

KİTAP TAHLİLLERİ / *BOOK REVIEWS*

Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious, Leaders, Conflict, and Peacemaking

Timothy D. Sisk, ed., (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), ISBN: 978-1-58901-782-5, 280 pages.

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The relationship between religion and conflict has attracted increasing scholarly attention recently due to, in part, the intricate nature of this relationship challenging the efforts at theorization on the subject, and in part the practical, and occasionally highly consequential, bearings it has on politics, both domestic and international. This edited volume addresses both these two facets of the relationship between religion and conflict by exploring the many roles religious leaders play in the outbreak, continuation, and cessation of conflicts in what are referred to as deeply divided societies. As highlighted in the introductory chapter by Sisk, the relationship between religion, national identity, and the state, and the causes and the consequences of the roles religious elites play in conflict situations are the two problematiques addressed in the diverse case studies of the volume.

In the first chapter, which constitutes the theoretical basis of all the proceeding case studies, David Little introduces an analysis of the relationship between state, nation, and religious tolerance, and contends that the character of the state, i.e. democratic or non-democratic, and the type of nationalism, i.e. inclusive or exclusive, inherently interact and determine the dynamics of nationalism. To Little, the main challenge facing societies deeply divided along ethnic, religious, or sectarian lines is the transformation from “illiberal nationalism” with its low levels of democracy and religious tolerance to “lib-

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eral nationalism” with its high levels of democracy and religious tolerance. Little also makes an interesting distinction between two types of intolerance: belief as a target, and belief as a warrant. Intolerance as a target occurs when someone is persecuted because of his/her belief while intolerance as a warrant occurs when someone is persecuted not because of his/her belief *per se* but because of the beliefs of those persecuting him/her.

The next chapter focuses on the Sunni-Shia divide in the Muslim world, and the mainly divisive role religious leaders play in sectarian politics in the national, regional, and global contexts. According to Nader Hashemi, religious sectarianism is interlinked with political mobilization, and yet the dynamics of the relationship change according to circumstances. In the national contexts, like Saudi Arabia, sectarianism is developed through a political alliance with the ruling elite to serve the objectives of the state. In the regional context of the Middle East, the Sunni-Shia divide is affected by the regional rivalry of states, and is also affected by the developments in the global context. Hashemi emphasizes the generally antagonistic attitudes of Muslim religious leaders toward the adherents of the other sect, which is prone to enhance the Sunni-Shia divide and is inimical to the reconciliation efforts as tensions emerge along this divide.

George Emile Irani, in the subsequent chapter, investigates the role the Vatican tried to play during the Lebanese Civil War to achieve a measure of peace in Lebanon through its links with the Maronite Christian community in the country. Irani states that considering Lebanon as a special case and a model of Christian-Muslim coexistence, the Vatican decided to interfere in the Lebanese Civil War fought between two religious communities of the country by dispatching missions and emissaries to convince Maronite leaders for more conciliatory political positions, but to no avail. The Maronite community sustained its autonomy and defied the Vatican. Nevertheless, the Vatican showed a willingness to mitigate a devastating conflict in the region.

Micheline Ishay, on the other hand, assesses the issue from a different perspective, and argues in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that there are more fundamental dynamics that shift the role of religion and religious leaders in conflicts. To Ishay, the essential reason behind the rise of religious politics in both Israel and Palestine is the economic fragmentation of both Israeli and Palestinian societies caused by the adverse transformation of their respective economies from state-control management to privatization. As a

result, Ishay argues, the Israeli and Palestinian communities frustrated by the social disparities this transformation has brought about have turned to religious and nationalist groups that would provide them with the social services they are in need of. The solution, for Ishay, to undermine the appeal of the antagonistic religious and nationalist politics is reviving credible welfare policies by “liberal and secular forces” in both Israel and Palestine.

Although not a deeply divided society, Egypt is the case wherein Scott W. Hibbard investigates the relationship between religion and conflict. However, the main subject of analysis is not interreligious conflict between the Muslim majority of the country and the Coptic minority but the fluctuating relationship between the Egyptian state and Islam in the Egyptian social and political life in the periods of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak. To Hibbard, even though during Sadat’s and Mubarak’s periods, religion gained a more prominent role in the Egyptian social and political life than it had in Nasser’s period, and it has always been considered by the Egyptian state as an instrument of state policy. The basic factor in shaping the state’s attitude toward religion, Hibbard underlines, is the political elites’ conception of the nature and the character of the Egyptian state and nation.

According to Caroly Fluehr-Lobban, although there were structural causes like post-colonial ethnic tensions, poor governance by elites serving above all else themselves, and militarism in administration that undermined or left no room for democratic political development, at the very basis of the Sudanese civil war that lasted from 1983 to 2005 was the emergence of a political-religious establishment that was of Arabic descent and Muslim. The political partner of this coalition, Lobban contends, used religion both to assume authority in Sudan and to legitimize its rule, and practically established an authoritarian political system that was exclusive and prejudicial to the non-Arab, non-Muslim minority. The religious partner, on the other hand, capitalized on state authority to implement a “strategic cultural agenda” for the purpose of transforming the social order in Sudan into a new Islamic order. To Lobban, this alliance was most visible in the implementation of Sharia law in all parts of Sudan, which was instrumental in imbuing the Sudanese society with anxiety and terror with its criminal penalties. Specifically, Lobban holds responsible a Muslim religious leader, Hassan al-Turabi, for the outbreak of the violent conflict as “the chief catalytic agent,” and claims that his unrelenting policies aimed at “Islamization” of the Sudanese culture and people are “directly responsible” for the Sudanese Civil War.

