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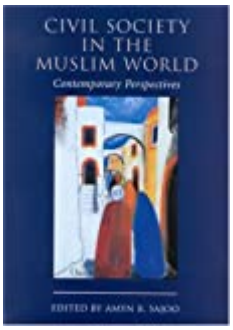

Amyn B. Sajoo, ed. *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives.* London: I. B. Tauris, 2002. xix + 339 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-86064-858-8.

Reviewed by Dawn Chatty (Refugee Studies Centre, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford)

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Reconsidering the

Reconsidering the "Civil" in Muslim Society

This volume is the result of a year-long project which found closure in a series of seminars on civil society hosted by the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. Although it explores the now decades-old debate about whether civil society exists in the Muslim world, it also raises issues which extend far beyond the Near and Middle East, Central Asia, Eastern and Western Africa, and Southeast Asia. This is a useful guide to the debate about the origins and philosophical antecedents of civil society, and explores a number of discourses about Muslim society in specific communities. The volume consists of eleven chapters which include a solid introduction outlining the general themes raised in the book. Contrary to much Western polemical positioning with regards to the lack of civil society in Muslim cultures, the volume explores the deep civic sensibility which has pervaded the history of most Muslim civilizations. The persistence and relevance of ethical concerns in Muslim society is developed in several chapters and is viewed as a cornerstone for the potential development of mature citizenship. One significant aim of the volume is to challenge the deterministic logic which compels some Western analysts to regard civil society and civic culture as peculiarly Western-based.

The contents of the chapters range from overview discussions of civil society in Islamic contexts to the specifics of civil society debate in particular regions or countries. The contents include discussions involving gender in post-revolutionary Iran, sociological perspectives on civic culture in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, reflections on civil society in the Maghreb, and examinations of civil society in Pakistan, Turkey, Tajikistan, and Central Asia in general.

What is particularly valuable about this volume is the way in which it overcomes the general tendency to focus on the Arab Middle East when engaged in discussions as to whether there is or is not a model of "civil society" in the Muslim world. As the editor points out, there are nearly 1.2 billion Muslims in the world today, and the majority inhabit the four South-Asian countries of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Hence, what is often perceived as the "Islamic heartland" in the Arabian Peninsula represents, in fact, only a small minority

of the world's Muslims. Even when the term Middle East is conceived more broadly, the largest concentration of Muslims is then in Iran and in Turkey, rather than in the "Arab" world. What the editor and contributors to the volume clearly show is the complexity of Islam in its various forms and practices, and, as such, its challenge to the essentialism which marks the works of Ernest Gellner, Samuel Huntington, and other like-minded authors.

Furthermore, the volume challenges the modern concept and praxis of civil society as springing forth wholly formed in eighteenth-century Europe and North America. What the volume reveals is substantial evidence of civic institutional and cultural elements in Muslim societies, even if the development of civil society as understood today has lagged behind. Building on the work by Marshall Hodgson, Ellis Goldberg, and Masoud Kamali, the volume editor turns to Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson for a contemporary definition of "civic Islam" qua non-state-controlled citizen action that is directly germane to modern civil society, the emerging public sphere. A number of the volume chapters contribute to these complex definitional concepts. Some of these include the very specific civic antecedents spelled out in Abdou Filali-Ansary's chapter on the Maghreb. Ziba Mir-Hosseini explores the public sphere in Iran in the context of gender and press freedom. Shirin Aknir explores the post-Soviet Tajikistan where the legacy of indigenous Sufi-oriented Muslim traditions has been pushed aside, but where the ethos of self-help has been boosted by the external support from the Aga Khan Development Network. Olivier Roy in Central Asia expresses concern over the creation of formal, Western-type associations favored by international aid agencies while indigenous civic institutions are often ignored.

The volume does not put forward a single particular perspective on what the salient features of civil society in the Muslim world might be. Instead it raises the issues, delivers the debates, and shows the limits of particular formats as well as the provisionality of the conclusions that can be reached in a too-rapidly changing universe. The concept and praxis of civil society can be applied to Islam and the Muslim world, even if with a significant degree of slipperiness. What this volume shows is the extent of the energetic discussions about civil society which echo in halls, salons, and conferences in Tehran, Sarajevo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, Algiers, Singapore, and Lagos. These discussions in themselves can be seen as contributing vitally to fostering the associational life and intellectual autonomy of modern civic culture. I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in contemporary civil society discourses in the West and in Muslim societies.