

representations and explanations of heterogeneous standpoints on sartorial practices and their manifestation and expression through arts and fine arts is the theme of third chapter, 'Veiling through Arts'. Hijab poetry and other artistic representations of the veil/veiling practices that are discussed in this chapter makes particularly interesting reading and also further testify the existence of diverse viewpoints about veiling.

Overall, this book is a handy and robust account of the veil, and provides an objective understanding of the practice of veiling among Muslims. It enlightens the reader on a much-mystified subject, corrects misinformation about it, and can be a guide and primer to readers who are uninformed about the significance of the veil in the Muslim societies. Against the background of present global political developments that is characterized by exacerbated obsession with veiling practices (among other things) among Muslim women, this book justifies itself as a necessary read for gaining a deeper understanding of the topic.

Recalling the caliphate: Decolonisation and world order. By S. Sayyid. London: Hurst & Company, 2014, pp. 236, ISBN: 978-1-84904-5346 (Kindle Edition).

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The debate on the caliphate, from Bernard Lewis to Bill O'Reilly, is rarely intelligent or innovative. Many books on the caliphate endorse conspiracies and espouse clichés. It is relieving, thus, to be reviewing a book that is both intelligent and innovative. *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonisation and World Order* is S. Sayyid's reconceptualization of the caliphate and of Muslim identity.

When people talk about the caliphate, they talk about Islam. When they talk about Islam, they are talking about *an entity*. This entity is one in number, limited in its properties. This is what people thought until some realised that Islam in Malaysia is not like Islam in Saudi Arabia, and that Islam in the bedroom is not like Islam in the classroom. These people then said that Islam was many in number, unlimited in properties.

In response to these identity polygamists, the identity monogamists have pointed out that if Islam was many, then Islam was no more. In light of this ongoing debate, Sayyid gives a unique solution to the problem of having an anti-essentialist conception of Islam without dissolving Islam in a nitric acid plurality. Islam, he argues, is one entity that contains all the different expressions of Islam in it (p. 8). For Muslims, Islam “functions as a quilting point: a name that unifies a discursive formation” (p. 149). Now that we know what Islam is, we can start talking about the caliphate. But before we do so, we need to sweep the floor and address some pertaining issues.

The caliphate is a metaphor for Muslim struggle against colonisation (p. 15). The first step in this struggle is a “clearing of the ground,” a critique of the ideological shackles used to prevent Muslims from forming their own identity (p. 10). In response to the Neo-Con *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, some people advocate a Dialogue of Civilizations. This dialogue, Sayyid says, reflects liberal hegemony (p. 19); it is unable to show the intrinsic link between liberalism and imperialism (p. 25); it cannot criticise the West (p. 27); it embraces an uncritical cosmopolitanism (p. 29). Having swept up liberalism, Sayyid turns to secularism.

Secularists give three arguments to justify their faith: secularism nurtures science, while religion nullifies science. Secularism brings peace, while religion breaks peace. Secularism fosters democracy, while religion fractures democracy. These arguments, Sayyid says, take the history of Western countries and make it the history of *all* countries (p. 35). This is like seeing a bunch of red dots in a painting by Georges Seurat, then believing the whole painting to be red dots. What happened to Bruno did not happen to Al-Bīrūnī. Which Muslim ruler ever had Stalin’s blood lust? The Arab Spring was a revolt *against* secular corruption. The arguments for secularism are “ethnocentric” (p. 38).

“[A]n anti-essentialist analytic,” Sayyid writes, “is being married to an affirmation of the universalism of the Western project” (p. 52). Those who criticise Islam for being essentialist depend on an essentialist view of the West (p. 55). Anti-essentialism that doesn’t criticise the provincialism of universalism is incoherent (p. 60). Sayyid’s position is open to the criticism, like that levelled by Aziz Al-Azmeh in *Islam and Modernities* (2009, p. 97), that he is using Western categories to affirm

the paucity of Western categories (p. 50). In reply, we need only read what Jacques-Alain Miller wrote about Ricardo Piglia's comments on Chekhov.

Recalling the Caliphate explores *Dune* (chapter 6), and investigates why Saddam added the *takbir* to the Iraqi flag (chapter 9). It discusses democracy and diaspora (chapter 5 & 7).

What is the caliphate? Sayyid gives us five answers. He prefers the fifth answer: the caliphate is a "great power" (p. 121). He explores this proposal and finds that even if Muslims try to build a caliphate, they will not be able to do so due to international pressure (p. 130). Out of the five answers he has given, Sayyid neglects to mention another more fruitful answer. The caliphate is a Utopia in Oscar Wilde's sense. It is the benchmark for society that Muslims can never reach, but are forever trying to reach. The impossibility of actualising a Utopia doesn't invalidate its function. No society will be murder-free, but that does not stop us from trying our best to make a murder-free society. Muslim scholars criticised their governments who went by the name of a caliphate for not being a caliphate. 'Umar b. Abdel-'Aziz was seen as the only proper caliph from the Umayyad Dynasty. This shows that what is important is not establishing a caliphate in the contemporary world, but in improving Muslim societies and lessening the gap between the real and the ideal.

"Recalling the caliphate," Sayyid writes, "is the name for a hegemonic project that seeks to decolonise the *ummah*...[it] promises the possibility of a rejection of eurocentrism" (p. 188). The caliphate as a decolonisation project overturns the cartoon narrative of savages stampeding Europe. This cartoon narrative, unfortunately, is here to stay because of the ISIS parade that the media display with relish.

How does Sayyid's thesis hold in the face of ISIS? Is ISIS not an empirical falsification of Sayyid's thesis? Does it not show the logical outcome of pursuing the caliphate? Despite these questions making little sense, they are asked whenever a Muslim tries to talk about the caliphate in a nuanced manner (the discussion of the theoretical framework of the caliphate is not a lab experiment; the caliphate is not a syllogism). These questions assume that what ISIS signifies and what it means are self-evident. Only truisms and sightings of the Virgin Mary are self-evident. Since ISIS would deny it is a truism and would whip the Virgin Mary

for not wearing a niqab, what it signifies and what it means is not self-evident. Whatever significances and meanings we attach to ISIS need to be argued for.

Recalling the Caliphate contains a few blemishes. Sayyid uses the term ‘Muslimistan’ to refer to Muslims. This neologism sounds uncomfortably like Melanie Phillip’s racist book *Londonistan*. He says that Christianity’s antagonism towards science is due to the adoption of the Chalcedonian conception of the Incarnation (p. 35-6). The antagonism, in fact, was due to the belief that the Bible was God’s word. Robert Fitzroy appealed to the Bible, not to the Incarnation.

Sayyid shows that the caliphate is not a dystopia, but a hope for a world that celebrates plurality and eschews the monotony of Western hegemony. He also shows that the caliphate is not Angra Mainyu, a destructive spirit, despite what some might say.