For the Nigerian Case, Rosalind I. J. Hackett presents a sound analysis and identifies “areas of accord” and “areas of disaccord” between the Muslim and Christian leaders of Nigeria whose population is nearly half-Muslim and half-Christian. In this way, Hackett implicitly argues that conflict is not inevitable in deeply divided societies, and is primarily dependent upon the attitudes and policies of religious leaders. Areas of accord are issues mainly related to social and economic development in Nigeria, such as health problems and social welfare. Areas of disaccord are of a more religious nature, such as religious balancing in the state and society between Islamic revivalists and Christian evangelicals, proselytization campaigns especially by “new Christian radicalism,” and the place of the Sharia in the Nigerian legal system. Hackett concludes by highlighting the role of media, multilateral efforts between all segments of society, “deficit of dialogue” in divided settings, and new legislation in the (mis)management of conflicts in societies divided along religious lines.

The subsequent chapter also pertains to sectarianism, which in this time is between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Mari Fitzduff first presents a detailed description of sharp divisions in society between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Her description of the solid segregation of the educational system along sectarian lines is especially informative. According to Fitzduff, the entrenched segregation is, in part, a result of “a theology of exclusion” emerged out of the social and political developments in the history of Northern Ireland. The other basic reason of this entrenchment is the fact that in cases of conflict, religious leaders in Northern Ireland have invariably faced a dilemma: if they are seen by their respective communities as too compromising or too weak, they become destined to lose followers. Accordingly, the freedom of action in situations of conflict has been severely constrained for both Catholic and Protestant leaders, and they have been compelled to become, or at least to appear, intransigent. Nonetheless, Fitzduff indicates, as the society in Northern Ireland gradually becomes more secular, the role of religion and religious leaders in the future course of the conflict becomes weakened, which seems to be a welcome outcome for Fitzduff.

Karina Korostelina, on the other hand, focuses on the civil war in Tajikistan to examine the causes and the ways religious leaders mobilize people along the lines of religious identity. Korostelina propounds an analytical model to illustrate the dynamics of social conflicts, which is comprised of four stages, that is, comparison, competition, confrontation, and counteraction. Korostelina

calls it “the four-c model.” Identification with a particular group formed on the basis of religious identity calls for comparisons between the in-group and the out-group, which in turn leads to competition with the other group, which most probably paves the way for confrontation, and of course counteraction from the other group. Notwithstanding the clarity of the model, Korostelina is rather unsuccessful in applying the model to the Tajik case as the civil war in Tajikistan was fought not between two social groups but between the Islamist groups, mainly the Islamic Renaissance Party, and the Tajik government. In addition, Korostelina explains the reconciliation between the Islamist groups and the Tajik government not with reference to the religious understandings of Islamist leaders but to their assessment of the political developments in and out of Tajikistan unfavorable to Islamists leaders.

Buddhism comes under scrutiny in Susan Hayward’s chapter. Hayward looks closely at the dynamics that galvanized Buddhist monks of Sinhala ethnic origin against the minority Hindus of Tamil ethnic origin in the civil war in Sri Lanka, and contends that the rise of “Sinhala Buddhist nationalism” was a product of both religious and political leaders. Hayward presents an interesting case where divine Buddhist monks interfered in profane politics and at times participated in elections as candidates and called for violent and virulent actions against Hindu Tamils. Even so, Hayward indicates, there were other Buddhist monks who worked for intercommunal reconciliation during the civil war, and to Hayward this attests to the fact that religion can both be a propeller of violence and peace, and religious leaders can be both “spoilers” and “reconcilers.”

Interestingly enough, the final case study of Sumit Ganguly and Praveen Swami investigating the role of religion in the conflict in Kashmir presents a strong counterargument to the main propositions of the preceding chapters. They argue that seemingly religious conflicts are not of a religious nature, and even though the conflicts erupt over religious issues religious leaders have no role in their settlement, that is, they are for the most part irrelevant to conflicts considered to be of a religious nature. In three case studies, Ganguly and Swami demonstrate that conflicts in Kashmir that erupted over religious issues developed mostly independent of religious leaders’ interference, and were completely resolved without their participation. In the words of Ganguly and Swami, this case study “constitutes an important outlier” in this edited volume.

Still interestingly enough, in the concluding chapter, Sisk sums up the preceding studies with the quite unexpected conclusion that “religious elites are more likely to reflect social forces than to shape them.” To Sisk, the case studies provide ample evidence that in cases of prohibitive political, economic, and social conditions religious leaders have “very little opportunity” to advance peace.

The volume presents both theoretical and practical studies cutting across many regions and religions, which examine the roles religious leaders play in the outbreak, continuation, and cessation of conflicts in divided societies. However, it also presents some shortcomings. First, although all the authors set out to explore the role of religion and religious leaders in conflicts, in all the case studies religion is always intertwined with politics, and religious leaders are always politicized. In some cases, they align with politicians, in other cases they are politicians. Hence, all the authors end up exploring the role of politics and political leaders in conflicts in their respective case studies. It appears spontaneously that in situations of conflict in divided societies the role religion and religious leaders play always interacts, and is usually dependent on politics and political leaders.

Second, the volume’s exclusive focus on the effects of religion and religious leaders on conflicts with total disregard of the effects of conflicts on religion and religious leaders overshadows the dialectical relationship between religion and conflict, and makes the contribution of the volume to the study of the relationship between religion and conflict at least partial. Religion and religious leaders are in fact affected and shaped by conflicts as affirmed by Sisk in a footnote. Exploring this dimension of the relationship is equally important to understand its dynamics, to settle conflicts more easily, and to promote a more sustainable peace in deeply divided societies.

These quite important shortcomings notwithstanding, this volume is an important contribution to the study of the intricate and sometimes perplexing relationship between religion and conflict.