

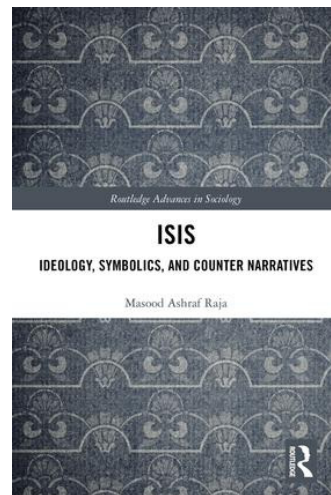
themes and topics related to the contemporary application of Islamic law across Muslim societies and countries.

Muhammad Zubair Abbasi*



Masood Ashraf Raja. *ISIS: Ideology, Symbolics, and Counter Narratives*. New York: Routledge, 2019. Pp. 150. Hardbound. ISBN: 978-1-138-48618-8. Price: \$45.47.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been often treated militarily or occasionally diplomatically, but rarely ideologically. *ISIS, Ideology, Symbolics, and Counter Narratives*, a book by Masood Ashraf Raja, focuses on this oft-neglected aspect, fostering conditions of ISIS ideology, its local and global catalysts, its strategies of recruitment, and proposal for a more tolerant, humane, and peaceful counter-ideology. The book is interdisciplinary: the writer employs theoretical terms from humanities and theological terms from Islam to discuss religious as well as cultural, political, global, and economic factors in the making and nurturing of ISIS. Raja argues that, unlike Western stereotype of most Muslims as terrorists, ISIS ideology only appeals to those already receptive to extremist mindset. Factors like neoliberal economy, global inequities, international financial institutions, Western foreign policies, and failed neoliberal model of education in developing countries, also helped increase ISIS recruits. The book also provides comprehensive historical overview of ideas like *jihād* and situates them in the contemporary world. Raja, who has previously served in Pakistan army, combines his knowledge of military practices and his training as a



* Associate Professor, Shaikh Ahmed Hassan School of Law, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Lahore, Pakistan.

secular humanist to explicate ISIS ideology, recruitment strategies, and its work.

The book comprises of five chapters. First chapter provides a comprehensive, but brief, summation of the emergence of ISIS on the global platform. Starting with ISIS conquest of Mosul in June 2014. It explains the difference between ISIS, ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant), Alqaeda, and DAESH (Arabic acronym of *al-Dawlah al-Islāmiyyah fi 'l-'Irāq wa 'l-Shām*). Citing multiple sources, Raja establishes that US invasion of Iraq catalysed the rise of ISIS in the region and any efforts to end ISIS require ending the “logical and material” enabling conditions of ISIS (p. 17).

In the second chapter, Raja explicates the ideological framing of ISIS. Using Ludwig Feuerbach (d. 1872), Karl Marx (d. 1883), and Louis Althusser's (d. 1990) thoughts on ideology, Raja explains that ISIS offers the romantic promise of the return of utopian *khilāfah*, which interpellates those Muslim subjects who are born into vulnerable material conditions. Further employing Althusser's ideology and interpellation, George P. Lakoff's (b. 1941) framing, and Michel Foucault's (d. 1984) discourse, Raja maintains that defeating ISIS requires a change in the cognitive frames that are hospitable to ISIS ideology via expansive acts of interpellation and hailing. In ISIS journal, *Dābiq*, Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī (b. 1971) promises “dignity, might, rights, leadership,” and equality to all Muslims with the return of *khilāfah*. *Khilāfah*, a fluid term, is invoked for retrieval in its classic sense wherein the promise of its return assumes historical significance in the Middle Eastern war zone by turning Western armies into the crusader armies against the Muslim armies.

Third chapter focuses on *jihād* and ISIS recruitment strategies, along with the etymological, historical, and theological significance of symbols like flag, honour, prestige, and migration (*hijrah*). This chapter is divided in two sections: (i) Jihad and Its Configuration in Neoliberal Capital (ii) ISIS and Jihad. The writer explains *mujāhid* Muslim subjectivity via theoretical and theological explanations of *jihād* and its “mythic” in Muhammad Iqbal's (d. 1938) poetry to contend that *jihād* as a “reactive or responsive practice” helps unravel the complexity of Muslim politics of resistance. Iqbal, in his poetry, interchangeably uses and simultaneously distinguishes two terms: the Muslim (a passive follower of Islamic tenets) and the *Mu'min* (an active striver for Islamic tenets). In doing so, Iqbal portrays a “transhistorical, supranational view of a truly action-oriented Muslim identity” (p. 53), contends Raja. This leads to a renewal of the Qur'ān, the *ḥadīth*, and their scholarly explanations—along with the ideal resistant subject i.e., *mujāhid*.

