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The Unpublished Letters of Muhammad Asad.

Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Renaissance Front &
Islamic Book Trust. pp. 252, ISBN: 978-967-26388-4-1.

Reviewer: Ahmad Farouk Musa.

Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ، اِ، اُ	a		آ، عَ، يَ	an
وْ	u		وُ	un
يَ	i		يِ	in
آ، عَ، يَ، اَ، اِ، اُ	ā		وْ	aw
وْ	ū		يِ	ay
يِ	ī		وْ	uww, ū (in final position)
			يِ	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>

Book Review

Gozde Hussian (2024). *Islamic Doctrines and Political Liberalism: Muslim's Sincere Support*. Palgrave MacMillan. pp. 253, ISBN 978-3-031-72266-0

Reviewer: Mohamed Fouz Mohamed Zacky, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Madani Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: zackyfouz@iium.edu.my

As someone interested in the ongoing debates on Islam and the liberal tradition, it was not the main title, *Islamic Doctrines and Political Liberalism*, but rather the subtitle—*Muslim's Sincere Support*—that first caught my attention. The phrase conveys a sense of authenticity, suggesting that while considerable efforts have been made to identify common ground between liberal values and Islam, the dialogue continues to grapple with the challenge of establishing a genuinely mutual foundation of support. True to this promise, Gozde Hussain's work situates Islamic intellectual resources in conversation with liberal political theory through careful and sustained engagement, demonstrating both sensitivity to context and fidelity to tradition. The book's central concern is particularly significant: Hussain explores whether mainstream Sunni Islam can find meaningful common ground with the core tenets of Rawlsian political liberalism. Crucially, this engagement does not rely on radical reinterpretations of Islam or on excessively abstract philosophical exercises. Instead, it is rooted in accepted interpretations within mainstream Sunni traditions—spanning theology, jurisprudence, and political thought. Hussain's answer is nuanced. While she acknowledges that most Sunni approaches stop short of fully endorsing political liberalism, she contends that reconciliation remains possible within interpretations that remain faithful to divine sources and jurisprudential reasoning. At the same time, she stresses that reconciliation cannot be one-sided. For genuine dialogue to emerge,

the Islamic intellectual tradition must engage political liberalism, but political liberalism itself must also re-examine and recalibrate certain assumptions. Thus, Hussain frames the encounter between the two traditions as a reciprocal process—one that requires movement on both sides.

Before outlining the central arguments that lead to the above conclusion, Hussain, in the second and third chapters, following the introduction, turns to the theoretical frameworks of her work. She engages both with Comparative Political Theory (CPT) and core assumptions of Rawlsian political liberalism. Yet her engagement is not merely descriptive; it is primarily critical, as she seeks to reconstitute the key assumptions of both CPT and Rawls ideas. On CPT, after surveying the major approaches, she argues that prevailing methodologies and rationales for doing CPT are largely grounded in the assumption that contemporary political theory is dominated by “the presence of Western cognitive hegemony within knowledge production.” From this perspective, CPT has often been justified as an effort to deconstruct the Western paradigm and to build alternative arguments from non-Western traditions. While acknowledging the validity of this justification, Hussain raises an important caution. She warns that “our fear of reinforcing Western hegemony and our respect for the autonomy of non-Western culture may inadvertently lead to the exclusion of valuable insights from the Western canon.” In this way, Hussain’s intervention, therefore, is an attempt to recalibrate the field, offering an approach to CPT that resists both Western dominance and the uncritical privileging of non-Western traditions. In rethinking Rawlsian political liberalism, Hussain examines Rawls’s idea that, for a comprehensive doctrine such as Islam to qualify for a liberal society, it must accept that it is rational for others to reject its core beliefs. Rawls calls this the “burden of judgment” (BoJ). Hussain finds this expectation unrealistic. Followers of a religious or philosophical tradition cannot be asked to treat their deepest convictions as open to rejection, since they regard them as absolute truths. Instead, she proposes a more practical standard: a doctrine should count as compatible with political liberalism if it supports the shared conception of justice because it recognizes the benefits of that framework, and that support comes from its own moral principles. In this way, believers do not have to compromise or water down their core convictions, yet they can still endorse and participate in a liberal political order.

After establishing the initial theoretical framework, Hussain examines three types of projects and discourses developed by modern Islamic thinkers to assess whether these approaches support the Rawlsian account of overlapping consensus, the central concept of political liberalism. She first discusses figures such as Mawlana Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who categorically rejected any reconciliation between Islam and the secular political order, even regarding acceptance of such an order as tantamount to apostasy. Drawing on Rawls's framework, she characterizes these positions as "*incompletable doctrines*."

