

THE POLITICAL THEORY WORKSHOP PRESENTS

Bandung against Bandung: Muslim Democracy as Realistic Utopia

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At the end of the Cold War, Iranian “religious intellectuals” increasingly concerned with democratic politics and disillusioned with the revolutionary postures of an Islamic Republic rejected the third worldism long associated with the Asian-Africa Conference held in Bandung in 1955. Ali Shariati’s legacy played a prominent role in these debates. Many dismissed utopian aspirations altogether, announcing their differences with him. Others cordoned off the parts of Shariati’s oeuvre that invoked Bandung from the essence of his ideas, claiming the former expressed support for statist authoritarianism. This article draws on recent scholarship to reassesses Shariati’s utopian political theory. It shows how Shariati’s “middle doctrine” [maktab-i vāseteh] bears affinities with Plato’s arguments in favor of democracy in the Republic. The consequent utopian vision predicates democracy and realism on Islam, not against it, providing for a “Bandung spirit” equipped to answer the challenges posed by today’s positivist critics.

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