The book discusses *jihād* as dialectical because it changes with the change in material realities and conflicts. *jihād* refers both to daily struggles and active

fight against a real enemy; but during the Soviet-Afghan war, its polysemous meaning was replaced with “fighting in the way of God.” Secretly funded by the US, Soviet-Afghan war invited *mujāhidīn* from all around the world, without any visa restriction, to Pakistan to fight the common enemy, Russia. US funded a sprawl of *madrasahs* in Pakistan that also served as a low-cost alternative to a failing neo-liberal education model. Raja notes that Post-USSR fall, “a large number of war orphans, a failed national education system, and state incapable of providing any meaningful relief to the poor” resulted in “the most literalist, the most militant, and the most uncompromising Islamist fighting force in the region” (p. 59). These *mujāhidīn* also formed their own groups to fight other enemies of the Islamic world, which, ironically, also included the US. While Taliban remained local to Pakistan and Afghanistan, ISIS in its *khilāfah*, encouraged all Muslims to migrate and instructed Muslims living in diaspora to perform their own individual acts of *jihād* in their places of residence. By connecting ISIS to the end times, synonymising ISIS with Islam, and pointing to even subtly or remotely anti-Islam Western policies, ISIS appeals to those who are already pre-disposed to ISIS ideology or live in vulnerable material conditions. Militancy also becomes easy redemption and salvation for the Muslims who cannot live by Islamic principles of piety, truth, prayers, fasting, and a just life.

Fourth chapter offers a critical reading of three major manifestos that ISIS uses: *The Management of Savagery*, *Introduction to the Jurisprudence of Jihād*, and *The Essentials of Making Ready* (for *jihād*). Raja focuses on the first manifesto, which is the most well-known for its detailed description of the strategies for creating an Islamic caliphate. The book assumes that the “collapse of an existing order,” results in an “interregnum, the state of savagery,” which serves as “a launching pad” for the promotion of “a Truly Islamic system of government” (p. 81). This ultimate Islamic system performs state functions—like providing food, security, justice, medical treatment—and establishes the *sharī‘ah*. Citing multiple paragraphs about the need for constant *jihād* in this Muslim *khilāfah*, Raja notes that *Management of Savagery* is a theologically well-argued and instructive text into the jurisprudence of blood that appeals to those who are either born into or convert to extremist ideologies.

Fifth chapter is the most urgent as it discusses the neoliberal capital, US counter-policies, and their ramifications. Raja argues that extremist groups emerged only after Soviet-Afghan war and economic liberalisation. Using John Rapley’s definition of neoliberalism, he establishes that neoliberal economic model reallocates most redemptive functions of the state to the market, which batters the lower socio-economic classes. Upon state’s failure in its distributive function of providing jobs to citizens, other (anti-state) groups take over.

These groups, in the post-USSR neoliberal world, were mostly religiously extremist. Unconditional US support for Saudi regime, US policy about Israel-Palestine conflict, US proxy wars in the Muslim world, and US abandonment of Afghanistan and Pakistan and previously favoured leaders like Saddam Hussein (d. 2006) and Muammar al-Gaddafi (d. 2011) also helped spread ISIS cause. ISIS also uses (mis)instruction in Qur'ānic verses that focus on Muslims' combative relationship with Jews and Christians, Muslim stereotype as terrorists, anti-Islam long term US policy, and Western secular values like freedom of expression of speech and sexual identities, to recruit the receptive Muslim subjects. These subjects become part of an "active, powerful citizens of global alliance of Islam" (p. 120) and fight for the pure Islamic model of the state in a Muslim *khilāfab*.

Overall, Raja builds the argument for the need of a narrative shift to address economic imbalance, social injustice, and ideological formation to fight the conditions that foster extremism. He proposes that Muslim scholars should reinvoke Islam's message of love, peace, and tolerance, while US should also reconsider its relationship with Saudi Arabia. Better early education system of Muslim youths will also affect their identity narratives and help curb the cult of ISIS ideology. The writer urges Saudi Arabia to revise its religious diplomatic stance to accept all Muslims as equal within and outside of the country. He also emphasises a retrieval of Muslim history and interpretation of Qur'ānic verses to represent the focus on compassion and love in all Muslim narratives. The writer's experience as a military officer and a professor, and a simultaneous residence of both Muslim and Western cultures distinguishes this book from others on the subject. He masterfully unpacks the terminology and enables the reader to understand ISIS from religious, economic, geographical, and humanistic positions. That is why, despite using theological, theoretical, and philosophical terms, the book is comprehensive and easily accessible to the reader.

Iqra Shagufta Cheema*



* Teaching Fellow, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Department of English, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas, USA.