Book Review

Jaan S. Islam and Adem Eryiğit (2022). *Islam and The State in Ibn Taymiyya: Translation and Analysis.* London: Routledge. 290 Pages. ISBN 978-1-032-13185-6

Slamet Mulyani[*] & Arik Maghfirotul Mukarom[**]

The concept of Islamic politics has undergone significant transformations from its traditional comprehension to its application in the modern context. Hence, it is crucial to look at the thoughts of influential figures in Islamic history to understand how this discourse evolved and its implications in the contemporary landscape. Ibn Taymiyya, a 14th-century Islamic theologian and philosopher, proposed profound insights into the concept of the Islamic state that continues to shape contemporary political discourse. Through his version of integrating Islamic law within political authority, Ibn Taymiyya laid the foundations for much of the modern Islamist ideology, influencing groups such as Salafis, Wahhabis, and Jihadist movements. Indeed, Jaan S. Islam and Adem Eryiğit in "*Islam and the State in Ibn Taymiyya: Translation and Analysis*" explores these ideas within an Islamic state structure context, pre-modern epistemology, and the challenges posed in a modern world that faces the simultaneous dynamics of secularisation and religious revival.

In order to thoroughly understand the political thought of Ibn Taymiyya, it is essential to situate within the historical context of his time—specifically, the period of the Mamluk Dynasty in Syria and Egypt, an intellectually and politically challenging era. The Islamic world at the time was facing both external threats from the Mongols, as well as internal conflicts with various theological sects and schools such as the Sufi and Shia. Against this backdrop, Ibn Taymiyya addressed political views that reflect the need for political stability and social justice based on Sharia law. Nonetheless, in contrast to some of his more pragmatic contemporaries, Ibn Taymiyya consistently emphasised the complete application of Sharia in governance.[1]

Ibn Taymiyya's views on social justice are rooted in the texts of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, where the state is seen as an entity that must act as a protector of morality and an enforcer of the Sharia. As explained in the book, the state is not just a political tool; it is also a responsible religious instrument that ensures all social and political life is aligned with Islamic values and law. Correspondingly, Munir and Kusnadi also state that Islamic law should be one of the primary means to achieve social justice and stability.[2]

Furthermore, Islam and Eryiğit also compare Ibn Taymiyya's thought with that of contemporary scholars such as Sayyid Qutb and Abul A'la Maududi, who also emphasised the importance of the state in enforcing Sharia. Sayyid Qutb, in "Milestones", stressed the need for revolution against "modern *jahiliyyah*" and viewed *jihad* as both a spiritual and military tool to establish an Islamic state entirely based on sharia.[3] Meanwhile, Maududi advocated the concept of "theo-democracy", where the Islamic state serves as the embodiment of Allah's sovereignty with the Sharia as the supreme law promoting education and *da'wah* as a means to transform society gradually. However, he did not entirely reject violence if necessary.[4] Ibn Taymiyya, while also emphasising the application of the Sharia, focused on the pure enforcement of Islamic law without a specific theory of statehood, believing that justice and stability can only be achieved with the Sharia fully implemented within any form of governance as long as it aligns with Allah's law.[5] Due to this orientation, although often perceived as radical, Ibn Taymiyya's thought offers a more flexible model centred on social justice.[6]

[*] Slamet Mulyani (corresponding author), Doctoral Candidate, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia. Email: mulyanislamet@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5500-2199.
[**] Arik Maghfirotul Mukarom, UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia. Email: arik.mukarom@uin-suska.ac.id. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2983-037X.
[1] Jaan S. Islam and Adem Eryiğit (2022), *Islam and the State in Ibn Taymiyya: Translation and Analysis*, London: Routledge, p. 201.
[2] Abdulloh Munir and Kusnadi Kusnadi (2024), "Maintaining the Social Environment: Urgency and Principles in Maqasid Al-Shariah," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman*, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 303–320.
[3] Sayyid Quṭb (2006), *Milestones: Ma'alim fi'l-tareeq*, Birmingham: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, p. 232.
[4] Jan-Peter Hartung (2014), *A System of Life: Mawdudi and the Ideologisation of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 70.
[5] Islam and Eryiğit (2022), *Islam and the State in Ibn Taymiyya: Translation and Analysis*, p. 221.
[6] Khaled Abou El Fadl (2014), *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 299-301.

