

Social Islam in Ayatollah Sistani's Approach

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Abstract

This study examines Ayatollah Sistani's model of "Social Islam" in post-2003 Iraq. The main question concerns how Ayatollah Sistani has articulated a "third way" between radical secularism and sovereignty-oriented political Islam. Employing the theoretical framework of post-secularism alongside critical discourse analysis, the findings show that Ayatollah Sistani has operated through three key strategies: (a) Habermasian translation; (b) epistemic authority; and © endorsement of a civil state grounded in positive law compatible with the Shari'a. While this model has achieved symbolic success, it faces significant challenges in terms of institutionalization. The study concludes that Sistani's "Social Islam" represents an indigenous form of Islamic post-secularism that demonstrates the possibility of a "functional differentiation" between religion and politics within Shi'ism. However, its long-term viability depends on institutionalizing epistemic authority beyond personal charisma.

Moreover, the research evidence indicates that Sistani's model has enabled a form of coexistence between the modern state structure and the religious tradition without allowing either to dominate the other. The model also holds the potential to serve as a generalizable theoretical framework for analyzing state-religion relations in pluralistic, post-conflict societies. Ultimately, the data suggest that Sistani's "Social Islam" is less a political project than a socio-ethical blueprint for rebuilding state and society under Iraq's fragile conditions.

Keywords: Social Islam; Ayatollah Sistani; Post-secularism; Epistemic Authority; Fatwa of Collective Jihad (al-Jihād al-Kifā'ī); Habermasian Translation.

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