



Afterword: Islam, critique, canon

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How are canons changed? Whether we look at how the canon of ‘western’ political theory was shaped or the ways in which a canon of Islamic juridical texts was collated, there can be little doubt that this was always in interaction with wider political and institutional currents. No canon is static, although all come with a claim to a long lineage.

In his now classic article, *Was the gate of ijihad closed?*, Wael Hallaq (1984) has shown persuasively that from the earliest days, *ulama*, or Islamic scholars, had kept alive space for disagreement and innovation in juridical reasoning. The canon of juridical reasoning within the Islamic tradition has a capacious range of internal debates and disagreements that provide a foothold for a range of internal critiques. However, the juridical canon is only one of several in Islam. Sertac Sehlikoglu and Mashuq Kurt have mentioned in the introduction to this special issue the reading group that led to this issue. That group also engaged with Islamic philosophers like Al-Kindi, Al-Ghazali and the Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who was part of the Muslim intellectual and political context. There is then a canon of Islamic philosophy that one might consider distinct from the juridical canon. While there is an overlap, many *ulama* were also philosophers, the use of juridical texts as representing the entirety of Islamic debates in Euro-American academic study of Islam is beginning to receive some criticism (Ahmed, 2016).

Engagement with different canons within the wider tradition of Islam will provide different visions of Islam and potentially distinctive spaces of critique. Of particular interest in this special issue is the populist Islamist canon, the imaginaries it produces, and the contours of critique it generates. Moreover, there is a concern for moving beyond texts to think about how dominant ideas are canonized and also contested. In her contribution, Sertac Sehlikoglu explores the complexities of practices of critique in a movement that was closely allied with the

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ruling party until a few years ago. The Gulen movement had encouraged members to develop self-reflection and questioning as part of their vision of a good Islamic life. How might those practices of critical analysis of oneself aid in recognizing and dismantling the privileges one take for granted? The experience of the Gulenists would suggest the very uneven reach of such practices of self-reflection, as certain issues related to the state or nationalism were cordoned off from critical evaluation in its discourse until recently.

At the same time, the possibilities inherent in self-reflection to direct political and social change require serious attention. Zora Kostadinova offers a very compelling argument regarding the potential present in critical self-reflection for social transformation. She is careful to recognize that the potential needs cultivation for fuller fruition but argues convincingly for recognizing and engaging with sufi *adab*, or norms of good conduct, as sources for inculcating norms of tolerance and sociality. One canon within the wider Islamic tradition that has not received as much attention as it deserves is that of *adab* and *akhlaq* literature and norms of social interaction. Kostadinova rightly draws our attention to this important but understudied canon and its potential in helping address contemporary concerns regarding intolerance.

Opacity is an important mode of resistance and, by extension, can be a source of critique. Critique is different from criticism in terms of the more structured and detailed assessment that the former entails. Sabiha Allouche's paper provides a very helpful reminder that the rush to translate difference and make it legible curtails the possibility of critique. Her pedagogical practices in courses related to gender and Islam in a UK university invite wonder and curiosity rather than easily digested pieces of knowledge. Refusing comfortable translations and instead offering unsettling comparisons such as the rationale for violence against women by Daesh in Syria and Incels in the USA, Allouche follows Edouard Glissant in making spaces for reflection and re-assessment in her classroom.

In any case, critique is always context dependent. Ideas and practices that might have been associated with critique or resistance to domination in one situation or at one time may not remain so in other contexts. Foundational Islamist thinkers such as Abul Ala Maududi had articulated a detailed criticism of nationalism (Iqtidar, 2021). However, due to their fascination with the state as a vehicle of social transformation, later Islamists became deeply invested in the nation-state. Kamal Suleimani's contribution traces some of these changes in Iran and Turkey. Both are important sites for thinking about these dynamics as they represent countries where Islamist groups have held much power, albeit never uncontested. Islamists in both countries have ended up supporting and utilizing nationalism in profound ways. A similar dynamic of somewhat unintended consequences is at play in Mashuq Kurt's analysis of the Turkish state's attempts at curbing dissent among Kurdish communities in particular. Kurt outlines in helpful and sensitive detail the ways in which Islamic ideas are being utilized for nationalist purposes by the Turkish state, but also become resources put to decolonial purposes by anticapitalistic Muslims and Kurdish critics. This collection offers an insight into the multiple sites and modes of resistance in which Islamic ideas and practices are contested, rejected, reshaped and embraced.

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