

Political Science: An Islamic Perspective

By Abdul Rashid Moten. London: MacMillan Press/St. Martin's, 1996, 217 pp., with Index.

Adopting an issue-oriented approach toward understanding Islamic and Western political thought, Professor Abdul Rashid Moten places these two traditions within historical and contemporary contexts. Moten's book thereby provides a comparative analysis of key issues, including Islamic research methodology, Islamic law, Islamic political and social order, strategies and tactics of various Islamic movements, and the link between Islam and politics.

In chapter 1, Moten examines the secular domination of Muslim thought and culture, arguing that secularism was imported into the Muslim world through the efforts of a Westernized elite. He adds that no such secular state had ever existed in the Muslim world. This owes much to the fact that there was (is) no common ground between Islam and secularism (p. 7). With secularism came nationalism, liberal political institutions, and the pursuit of a capitalist economic system. Nationalism, Moten notes, wedged its way into the Muslim world, dividing it into new nation-states and client states (p. 12). Since independence, secularism has failed to meet the socioeconomic and political needs of Muslim societies. The rising tide of Islamic revivalism against secular regimes in Algeria and Turkey demonstrates disenchantment with the shattered secularist dreams in the Muslim world (p. 16).

Chapter 2 attempts to scrutinize the inherent link between Islam and politics. The pillars of Islam, Moten writes, go beyond moral and spiritual upliftment; they entail both practical and symbolic significance in all aspects of life. In Islam, ethics sets the tone for politics, and the rules of political behavior originate from ethical norms. Political life cannot be separated from the broader framework of the religious and spiritual life (p. 21). Islamic rulers have hardly, if ever, emphasized the separation of religion and politics. Since the nineteenth century, Islamic modernists and revivalists have debated the nature of this separation. The reemergence of Islam in Muslim politics and societies in the last quarter of the twentieth century has pointed to a distinct Islamic order and the reawakening of Muslim identity. Moten cites, among others, Iran and Pakistan as examples of such a renaissance (p. 30). However, he fails to examine the divisive effects of Islamization programs in Pakistan (under Zia al-Haqq) and other countries such as Sudan.

The comparison between Western and Islamic methods of political inquiry is the subject of close scrutiny in chapter 3. Moten maintains that the Islamic conception of polity is based on profound religious-cultural grounds and that religion and polity form an organic unity (p. 37). Likewise, ethics and politics are

inseparably linked in Islam (p. 45). Having criticized Western empirical science and the growth of positivism in the social sciences, Moten emphasizes the importance of values and normative considerations to the Islamic method of inquiry. He tends, however, to underestimate the postbehavioralist movement and its growing appeal in the Western scholarly community. By treating the Western scholarly world as monolithic, Moten disregards a widespread backlash in the West against value-neutral tendencies in social sciences.

Moten is most persuasive when he argues that there is no such thing as knowledge for its own sake and that, in fact, empirical studies in the West are heavily influenced by the historical experiences of Western Christianity, which is largely based on secular precepts. "Such a science," he adds, "has not fulfilled and cannot fulfill the needs and requirements of Muslims and as such it cannot take social and cultural root in the Muslim society" (p. 44). He is least persuasive when he argues that different methodological inquiries must be "subservient to the eternal values of divine revelation" (p. 45). Moten sacrifices tolerance of diverse methodologies for the sake of supremacy of Islamic methodology and the universality of values enshrined in the Qur'an.

In chapter 4, Moten lays out the alternative to secularism—that is, the shari'ah, the Islamic legal order. He argues that the key element in ensuring the dynamism of the Islamic legal order is *ijtihad*, independent legal and logical reasoning (p. 55). *Ijtihad*, he adds, must be granted its rightful place if an ethical restructuring of the society is to be achieved and if the Muslim world is "to proceed to the work of reconstructing a dynamic, thriving civilization of Islam" (p. 62).

