This book is a collection of papers that provides an analysis of Islam in the modern world utilizing the concept of public sphere by Jürgen Habermas and others, as well as the concept of the common good. Contributors are from the fields of anthropology, history, Islamic studies, and Arabic literature, and they write about the practice of Islam in indigenously Arab countries, as well as Turkey, India, and West Africa. The editors seem to aim at an interdisciplinary approach in their emphasis on these concepts, drawing from the area-based knowledge of the contributors. However, it appears that maintaining the rigid conceptualization of the public sphere proved to be unnecessary. Rather, the editors sought to examine Islam’s role in myriad aspects of this public sphere, including such diverse issues as modes of communication, actors in the public sphere, and forces that attempt to impede the contribution of the public sphere. Thus, the contributors do not always share the same perspectives, but that brings this collection a dynamic that has produced remarkably-nuanced, paradoxical discussions.

In the Preface, the editors, Dale F. Eickelman, an anthropologist, and Armando Salvatore, a scholar of Islamic studies, point out important aspects of the public sphere. This concept refers to the phenomenon which dictates that people who are not religious specialists (such as laborers, mothers, and students) as well as religious specialists like ‘ulamas, are enabled to discuss religious or political matters. The rising level of education, the development of transportation, and the huge growth in the media’s presence could be the seed that brought on this discursive space. Therefore, actors, communication and its modes, and education are all aspects of society that can be put to good use in discussing the public sphere.

Part One, entitled “The Public Sphere and Religion in Contemporary Societies,” conceptualizes the idea of the public sphere and applies it to Muslim societies. Chapter One, entitled “Muslim Publics” (by the editors) describes the Habermasian public sphere as “an intermediate space in which ideas are presented” (p.6). The editors basically support such ideas, but they also integrate the concept of “public” by John Dewey in which intermediate institutions or
authorities are also considered to be of value. They de-emphasize the Habermasian idea in which discursive space is independent of power. Rather, they try to make the idea of the public sphere more suitable for use in historical contexts.

Chapter Two "Secrecy and Publicity in the South Asian Public Arena," is by Peter van der Veer, a scholar of anthropology and comparative religion. He puts forth the idea that the public sphere on the Indian subcontinent is deeply rooted in Muslim and Hindu modern educational and medical activities which were responses to Christian influence of the British colonial government and missionaries. The consequent developments of Islam and Hindu differ greatly. For the Muslims for example, Tablighi Jamā'āt regards preaching in face-to-face situations more important than the transmission of knowledge and images by media. In contrast, Vishva Hindu Parishad are quite eager to utilize media to disseminate religious ideas in, for example, the religious soap opera. Here it is pointed out the varied perspectives exist, such as historicity of public sphere, public sphere generated from religious activity, or public sphere and the media.

Chapter Three "Technological Mediation and the Emergence of Transnational Muslim Publics," is by anthropologist Jon W. Anderson and scholar of Arabic literature Yves Gonzalez-Quijano. It also deals with media, mainly focusing on the Internet as it represents the public sphere that is independent of power. This particular form of the media and its discursive space are expanding globally, and is additionally highly interactive. In this space, Muslims (mainly middle class ones) discuss religious issues through a scientific as well as analytical lens that is different from "ulamas' intensely intertextual style. As a result, they develop "horizontal" ties to their religion, which circumvent the "vertical" ties to religious authority that had traditionally been their main interface in practicing their faith.

In this collection, the Islamic religion, mainly since the latter part of the twentieth century, is examined. It is not a given that the public sphere was active only during this period, though. Part Two, entitled "The Historical Emergence of Publics in the Ottoman Empire," contains two articles that explore the rise of the public sphere in the pre-modern period of Ottoman history. In Chapter Four, "Coffeehouses: Public Opinion in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," one author, Cengiz Kırıl, focuses on coffeehouses in the Istanbul of the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the nineteenth century. He describes one version of the public sphere which involves oral communication by documents which recorded voices played in coffeehouses. The documents relay the reactions of people to the transition of political environments. Here people display a great variety of
opinions about rulers, officials, and politics. As Anderson and Gonzalez-Quijano point out, with the heterogeneous quality of the narratives, Kılıç shows that people in Istanbul relate their opinion by the telling of life-stories, legends, conjectures, and rumors.

