BOOK REVIEW

Sufism, Pluralism and Democracy, edited by Bennett, Clinton, and Sarwar Alam. Equinox, 2017. 247+xiii pp., Pb., \$29.95 ISBN 978-17-81-79221-6

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Sufism, Pluralism and Democracy depicts Sufism as a driving force within Islam, shaping Muslim societies that respect religious pluralism. These Sufi-influenced, Islamic, pluralistic societies are comparable to Western liberal democracies. By way of consequence, Islam is compatible with democracy and Sufism might be the needed ingredient for Muslim societies to flourish as democratic states. Clinton Bennett, one of the editors of the book, writes in the Introduction: “democracy cannot function without choice, thus pluralism is a necessary foundation. This is why pluralism is one of this book’s main foci, and a major consideration for measuring the status of democracy globally” (9). However, Bennett quickly continues, “there is no assumption that democracy in a Muslim-majority state must adopt Western-style secularism” (9). Because democracy is not monolithic, Muslim societies must develop versions of democracy based on Islamic ideals.

The book consists of five sections. The first section has one chapter that traces the relation between Sufi figures and politics in Muslim majority countries. Clinton Bennett, the author of this chapter, argues that the relationship between Sufism and politics is promising. If Sufism’s values can be projected into the political sphere, then the result might enhance democracy and challenge authoritarian regimes (25–26). To support his thesis, Bennett cites *The Economist’s* Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2015. His analysis notes the involvement of Sufi-affiliated parties in several Muslim-majority countries that rank higher in human development relative to other Muslim majority countries.

Section Two consists of two chapters covering Turkey and Kosovo/Albania. Chapter Two describes the Hizmet movement of Fethullah Gülen as a Sufi movement. It argues that the Sufi spirit led to their outstanding success. The following chapter discusses the role of the Bektashi Sufi order in Albanian politics, primarily by analysing the influential writings of Baba Rexheb, a prominent Bektashi figure.

Section Three consists of one chapter. Using the case of Javad Nurbakhsh, a prominent Sufi leader of the Nimatullahi Khaniqahi order, Milad Milani explores the inevitable tensions that arise between

political activity and religious teaching. Milani uses Bourdieu's social theory to explain Nurbakhsh's re-interpretation of Islam in relation to the Western democratic context.

Three chapters comprise Section Four. In Chapter Five, Charles Ramsey examines the Deobandis' opposition to Sufi practices in Pakistan. At the same time, he shows that the Deobandis are not a homogenous group. Despite their reformist inclinations, many Deobandis are still attached to Sufi beliefs and practices. Ramsey suggests that, since the Deobandi play a role in supporting Pakistan's constitutional democracy, their political participation should be encouraged. Chapter Six compares Bangladesh and Indonesia, examining how Sufi values have shaped the pluralistic culture in both regions. In both contexts, Islam boosts the development of democracy. In the last chapter of this section, Sarwar Alam argues that East Pakistan, which is now Bangladesh, is developing a different interpretation of Islam than Pakistan. To support his argument, he analyses the writings of a prominent Bangladeshi Sufi, which promote a more inclusive, universal, and transcendental version of Islam that differs from the exclusivist one dominant in Pakistan.

There are two chapters in the last section. Unlike previous chapters, neither is bound by a specific context. Each chapter provides an analysis of Sufi teaching and literature as a way to probe the intellectual tradition. Chapter Eight describes two Punjabi Sufi poets whose works could promote contemporary values such as human wholeness, religious pluralism, and gender justice. The following chapter explores the notion of religious pluralism developed by two great Sufi figures, Ibn Arabī and Rūmī. By having this chapter at the end, the book concludes optimistically. Overall, Sufism is presented as an Islamic option fully capable of guiding society towards pluralistic, democratic ideals.

Readers who doubt Islam's compatibility with democracy might find this book illuminating. Those who are interested in Islam and politics will certainly find it useful for its important historical overviews of several Muslim majority countries. One of the strengths of the book is its compelling analysis of Sufism as an intellectual, social, and political tradition—several authors deeply engage the writings of Sufi figures whose influence within their respective context is indispensable.

One problematic issue is that "Sufism" is never precisely defined. Moreover, there is an enduring Western interpretation of Sufism as a separate tradition within Islam. Bennett states this clearly at the beginning of the book: "certainly, Sufism focuses on the inner experience of faith rather than on its external and legalistic aspects"

(1). This assumption divorces Sufism from other components of Islamic tradition such as jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*). Although it grew mainly as a mystical tradition, Sufism nevertheless encompasses denominational groups and insinuates itself into other aspects of the Islamic tradition. Sufism exists within Sunni and Shi'a tradition, and not as a separate denomination. Many Sufis are prominent theologians, philosophers, and jurists. For instance, the biggest Muslim organization in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (see Chapter Six), is famous for its three principles of *akidah* (theology), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and *tasawuf* (mystical path). Despite these minor drawbacks, *Sufism, Pluralism and Democracy* makes an important contribution to our understanding of Islam's political potential.