Second, Hussain turns to a body of arguments that could provide Muslims with a framework for endorsing the liberal political order. She identifies three main bases advanced in this regard but notes that the first two do not constitute a genuine pathway to a possible overlapping consensus. These arguments suggest that the secular or liberal order is not an ideal condition but can be tolerated by Muslims so long as it ensures freedom to practice their religion, or if resisting it would create greater instability. Hussain contends that while such discourses acknowledge the secular order, their foundations remain fragile. Support for political liberalism, she argues, stems less from principled theological commitment than from a sense of Muslim vulnerability, and is ultimately regarded as a compromise when measured against the ideal of living under an Islamic state. She considers a third possibility, articulated by thinkers such as Tariq Ramadan, Abdullah bin Bayyah, and Rachid al-Ghannouchi, who argue that Islamic values are broadly compatible with secular and liberal values. From this perspective, it becomes a religious responsibility for Muslims to contribute to and engage with these political models on the basis of their theological commitments. Interestingly, Hussain observes that while this third variant recognizes the justice of the secular order and encourages Muslim participation within it, it still upholds the Islamic order as superior. Nevertheless, she emphasizes that this third approach holds the potential to develop into an Islamic form of overlapping consensus in the long run, provided the conditions are favourable.

Finally, in the chapter preceding the conclusion, Hussain turns to Islamic intellectual projects that explicitly endorse the secular and liberal order as genuinely Islamic. Here she surveys the discourses of Abdullah an-Na'im, Nurcholish Madjid, Ali Abd al-Raziq, and Nasr Abu Zayd.

Among them, she notes that ‘Muslim citizens in liberal states who seek an Islamic rationale to support their political order may find al-Raziq’s arguments particularly compelling and within the bounds of acceptable interpretations of divine sources’. This is a striking observation, given that much of the modern Islamic political debates has vilified al-Raziq’s thesis for departing from mainstream views on Islam and politics. Hussain, however, situates him differently: for those seeking a solid and textually grounded justification for political liberalism from an Islamic standpoint, al-Raziq’s project has strong appeal. The main reason, she argues, is that he “sits firmly within the dictates of Islam’s sacred texts” and speaks in the scholarly language of the *ulama*, drawing upon authoritative sources and the writings of reputable Muslim scholars and jurists.

Overall, Hussain’s work offers a fresh perspective on the debate between Islamic values and political liberalism. Unlike earlier studies that constructed an Islamic case for liberalism by departing from mainstream interpretations through epistemic ruptures, she deliberately seeks answers within established Islamic traditions. In doing so, she provides a careful and critical cross-examination of the development of modern Islamic socio-political thought in relation to contemporary liberal theory. A possible point of contention lies in the way Hussain frames Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī as someone who outright rejected the compatibility of Islam and secularism, equating the latter with apostasy. While al-Qaradāwī did acknowledge the incompatibility of Islam and secularism in Muslim-majority contexts, he later emphasized that Muslims living as minorities should navigate their challenges by embracing the ethics of citizenship in the West—an approach he presented as consistent with Islam’s core principles (Al-Qaradāwī, 2014). This positioning brings him closer to scholars such as Abdullah Bin Bayyah and Tariq Ramadan, rather than to the rejectionist camp. Beyond this observation, the book succeeds in offering a balanced and productive framework not only for dialogue between Islam and political liberalism but also for advancing the practice of comparative political theory.

References

- Al-Qaradāwī, Y. (2014, January 31). الوطن والمواطنة في ضوء الأصول العقدية. E-CFR Blog. <https://www.e-cfr.org/blog/2014/01/31//الوطن-والمواطنة-في-ضوء-الأصول-العقدية/>

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

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1. Original research and review articles should be 5,000-8,000 words while research notes 3,000-4,000 words, accompanied by an abstract of 100-150 words. Book review should be 1,000-1,500 words.
2. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with a 1-inch (2.5 cm) margins. Use 12-point Times New Roman font.
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4. The title should be as concise as possible and should appear on a separate sheet together with name(s) of the author(s), affiliation(s), and the complete postal address of the institute(s).
5. A short running title of not more than 40 characters should also be included.
6. Headings and sub-headings of different sections should be clearly indicated.
7. References should be alphabetically ordered. Some examples are given below:

Book

In-text citations:

Al-Faruqi & al-Faruqi (1986)

Reference:

Al-Faruqi, I. R., & al-Faruqi, L. L. (1986). *The cultural atlas of Islam*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Chapter in a Book

In-text:

Alias (2009)

Reference:

Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

Journal Article

In-text:

Chapra (2002)

Reference:

Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 10, 214-232.

The Qur'ān

In-text:

(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:

The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

Ḥadīth

In-text:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

The Bible

In-text:

Matthew 12:31-32

Reference:

The new Oxford annotated Bible. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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