The second Ottoman article constituting Chapter Five, "Gender, Consumption, and Patriotism: The Emergence of an Ottoman Public Sphere" is by Elizabeth B. Frierson. It focuses on the period between the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a time in which contact with the West was increasing and the technology of the printing media was becoming more advanced. The author shows that discourses about Turkish citizens' identity as Ottoman subjects were disseminated by articles in female magazines about consumer products made in the Empire. Interestingly, such phenomenon was in some regards related to but relatively independent of political change. Relevant discussions about the relationship between the world of oral communication in Chapter Four and print media in Chapter Five would have been more provocative.

The book is organized so that Part One and Part Two attempt to explore the public sphere through the media or discursive spaces, and Parts Three and Four focus on actors in the public sphere. In this book, it is a point that actors are conceptualized as being from a wide range of laymen, other than religious specialists. However it is also true that religious specialists play an important role in the public sphere. 'Ulamas are the subject in Part Three, "Religious Authority and the Common Good."

'Ulamas have produced authoritative religious discourse throughout the history of Islam. Among them, however, the concept of the common good has been thought of quite differently. Chapter Six, "The 'Ulama of Contemporary Islam and Their Conceptions of the Common Good," is by Muhammad Qasim Zaman. As Islamic studies specialist, he believes that 'ulamas' discourse, whether conducted face-to-face or more indirectly, generates the public sphere. Also, the 'ulamas' common good conceived as rooted in the Arabic maṣlaḥa 'āmma, is not the same as the common good conceived as "socio-cultural project" by social scientists. In the broadest sense, maṣlaḥa 'āmma can be regarded as this social common good, but there is a big difference. With the maṣlaḥa 'āmma, one is expected to obey the principles of Islamic Law. In fact, Zaman shows that modern 'ulamas in South Asia are often reserved for the sole purpose of applying the principles of the common good to the society. He notes that they are not necessarily welcome in arenas of free-flowing, opinionated discussion, as any opposition and contradiction among 'ulamas are negatively
In Chapter Seven, "When Disputes Turn Public: Heresy, the Common Good, and the State in South India," anthropologist Brian J. Didier deals with a dispute between 'ulamas and a Sufi order in a small island of South India. At first the 'ulamas calmly advised the Sufis to abandon their own rituals. However, they began to criticize increasingly vehemently, until they actually declared the Sufis to be unbelievers. This chapter deals with the common good as did the preceding chapter. In this chapter, common good seems to refer to what is thought of as proper Islam.

Habermasian theory is often criticized for its idealization of actions such as deliberation performed in public sphere. One could question whether such actions can be realized in an actual social context. Part Four "Ambivalence in the Practice and Public Staging of Islam," considers factors which hamper the realization of the public sphere to be problematic.

Anthropologist Paulo G. Pinto in Chapter Eight, "The Limits of the Public: Sufism and the Religious Debate in Syria," considers that criticism of Sufi orders and published reactions from them actually represent the public sphere in Syria. However, he warns that such reactions should not be over-emphasized, because Sufi identity is really achieved by the emotional ties which keep disciples bound closely to their masters. Pinto points out that this factor greatly influences the mobilization of Sufi orders. They have a passionate reaction when they are able to trace themselves genealogically to their masters, but they do not seem to be at all concerned about other factors. This chapter shows how the mode of the construction of a religious identity determines the rate and pattern of involvement in the public sphere.

