightened sense of self-reflexivity that would make more difficult comparisons that serve the purpose of asserting hegemony of one over the other. Reiken argues that within such a scheme of comparison, difference then, becomes hard to conceptualise as apolitical, ahistorical and absolute.

Firmly placing Islamists within the current historical context and the debates they have with their critics and with each other, Ovarmir Anjum explores the challenging question of Islamist conceptualization of the place of non-Muslim citizens in contemporary Islamic states. He focuses in particular on Yousaf al-Qaradawi (whom Anjum sees as a tradition-bound Islamist) and Fahmy Huwaydi and Tariq al-Bishri (whom Anjum classifies as a republican Islamist) to tease out the differences in their position. In doing so Anjum highlights the differently inflected strands of Islamist thinking. More critically, he argues that while Islamists seem to have embraced the (idea of) modern state, there is significant variation in their conceptions of the relationship between the state and the nation. Huwaydi, argues for Islamic norms and laws as the ‘substrate’ for the democratic, national state. Qaradawi, on the other hand, calls for a deepened engagement with *ijtihad* (creative reinterpretation of *sharia*, the

guiding principles of Islamic law) to provide new Islamic rulings and analysis of the novel ways of life open to Muslims in Islamic as well as non-Islamic states. Anjum argues that neither scholar's arguments are free of internal contradictions. His purpose, rather, is to highlight these differences within Islamist thought to approaching the question of non Muslims in an Islamic state, and to show how they are predicated on different conceptions of the state and the nation.

Islamist thought is an important and prominent part of modern Islamic thought. Much of modern Islamic thought is an engagement with the arguments of Islamists, even if in the form of its criticism and refutation. Mohammed Mojahedi in his paper continues this engagement through a critique of post-Islamist thinkers and their conceptualization of tolerance. His interest is not in arguing *for* the Islamists but to point out the limitations of the post-Islamist critique in its current form. In fact, he argues, that the very question "is there toleration in Islam?" belies assumptions that are deeply problematic. In an important move, Mojahedi argues that post-Islamist thinkers, particularly those in Iran like Abdoulkarim Saroush, promote a culturalist understanding of social and political change. They assume that theological changes will bring the social and political alterations they desire. Mojahedi argues that without engaging with the existing political structures or engaging in mass social mobilization, these post-Islamists remain limited in their impact or the force of their critique. More, critically, he points out that their version of tolerance is one that recognizes a particular response as the only valid one. It is, in his estimation, a limited monist vision of toleration, rather than a pluralistic and capacious one.

In searching for a capacious mode for engagement with difficult others, Yasmin Saikia, points towards the notion of *insāniyat* in the South Asian context. Building on oral histories and interviews with perpetrators of violence during the civil war in Pakistan that eventually led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, she argues that the notion of *insāniyat* allowed the soldiers and others a means for thinking critically about their own role. Many soldiers commented that they had lost their *insāniyat*, that which made them human, in this war. Reflecting on their actions through the prism of *insāniyat* allowed them to move past the differences of ethnicity or religion and to recognise their victims as other human beings. Saikia suggests that this notion cannot be translated simplistically as humanitarianism or humanism in large part because

unlike humanism *insāniyat* retains a god-centric approach that places human beings in a spiritual connection with each other that goes beyond national boundaries.

All four papers raise insights that are not just about the contours of Muslim life. Reiken's reading of Laroui's work engages with the possibility of new modes of comparison. Anjum highlights the ways in which different understandings of the nation, the state and their relationship can lead to disparate interpretations within a tradition of thought. Mojahedi argues for recognizing the limits of culturalist critiques in bringing about social and political changes and Saikia makes a case for taking seriously the role of repentance and self-reflexivity. Moreover, the explicit question of nation state and its difficulties with religious tolerance that all four papers engage with in different ways, requires rethinking within states as diverse as Hungary and India, USA and Nigeria. Is it possible that the idea of the nation state, whatever the political institutions in place whether liberal or not, is inherently susceptible to fostering heightened identity awareness and political strife? Further, they all take for granted an on-going conversation with a wide range of Islamic and non-Islamic thinkers. They also take as given that there is little value in approaching modern Islamic thought as either flawed replication of Western thought or an expression of some putatively pure Islamic tradition. That the Islamic tradition is capacious enough to generate and incorporate competing ideas is a source of strength rather than a limitation (Iqtidar, 2016b). Finally, the papers also raise, albeit implicitly, the question of how religious difference may be differently constituted compared to racial or ethnic difference. That is, the assumption that all kinds of difference require one mode of engagement, through some version of tolerance, may need revisiting. The fact that there is no one Islamic answer to the question of religious tolerance is then, an immensely useful starting point for opening up new modes of inquiry and questioning that take us beyond parochial European political theory, at the same time as explicitly acknowledging its contributions.

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