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R E P O R T

**Fontäne Contribution:
Civil Islam
AND Europe**

BY ARHAN KARDAS

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FONTÄNE CONTRIBUTION: CIVIL ISLAM AND EUROPE

All Abrahamic religions first established themselves as civil engagement and developed over time either merely civilly or civilly and politically. The length of time Judaism, Christianity and Islam required to establish themselves differed. Judaism needed only one generation in order to establish itself in Jerusalem under the leadership of Joshua. Christianity, a civil religion, only became politicized 300 years after its creation. Islam, on the other hand, could establish itself within 23 years as a civil and political entity in Medina. From this perspective, one could speak equally about political Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The fundamental question is whether in principle the religions aimed to build an apparatus of state or to design a society or rather a community. Are they in their essence political, or do they have the potential for politicization? Are they communities of values or rather state ideologies? We cannot fully answer these religious-sociological questions in a short article. The designation political Islam is used for certain Islamic tendencies which attempt to resolve the problems of Muslims within the boundaries of lawful politics.¹ Starting from the term

“political Islam,” in this article we want to attempt to portray another Islam, namely civil Islam.

“Civil Islam” is not a common term in our society.² I use the term civil Islam not only in contraposition to the expression “state Islam”, but also to the common term “political Islam.”³ In a departure from these terms, “civil Islam” (Arab. *el-islam el-medenī*) means a values and contract-based manifestation of the Islamic religion whose principles and objectives were represented socially first in Medina between 622 and 661. In contrast to the pre-Islamic name of the city of Yathrib (Arab. place of rebuke and vilification), the Prophet changed the city’s name to “Medina” (Arab. place of justice) and emphasized therefore the literal meaning of the concept of the primacy of the law and justice.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The values of civil Islam could no longer gain acceptance in the administrative machinery after the uprising of Medina against the first Umayyad King Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiyah, the battle of al-Harrah and the subsequent three-day plundering of the city

¹ Ali Bulaç, “Ein zeitgemäßer Erneuerer in der Tradition der Ulema: Der Intellektuelle Alim Fethullah Gülen”, in *Unsere Mitbürger, Muslime in der Postmoderne*, eds. Robert Hunt and Yüksel Aslandogan, 108-146. See page 114.

² As far as I am aware, this description appeared for the first time in an article by the Muslim intellectual Ali Bulaç, in which he discusses the position of the Gülen movement with regard to the role of its founder, Fethullah Gülen: Bulaç, 108-146.

³ The main features of civil Islam originated with the renowned theologian and jurist Abu Hanifa (699-767), who differentiated clearly between the political dispute and the theological justifications: “He said, fight the rebels because they are rebels and not because they are non-believers, and be with the righteous and just side” (Abu Hanifa, En-Numan, *el-fiqh-el-ewsat*, p. 131).

in 683. Since then, the sultanate (then called “Hiraqlīa”)⁴ was a regime in which the administration of public concerns was no longer decided through consultation with the

The Islam of Medina—in other words, civil Islam—placed great value on democracy-like participation in decision-making processes. In this, it made use of certain Quranic principles such as the oath of fealty (bey‘a) and consultation (schūrā) and attempted to establish a consensus among the population on the formation of the government.

people, but rather by powerful dynasties. It subsequently led to a politicization of the Islamic religion, which repressed civil Islam in Arab-speaking areas over the span of a thousand years. The Islam of Medina—in other words, civil Islam—placed great value on democracy-like participation in decision-making processes. In this, it made use of certain Quranic principles such as the oath

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POLITICS IS NEITHER A PART OF FAITH NOR OF ISLAM

The Islam of Medina differed significantly from the Islam of Damascus, the capital of the Umayyad dynasty, from Kufa, later the capital of political Shia Islam, and from Al-Hijr, the meeting place of the Khawarij near modern-day Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Khawarij groups from Najd and Al-Hijr, who advocated a type of anarchism and punished grave sinners as apostates with death, stood opposed to the Shiites from Kufa, who saw Hussein as the sole heir to the Prophet, due to the political office of the caliphate, and consequently understood state policy to be an integral part of the Islamic faith. Medina represented in this discourse the „voice of reason“; it was a values-based community for whom politics was not an essential prerequisite of faith or Islam. Moreover, the Islam of Medina preferred the leader of the community to be selected in accordance with the principle of choice. Thus, civil Islam is not indifferent to politics and does

⁴ This designation is from Abdul-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr, the first son of the first caliph, who used it vis-à-vis the messenger of Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, when he demanded the oath of fealty to his son, Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiyah, from the notables of Medina. The then-governor of Medina, Marwan ibn al-Hakam, said that Mu‘āwiyah had chosen his son as his legitimate successor for the community. Abdul-Rahman countered: “Oh God, you lie Marwan! And Mu‘āwiyah lies too. Neither of you wanted the best choice for Muhammad’s community. On the contrary, you wanted to turn the government into a *Herakleiosismus*. Whenever a Heraclius dies, another Heraclius comes and governs” (Ibn el-Ethir, Vol. 3, p. 507). Abdul-Rahman was referring to the ruler of the Middle Byzantine Empire, Heraclius, his son Constantine and his grandson Constans II, as well as the dynasty he founded. He compared Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān’s intention with that of the Byzantine regime and found it incorrect, from an Islamic point of view. Although the Umayyad rulers called themselves caliphs, to this day representatives of civil Islam see nothing but a thin disguise for the terms “sultan” or “king”. Thus, adherence to the principles of civil Islam ended with the murder of the fourth caliph Ali and the six-month reign of his *chosen* son Hassan ibn Ali.

not aim to seize political power. It merely endeavors to create with its values an ethical framework, among other things, for humane politics.