The Islamic community, the *ummah*, provides a social context for order in the Muslim world; it contrasts profoundly with nationalism. In chapter 5, the author scrutinizes the difference between the two. Nationalism, Moten contends, is a secular ideology that has been imposed on the Muslim world in the post-independence era. As a form of glorified tribalism, nationalism is based on linguistic, geographical, cultural, and racial factors; it is contrary to the Qur'anic conception of *ummah*. The latter transcends geography, language, race, or history and is based upon *tawhid*—the unity and sovereignty of God. Nationalism promotes the structure of the nation-state system and intensifies the cultural plurality and social antagonism between various units of the Muslim world. Moten exposes the sinister aspect of nationalism and how it militates against the idea of Muslim unity by arguing that "Arab nationalism is the product of a Christian and Jewish conspiracy to keep the *ummah* divided" (p. 80).

It is, however, unclear how Moten accounts for intra-Arab conflicts and the tensions between Arab and non-Arab Muslim nations. Nationalism is alive and vibrant within the Muslim world. Universalists such as Iran's Imam Khomeini painfully conceded this reality. Although transnational solidarity and bonds exist among Muslims of different nationalities and sects, jingoistic national pride still prevails in the Muslim world. Similarly, Moten's questioning of popular sovereignty in this chapter is utterly unpersuasive. An increasing number of Muslim countries, such as Iran and Jordan, have embraced the notion of popular sovereignty in their constitutions.

In chapter 6, two central questions are addressed: Can an Islamic political order, *khilafah*, be democratic? And Is the Western conception of democracy compatible with an Islamic political order and polity? Since the Islamic order is based on principles such as unity of God, justice, freedom, equality, and con-

sultation, it is compatible with democracy (pp. 87–90). The Islamic order, however, advocates the fusion or limited separation of powers and is noticeably different from parliamentary or presidential systems. Moten insists that the Islamic democratic order differs so vastly from the Western democratic order that it is, in fact, irreconcilable with Western democratic philosophy (p. 106).

Chapter 7 deals with the substantial and procedural facets of human accountability (*muhasabah*) in Islam. The subordination of the chief executive to the law and the obligations of the governed to disobey an unlawful command are explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. Grounds for impeachment in Islam are based on criteria of legality and legitimacy (pp. 113–116). The consent of the ruled and commitment to the promotion of justice are two stringent criteria. Failure to fulfill these criteria would disqualify political leaders. The *majlis* (parliament) is endowed with the authority to remove leaders when and where necessary (p. 125).

Islamic movements, for instance, in countries such as India, Pakistan, and Iran, which represent variations in strategy and tactics, typify the richness of Islamic reawakening and self-expression. While displaying similarities and differences between and among Islamic movements in the book's final chapter, Moten points out that the characterization of these movements as "Islamic fundamentalism" is deeply flawed and that the Islamic reawakening (*nahdah*) must be viewed as a process (p. 128). This process is neither a response to the Western modernization nor a backlash against its challenge; it is essentially a form of returning to pure Islam and "a quest to mold Muslim life after the Prophetic pattern in an imperfect world. This is exemplified by the Salafiyah movement, the Sokoto Jihad and the Mahdiyah movement" (p. 130). Jihad, optimism, and success are the inherent mechanisms for the persistence of the *nahdah* movements (p. 139).

On balance, Moten constructs a credible argument for an Islamic order and political science based on humane premises. Elaborate explanations and several interesting tables and graphs make the book a useful source of illustrating Islamic perspectives. Nevertheless, Moten's flat statement that empiricism cannot be put to good use, implying that one must choose between values and facts, may strike the reader as dogmatic. Despite his success in demonstrating the interrelatedness of ethics and politics in Islam, the book in itself cannot be said to have contributed much to the continuing debate between the two worlds. Moten offers little in the way of intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural exchange. Although he aptly acknowledges the limits of empiricism, his unqualified rejection of it undermines the book's general theoretical plausibility and appeal.

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