Chapter Nine, "Islam and Public Piety in Mali," is by anthropologist Benjamin F. Soares. Soares also thinks that the differences in Muslim identities are problematic. While in Chapter Eight the difference between Sufi and non-Sufi identities is relevant, this chapter deals with the issue of public display of piety. It examines situations where a consensus on prayer, pilgrimage, and forehead prayer marks exists on one hand, and where another consensus coexists regarding social groups that recognize different saintly lineages. The author implies that while the former is a positive outlet that benefits the common good, the latter is seen as a barrier to achievement of the common good.

Chapter Ten, "Framing the Public Sphere: Iranian Women in the Islamic Republic," by anthropologist Fariba Adelkhah demonstrates how cultural norms rather than Islamic traditions prevent women from participating in the public sphere in Iran. The author admits that the participation of women in society has
been tolerated by religious authority to some extent. She recognizes, however, that Islamic women trying to participate in political matters are faced with gender bias or local political strictures. Whereas van der Veer points out that we have to include other religions before we consider the sphere to be public in Islamic countries, Adelkhah thinks that we must recognize traditional cultural aspects of societies other than Islam.

This book is situated within the study of Islam from an anthropological perspective. Anthropological studies of Islam have emphasized the anthropology of civilization. Religious knowledge and religious practitioners have long been considered important subjects in this area. Sacred books and their interpretations have been thought of as very influential in the social life of Muslims. Transmission and dissemination of religious knowledge are very important undertakings, and, thus, ‘ulamas, Sufis, ordinary citizens, and Islamists alike have all been considered to be related actors in these activities.

Discussion of the public sphere can be placed right within such a historical context. Here it can be argued that popularization and development of new media, such as the Internet, can introduce this discursive activity through religious avenues. However, we should recognize that discussion on the public sphere focuses on the communication process, and that the utilization of religious knowledge rather than its transmission is emphasized. That is why discussions about how actors can (or cannot) participate in the public sphere are done in this collection.

Eickelman and Anderson edited a previous collection of papers on the public sphere\(^1\) where the creation of discursive space through media such as print, cassette and Internet was examined. This new collection has a similar perspective, where the concept of either the public sphere or public Islam is looked at by contributors. This new book aims at an extension of this discussion by adding the concept of the common good.

The book does not seem, however, to include a common perspective about the concept of common good. This concept is not clearly defined, and some contributors do not even refer to it by name. The meaning of the phrase appears to differ with each author. Zaman’s, Didier’s, and Soares’ definition of the concept are all different from each other. Zaman sees the common good as the need to grasp and face problems through the eye of Islamic jurisprudence. Didier and Soares, on the other hand, relate this concept to proper belief and practice.

The common good appears to be thought of as that which orients discussions and establishes relationships among participants in the public sphere. Public Islam refers to the part of the Islamic religion that has come to be
argued through and over the media. Common good refers to how such argument will be realized and what kind of issues will be discussed.

Various actors can be successfully exploited by the common platform of the public sphere. However, how these actors are related to one another has not been examined because of the absence of discussions about what the common good is. Each contributor does, however, criticize Habermas' overly-idealized public sphere and points out how such acts would be difficult to be realized. Van der Veer, Anderson, and Gonzalez-Quijano focus on how Muslims are connected to each other through the media. Kirli points out that there are common discourses among different confessional groups, but he does not regard this point as his main issue. The papers of van der Veer, Anderson, and Gonzalez-Quijano do not refer to negotiation nor arrangements among people with different positions or opinions. Didier showed how his dispute was settled by the sudden intervention of government, eliminating the possibility of any negotiation or arrangement.

Hindrances to creation of the public sphere is an important topic, but how ties and bonds can go beyond differences might be also an interesting topic. Effective discussions seem to be found in Dewey's concept, in which intermediate institutions and authorities are considered and how consequences of actions are perceived is analysed. The issue of expectation might be one answer to the problem of fragmentation of religious authority, which has been held in high regard since the first collection was issued. Therefore, religious authority should continue to be questioned. We can ask how we carry on such discussions in the future beyond specific topics or time or periods. This book can open the door to new questions, as well as provide answers and foster new ideas.

Notes


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