

**Title—Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonization and World Order**

**Author—Salman Sayyid**

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Categories: Islam, Politics, World History, Theory, Economics, Religion

Place: The World

Time: 1800-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Sayyid aims to reconceptualize the Islamic caliphate, focusing less on restoration and more on innovation. He seeks to establish a reconceptualization of the caliphate that opens a decolonial horizon. His book is a middle group between essentialist claims about Islam and the apologetic reaction to it which reduces the singularity of Islam into an assumed multiplicity. Sayyid begins by addressing the “Muslim question” which encompasses the difficulties associated with the emergence of a distinct political identity that appears to be transgressive of the norms, conventions and structures that underpin the contemporary world. According to Sayyid, understanding the meaning of Islam is necessary for answering the “Muslim question.” He sees the contemporary emergence of Islam taking place in a world marked by the logic of post-coloniality, or in a world in which the cultural underpinnings of the West find it difficult to translate Western military and political power into a planetary hegemony. The book is roughly divided into two sections. The first section is a critical engagement with the Western notions of liberalism, secularism, relativism, and democracy; all of which receive their own chapter. The relationship between Muslim mobilization and the contemporary world order is often expressed as a problem of secularism and its discontents. By policing the boundary between the religious and the political, secularism becomes another means of policing the boundary between the pre-modern and the modern, the Western and the non-Western. The second section engages with and articulates the aspirations of Muslims vis a vis the caliphate.

Sayyid contributes to the process of working out how the West and Islam fit into the world. To do so, he interrogates the interactions between Islam and the political. The political is central to his imagination of the caliphate that can provide Muslims a rooting in the world, as opposed to a return to the homeland. For Sayyid, the political is a condition—it does not designate a region or a specific sphere of activity. He underscores how the political describes the practice of hegemony, or the attempt to structure and institute new social patterns and arrangements. He argues that it is impossible to fulfill the demand that the caliphate be an ethical state to justify its Islamic character. The caliphate could only be achieved by a radical cultural transformation. Sayyid posits that the caliphate’s coming would be based on the rejection of the nation state with its uneasy mixture of universalism and particularity. Recalling the caliphate means understanding that the challenges that confront Muslims collectively are neither religious nor cultural, but political; their resolution can only be found in a politics in the name of Islam.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- The contemporary emergence of Islam is taking place in a world marked by the logic of post-coloniality, or a world in which the cultural underpinnings of the West find it difficult to translate Western military and political power into a planetary hegemony
- Islamism is a constellation of political projects that seek to position Islam in the center of any social order
- Critical Muslim Studies is a field of investigation into matters associated with Muslims which are framed by three related epistemological stances: post-positivist, post-orientalist, decolonial