Political Ideology in the Arab World

Arab nationalism and Islamism have been the two most potent ideological forces in the Arab region across the twentieth century. Over the last two decades, however, an accommodation of sorts has been developing between liberals, socialists, and Islamists, to protest unpopular foreign and domestic policies, such as those aimed at cooperation with Israel or the war in Iraq. By examining the writings of Arab nationalist, socialist, and Islamist intellectuals, and through numerous interviews with political participants from different persuasions, Michaele Browers traces these developments from the “Arab age of ideology,” as it has been called, through an “age of ideological transformation,” demonstrating clearly how the recent flow of ideas from one group to another have their roots in the past. Political Ideology in the Arab World assesses the impact of ideological changes on Egypt’s Kifaya! [Enough!] movement and Yemen’s Joint Meeting Parties.

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The International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World in Leiden, the Netherlands, proved a hospitable and stimulating environment for working through some of the conceptual questions that initiated this project. The recent closure of this institute represents a great loss. The scope of the project was further sharpened through participation in a workshop at the Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting on “Cooperation across Ideological Divides: Comparative Locales within Arab Public Spheres” that was led by two outstanding scholars, Jillian Schwedler and Bassel Salloukh, and sponsored by the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. The Fulbright Middle East, North Africa, South Asia Regional Research Program; the American Institute for Maghribi Studies; the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan; and the William C. Archie Fund Grant at Wake Forest University, provided funding for research completed in Yemen, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Morocco.


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Glossary

ahl al-dhimma: protected peoples, non-Muslim subjects of Islamic governments
asala: authenticity
azma: crisis
da‘wa: calling or inviting to Islam
fiqh: Islamic jurisprudence
hadatha: modernity
ijtihad: independent reasoning, particularly in regard to interpreting religious texts
‘ilmaniyya: secularism, from ‘ilm (science); also rendered ‘almaniyya, from ‘alam (world)
jahiliyya: ignorance or barbarism; usually used in reference to the pre-Islamic era, though in modern times it has come to be used in reference to individuals, systems and societies not following Islam; also known as the “age of ignorance”
kafir, plural kuffar: unbeliever, one who rejects Islam
khuruj: literally, coming out or rising; Zaydi principle of rising up against an unjust ruler
kifaya: enough; slogan of and nickname for the Egyptian Movement for Change
mu‘asira: contemporaneity
muwatin: citizen
Nahda: awakening or renaissance; name given to the period of intellectual creativity and reform from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries; often seen as the Arab and Islamic counterpart to the European Enlightenment
qawmiyya: nationalism, usually referring to pan-Arab nationalism, as opposed to wataniyya
salafiyya: movement claiming to follow in the way of the righteous ancestors (salaf); used to describe traditionalist and puritanical Islamic movements in various parts of the world
Glossary

shari‘a: body of Islamic law; literally, the way or path
shura: consultation, used by some Islamic thinkers as a synonym for democracy
turath: heritage
umma: community
wasatiyya: an intellectual trend characterized or claiming characterization as centrist or moderate (wasti), or said to occupy the middle (wasat) between extremist alternatives
watan: homeland, nation
wataniyya: nationalism, usually referring to state-based nationalism, as opposed to qawmiyya