

Book Review

Islam and the West

Western Dominance and Political Islam, by Khalid bin Sayeed. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995. Pp. 197. ISBN 0 719 2265 8.

The book under review revolves around two main themes: Western dominance of the contemporary Muslim world and the responses it has generated from the Muslim societies and their leaders. The author argues that while Western dominance has military, economic, technological, and cultural dimensions, the Islamic resistance to the West has been primarily religious and cultural. This should explain why the roots of tension between the Islamic world and the West have existed for so long.

The first chapter outlines the nature of the Western hegemony; the subsequent five chapters discuss the Arabic-Islamic response to that hegemony. In the seventh chapter, the author attempts to establish a theoretical framework on how societal human development can be achieved by Islamic political theory. Finally, the author explains how certain Muslim thinkers have identified the way out of Western dominance. As such, the theme of the Islamic response to the West's hegemony takes a much greater portion of the book.

Khalid bin Sayeed examines the Islamic response to Western dominance by focusing on three Muslim societies: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. According to him, Iran, under Khomeini's leadership and also that of his successor, stands as the only country defying Western and American imperialism. The author discusses at length the differences which exist between the pragmatists and the militant radicals following Khomeini's death. The pragmatists are keen on the adoption of liberal policies on both the domestic and foreign fronts. The radical militant group opposes such strategies because they are not in line with Imam Khomeini's revolutionary guidelines. However, in the opinion of the author, the Iranian Islamic Revolution offers something new on the

sociopolitical scene of contemporary Muslim societies. He describes the regime in power as "examples of how *political Islam* has tried to convert some of the basic Islamic ideas into a sociopolitical programme and a set of public policies." (p. 64)

As to the resistance of contemporary Saudi society to the West, the author links it to King Faisal's reign and to the later emergence of middle-class groups of liberal and radical Islamic persuasions. On the one hand, King Faisal was known to be the most religious person among his brothers, on the other hand, he was also the one who believed that the process of modernization could be brought about under Islamic influence. The royal Saudi family was criticized by the radical groups for its following of the West, which is opposed to Islam. They also accused the princes of corruption, like gambling and ostentatious lifestyles, in contrast to the misery that exists in the country.

In the case of Pakistan, there is hardly any Islamic resistance to the West. In fact, the author argues that the Pakistani situation confirms his thesis that the Muslim world in both the Middle East and South Asia is under overwhelming Western or American dominance. In Pakistan, the West has many friends like the liberals and the secularists. In comparison with Saudi Arabia, Khalid bin Sayeed sees no real hope for Pakistan to resist Western dominance.

Looking at these three samples of Muslim societies, one can see a strong correlation between the presence of a highly Islamically-committed political leadership and social groups and the emergence of Islamic resistance to the West. Unfortunately, the author fails to identify this link in more concrete terms. We believe that Iran is the most defiant towards the West because it is the only Muslim country today governed by a religious leadership, that sees Islam as a governing system that ensures social justice and promotes progressive human development. This type of leadership is highly motivated to translate Islamic principles and teachings into reality.

This clerical leadership, however, is not the only type that could help establish an Islamic social order. A political leadership whose members are well-versed in Islam as well as in modern Western cultures and languages could as well favour the promotion of Islamic infrastructures and superstructures in their society. This could take place if the Islamic aspect of their intellectual background is stronger than or equal to the Western cultural aspects. In our opinion, this is an ideal, intellectually balanced leadership, and would be better prepared than the clerical leadership to adapt Islam to modern life. The Sudanese leadership may

be a case in point. Al-Turābī is the inspiring leader behind the scenes. His knowledge of Islam and Western culture and languages makes him an ideal leader for a movement which tries to Islamize society. Most political leadership of contemporary Muslim countries belongs to neither of the two types of leadership. Atatürk and Bourguiba were inimical to Islam; Nasser, al-Āsād, and al-Qadhdhāfī are semisecular fanatic Arab nationalists. The Shah of Iran promoted Western influence and attempted to reawaken the history of old Persia. In short, Islam has not been a central force for these and other Muslim leaders in the shaping of their societies, and hence they became dependent on either the West or the old Communist lock. On the contrary, empirical evidence shows that the ongoing contemporary Islamic movements have enhanced the sense of collective identity among the Muslim masses and they are seeking independence from the foreign dominance. When an Islamic regime takes the form of what the author calls "Political Islam," the horizon is open not only to resist the impact of the outsider, but also to establish Islamic sociopolitical institutions as an alternative to the Western model in the domains of social justice, human development, and participatory democracy. These plausible sociopolitical achievements are in line with Ibn Khaldūn's religious type of *ʿasabīyah*, through which the Arabs were able to build a world civilization. This religious *ʿasabīyah* could materialize if Muslim political leadership adopt political Islam as their strategy to change themselves and their relations with the West and East. The power of the religious force is an enormous one, as Weber's thesis affirms. Political Islam is certainly that force which could change the Muslims from within and make them real political actors on the world scene again.

Mahmoud Dhaouadi

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, IIUM

Modernity in the Arab World

The Challenge of Modernity: The Quest for Authenticity in the Arab World, by Louay M. Safi. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994. Pp. 211. ISBN 0 8191 9376 3.

Modernization is the process of transforming of a social order into a competent one capable of providing utmost benefit to humanity. It is of