RELOCATION OF CIVIL ISLAM FROM MEDINA TO KUFA AND FURTHER TO CENTRALASIA

Following the assassination of the third Calif of the Prophet Muhammad, Uthman (d. 656), his successor Ali ibn Ebi Talib (d. 661) moved to Kufa for six years, where he sought to implement the values of civil Islam with the support of the scholar Abdullah ibn Abbas (d. 688) and prior to that of Abdullah ibn Masud (d. 652). However, he could not long resist the politicization of Islam by the Shiites and the Umayyads. His community had to flee without political leadership first to Kurdistan and then later to Persia and finally to Transoxiana. Due to the limited influence of the Abbasids from Baghdad and the Umayyads from Damascus, civil Islam could establish itself in Bukhara, Samarkand, Fergana, Balkh and neighboring cities, as well as in Khorasan. The Samanids (819–1005) and Ghaznavids (977–1186), as well as the Karakhanids (960–1213) and later the Seljuks (1040–1308) were shaped by this understanding of Islam. In contrast to the Arabs, the Turks and the Persians had an established political system, which is why they took on Islam primarily as a doctrine and religion and not as a political view. In the nineteenth

century, the doctrine was developed that Islam was a concept of state as well as a religion. On the other hand, others highlighted the universal spirit of Islam.

REPRESENTATIVES AND THOSE WHO SUBSTANTIVELY SHAPED CIVIL ISLAM, ACCORDING TO THEIR SCIENTIFIC FIELD

Civil Islam was primarily developed theologically and normatively by Hasan al-Basri (d. 728) Abu Hanife (d. 767), Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 778), and Kadi Abu Yusuf (d. 798) in Kufa and Basra, and later through the theology of Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 944) and the Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) of Hakim el-Schehid (d. 945) and Muhammad al-Sarakhsi (d. 1090). In addition, it was enriched by the theology, philosophy, and Islamic jurisprudence of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (Al-Ghasel) (d. 1111) and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209) in Khorasan und Transoxiana.

In ethics, civil Islam followed the descendants of the house of the Prophet (*ehl-elbeyt*) and was represented by Bayazid Bastami (d. 878), Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 909), Ebul Hasen el-Kharaqanī (d. 1033), Yusuf Hamadani (d. 1140), Abu Sa‘īd Abul-Khayr (d. 1049), and Ahmet Yesevi (d. 1166), and later in Anatolia by Mevlana Celaledin Rumi (d. 1273) und Yunus Emre (d. 1321), as well as Hacı Bektasi Veli (d. 1271) und in Transoxiana by Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari (d. 1389).

In the field of Hadith sciences, Hadith collectors from Khorasan and Transoxiana such as al-Bukhari (d. 870), Muslim (d. 875), al-Tirmidhi (d. 892), Abu Dawud (d. 888), El-Nese'ī (d. 915), and Ibn Majah (d. 887) are counted as representatives of civil Islam.

In the field of philosophy and natural sciences, important representatives are: el-Kharizmī (Algorismi) (d. 835), Ahmad al-Farghani (d. 860), the three sons of Musa (Ja'far, Ahmed und el-Hasan, died in the ninth century), Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi (Razes) (d. 925), Abu Reyhan al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), and Muhammad Al-Farabi ibn Tarhan (Al-Farabi) (d. 950), as well as Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna) (d. 1037).

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All of the above-named persons are without exception of Central Asian (Turkish-Persian) origin. The ninth and tenth centuries saw an Islamic renaissance

or enlightenment in all scientific fields and societal institutions, which lasted regardless of political clashes into the fourteenth century.⁵

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES: CIVIL ISLAM VS. POLITICAL ISLAM

1. The goal and purpose of civil Islam is the perfection of man, so that he achieves proximity to God. Political Islam puts the state and governance in the foreground.
2. For civil Islam, the Quran is an instruction for life. But for political Islam, it is a state constitution.
3. Civil Islam concerns itself with the shaping of mentally and spiritually mature personalities. Political Islam concerns itself with the symbols of Islam and Islam's public presence.
4. Civil Islam understands the *umma* (community of believers) as encompassing (inclusive) and dynamic. Political Islam on the other hand sees the *umma* as exclusionary (exclusive) and static.
5. Civil Islam favors *absolute justice* in society. The right of the individual may not be sacrificed for the benefit of society. Political Islam stresses *relative justice*, which for the most part allows the hegemony of the majority. It is legitimized through the *principle of the lesser of two evils*.

