

Hayrettin Yucesoy (Saint Louis University), “Political Resistance and Nonviolence in Medieval Islam”

In a widely circulated hadith attributed to the prophet Muhammad “*ikhtilaf ummati rahma*,” medieval Muslim scholarly and popular discourse seems to have recognized dissent as a condition of civil society. The medieval literature of jurisprudence, theology, and hadith discussed subjects pertaining to political dissent under various chapters and topics. Historiography, poetry, hagiography, and biographical dictionaries are full of material that can be productively studied to elaborate on the nature and forms of political dissent. Political tracts, mirrors for princes, manuals of statecraft discuss this topic from the perspective of imperial notion of justice and of social equilibrium. A wealth of critical practices from the Umayyad and Abbasids periods can be examined productively as forms of dissent. Political dissent was expressed in variety of subtle and open ways. These ranged from pacifist attitudes such as renunciation, withdrawal from politics, unvoiced deviation, and quietism to openly activist behavior, which included the tradition of *al-amr bi-al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, but certainly was not limited to it: poetry, political speeches, abstention, noncooperation, and various acts of open disobedience constituted other forms of dissent. Pursuing scholarly and historical knowledge, in fact knowledge itself, can be said to have functioned both as dissent and a kind of protection and umbrella for the expression of dissent. In my paper, I will examine the critiques of the caliphate by the Sufis of the Mu'tazila as such a discourse that refused compliance with existing political practice and ideologies supporting it.