Moreover, the book also connects to critiques of the modern nation-state by intellectuals such as Wael Hallaq, who emphasises the difficulty of integrating Islamic law into the framework of the modern sovereign state. Hallaq argues that the traditional Islamic legal system, as advocated by Ibn Taymiyya, is problematic to accommodate in the modern state context, where popular sovereignty is the underlying law.[7] This is due to the fact that sovereignty in Islamic governance lies with God, not with the sovereign or the state, and the Sharia is a moral-legal system that precedes all forms of global rules, including executive and legislative powers. In this gap, Islam & Eryiğit highlight the social justice orientation of Ibn Taymiyya's idea in implementing Islamic law within the context of the modern state. This analysis thus shows that while most modern interpretations of Ibn Taymiyya tend to be radical, his teachings also offer a governmental model focused more on social justice and the rule of law rooted in Islamic principles.

One of the main contributions of this book is how the authors successfully link Ibn Taymiyya's views with contemporary issues in Islamic politics. This is evident from their exploration of Ibn Taymiyya's thought in the second part of the book. For example, in the chapter on "The Office of Islamic Government *(Wazifat al-Ḥukuma al-Islamiyya)*," the authors comprehensively explain how Ibn Taymiyya emphasised the importance of government in enforcing the Sharia and maintaining social order. This view remains relevant in the modern world, especially in Muslim countries facing the challenge of balancing religious and secular laws.[8]

The book also discusses how Ibn Taymiyya's thought has been used or misused by modern radical groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. The authors underline that although Ibn Taymiyya's teachings are often used to justify acts of violence, these interpretations often oversimplify or even distort the original complexity of his thought. Additionally, often overlooked in numerous radical interpretations, Ibn Taymiyya himself emphasised the importance of justice and the appropriate application of the Sharia. His view of *jihad* as a moral and spiritual struggle is also elaborated upon, showing that *jihad* is not just a tool for war against external enemies but also an effort to uphold the Sharia in daily life.

This book significantly contributes to the academic discussion on Islamic history and civilisation. One of the main strengths of this book is the direct translation of important texts by Ibn Taymiyya, accompanied by a rich historical and theoretical context. The book provides access to the original thoughts of Ibn Taymiyya and connects them with contemporary political issues, making it highly relevant to modern Islamic political studies.

The authors' boldness in linking Ibn Taymiyya's thought with modern critiques of the secular nation-state is also commendable. By analysing how Ibn Taymiyya placed divine authority above human authority, the book offers a solid alternative to the modern secular state concept, which bases its legitimacy on popular sovereignty rather than divine law. This provides a fresh and new perspective for academics and researchers interested in Islamic political studies. Unfortunately, the book does not delve deeply into the impact of Ibn Taymiyya's thoughts on contemporary Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda or ISIS. Given the relevance and significant impact of Ibn Taymiyya's thoughts in global Islamic discourse, a deeper discussion on how these groups interpret his teachings would be highly beneficial.

Conclusively, "*Islam and the State in Ibn Taymiyya: Translation and Analysis*" is a valuable piece of work that successfully connects the past with modern challenges, offering a worthy contribution to the ongoing discussion of how classical Islamic thought can shape a more just and inclusive future for Islamic politics. The book is highly relevant to scholars interested in Islamic political studies and the application of the Sharia in a modern context. It boasts three significant findings: first, Ibn Taymiyya's view of *jihad* as a moral and spiritual struggle shows that it is not just about physical warfare but also involves efforts to enforce the Sharia in daily life. Second, Ibn Taymiyya's perspective on the role of the state in enforcing Islamic law emphasises the importance of a government based on morality and responsibility to the Sharia, which is relevant in discussions about secular states and religious law. Third, the book's analysis confirms that although Ibn Taymiyya is often associated with radical interpretations, his thought also offers views that support social justice and the integration of Islamic law within a fair and welfare-oriented government.

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[7] Wael B. Hallaq (2013), *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 49-51.
[8] Islam and Eryiğit (2022), *Islam and the State in Ibn Taymiyya: Translation and Analysis*, p. 95.

Acknowledgement

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