⁵ See Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment, Central Arabia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane* (Princeton, 2013). See *Dramatis Personae* and the substance of this book.

6. Civil Islam views this world as the house of service (*dar-ul-hidme*) and the hereafter as the house of reward (*dar-ul-udjra*). Civil Islam does not recognize any territorial divisions of the world when it comes to the service of humanity. Political Islam, on the other hand, divides the world into two camps: the house of peace (*darul-islam*) and the house of war (*dar-ul-harb*), which leads to a continuous fight between these two poles.

7. Civil Islam focuses on positive or constructive action. It aims to revive the body, spirit and heart of man. For civil Islam, the following principle of the Quran is the center of attention: “Whoever saves one, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely” (Sure El-Maide, 5:32). In contrast, political Islam is mainly focused on power and force, which it justifies either with self-defense or with conversion of non-Muslims.

8. Civil Islam defines God, prophet and man in accordance with their attributes. Therefore God is the one who fulfils the characteristics of divinity, and the prophets are the ones who fulfil the characteristics of prophethood. It is the same with Muslims. Being a Muslim is an attribute-derived identity. When a Muslim exhibits the characteristics of a non-believer, it indicates deficits in his identity. In the same way, a non-Muslim can exhibit certain character traits that are favored by Islam, although he

does not see himself as a Muslim. Instead of religious convictions, appropriate characteristics are decisive.⁶

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9. The modernization of the Islamic religion was almost entirely initiated by civil actors in the Muslim community such as Hasen al-Basri, Abu Hanifa, Muhammed Idris el-Schafii, Ahmed Yesewi, Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, al-Ghazali, Imam al-Suyuti (died 1505), Imam Rabbani (died 1624), or Mevlana Khalid al-Baghdadi (died 1827). With the exception of Umar ibn Abdulaziz (died 720) und Muhammed ibn Abdullah el-Mehdi (died 785), there is no political representative among the modernizers. The scholarly tradition is really an answer to the politicization of religion.

⁶ See Arhan Kardas, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=es19BKNi7MI>.

10. Civil Islam is interested in doctrine, Islamic theory of social conduct and ethics. Political Islam on the other hand occupies itself especially with Islamic jurisprudence and endeavors to ensure its practical application in its classic form under public law.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CIVIL ISLAM IN EUROPE

This kind of European Islam has certain basic conditions, which I would briefly like to list:

1. European religious experiences must not be carried over into Islam. Considering Islam as a church is a product of this projection.
2. Distorted views of Islam should be reformed and returned to the fundamental principles of the original Islam of the Prophet and his community.
3. Individual Muslims should be empowered and the basic conditions created to enable European Muslim individuals to flourish.
4. The constructive and dialogical highlights of Islamic history should be emphasized in the formation of Muslim identity. Rather than the political Islam narrative, the civilizing-cultural history of Islam should be placed in the forefront, whereby the focus should lie on the Anatolian humanism of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, whose representatives Mevlana, Yunus und Haji Bektash Wali. The high culture of Andalusia must be established as a part of the Islamic identity.
5. The culture of the *Khilaf* in the Islamic tradition should be resurrected and placed alongside the critical thinking of the Enlightenment.
6. An alliance of religion and science must not be categorically dismissed. A Quranic enlightenment through use of the Quran's reason is possible. A practical realization of Quranic reason would be the establishment of an Islamic theology in which natural sciences and the humanities are also taught.
7. Democratic approaches and socially responsible engagement should be promoted! "New Europeans," in other words Europeans with a migration history or background, whether they originate from Turkey or Iran, from Pakistan or Morocco, or from Silesia or the Sudetenland, should be seen as a win and an enrichment. To make a comparison: attention should not be paid to the "hardware," but rather in first instance the "software". People who were born and raised here operate in accordance with German "software".
8. Nowadays neither the mosques nor the churches are a daily reality. Everyday

life happens in the schools. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate Islam in the educational system. Germany has meanwhile introduced Islamic denominational education in school, as well as Islamic studies as a regular school subject.

9. An empathetic dialogue, perhaps in the framework of scriptural reasoning or a scriptural-intellectual summer school, is needed. Inter- and intra-religious dialogue will shape European Islam. The goal is a culture in which also the secular is esteemed and respected. Tolerance is not enough; harmony should be created.
10. A language of Islam should be developed that takes account of regional sensibilities as well as the substance of Islamic terms. In so doing, each concept that has been incorporated through orientalism into the language should be reconsidered.
11. The religious-historical legitimization of constitutional values as a *conditio sine qua non* of society should be established through education! Human dignity, equality before and through the law, freedom of religion or belief, and all fundamental rights and freedoms should be taught properly from childhood. In this, it is imperative to stress the independence of religion from state authorities, the separation of church and state, and the importance of

order and security. Democracy, rule of law, separation of powers, minority rights and women's rights must be taught as of childhood!

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