

**Book Review**

*An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century Edited by Aminah Berverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard and Laith Saud, Pub: Wiley Blackwell, 2013; ISBN: 9781405193603*

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The religion of Islam has become the nerve-center in post-Huntington's Clash of Civilizational debate and was labeled as a "monster" in America's war on terror after 9/11 phenomenal changes in geo-politics. Paradoxically, Islam is often thought of as a static and monolithic tradition, but it is in fact fluid, dynamic, and characterized by enormous variety. The central theme of this book is that the Image of Islam (particularly in the West) is very different from the lived reality of over a billion adherents around the globe. This book is an outcome of a group of leading regional specialists (mostly European) and explored trends across various countries and regions, including Asia, Africa, Latin American, the Middle East, and Europe, providing an accurate and fascinating account of Islam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (p. 12) The volume is edited by (Aminah Berverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard and Laith Saud) and in addition to them, scholars like John Tofik Karem (teaching Arab Culture, DePaul University, Chicago), Saeed A. Khan (teaches Islamic and Middle East History in Wayne State University, Detroit), Maria Louw (Dept. of Anthropology, Aarhus University, Denmark), and Babacar Mbengue (Islamic Studies, DePaul University)

The Part I provide an overview of the basic structures and debates within Islam. It begins with a historical chapter (Chapter 2), which provides an introduction to the context in which Islam first emerged, and how the early political structures developed. This includes a brief overview of the historical eras which formed the early Islamic period; the history of the Prophet Muhammad, the rise of the early caliphates, the expansion of Islam, and subsequent dynasties. This chapter will also examine the "Gunpowder Empires," (p. 45) and the rise of European colonialism and its legacies. The three chapters that follow discuss the structures, tenets, debates, and sects of the Islamic tradition with the concept of a "spectrum of belief" organized around a central belief in God. Chapter 3 will introduce the reader to fundamental elements of the Islamic worldview that have structured the discourses within the religious tradition both in the past and in the present. A key organizing belief in the Islamic tradition is tawhid, the underlying unity of God and all creation.

An issue that is central to the pedagogy (i.e. educational philosophy) of this text is that the Islamic worldview must be rendered in its full diversity and complexity. This idea is very much reflected in Chapter 4, which focuses on the evolution of Islamic doctrines, beliefs, and practices. This includes the development of Islamic law, kalam (dialectical theology), philosophy, ethics, and social theory. A central feature of this chapter is its elaboration on the spectrum of thought that has defined the tradition, and the tension between those who rely on tradition to guide their interpretation of the religion and those who rely on human reason to interpret Islam. It is important to remember that these aspects of the

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religion developed through a process of dialogue and debate; this is a community discourse and not a product of one particular religious hierarchy. These dialogues and debates, moreover, continue to this day. (p. 76)

In Chapter 5, the researchers have tried to explore the fundamental features of what are commonly referred to as "Islamic sects." A number of particular "spiritual types," to use the words of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, have emerged within the tradition, which include Sunnism, Shi'ism, and the diversity therein. This chapter will examine these types via their theological and philosophical contributions to the Islamic discourse. One of the important contributions of this chapter is that it allows readers to better understand the modern implications of these debates, which are more fully discussed in subsequent chapters.

Part II examines Islam in a modern political context. This includes a discussion of the ongoing debate about the proper relationship between Islam and political authority. Although it is commonly argued that there is no distinction between religion and state in the Islamic tradition, the reality has always been otherwise. While the Prophet Muhammad embodied both religious and political authority, the relationship between the two remained unclear during the reign of the immediate successors to the Prophet. Subsequent trends in Islamic history, moreover, saw the emergence of a separation of function – and even competition – between religious authorities and their political counterparts. At issue in this ongoing competition is, on the one hand, the role of religious authorities in regulating the affairs of state, and, on the other, the danger to Islamic tradition of its overt manipulation by political leaders. An additional issue involves the reassertions of the demands for a caliphate (the single embodiment of both religious and political authority).

Chapter 6 examines these issues in the context of societies that established secular political structures in the early and mid-20th century. The most influential and extreme example of the secular trend is Turkey, whose modern founder, Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, sought to orient a newly recreated Turkey toward Europe, not the Arab Middle East. The secular political structure in Turkey marked a sharp break from the Ottoman past. Turkey was not the only case, however. Pre-revolutionary Iran (1906–1979), Nasser's Egypt, the Arab nationalist states of Syria and Iraq, among others, were all consciously secular. At the heart of this movement was a twofold belief. On the one hand, the effort to modernize entailed a de-emphasis (or elimination) of religion, or at least its relegation to the margins of public life. (p. 128)

Chapter 7 looks at states that took very different approaches to these issues, and linked religious authority to state authority in various ways. Here we review the underlying rationale – the assumption that Islam is both a religion and a state (*din wa dawla*) – and how this relationship has manifested in practice. The most well-known examples of this close affiliation of religion and state power are in Iran (which has a self-consciously theocratic political structure) and Saudi Arabia (a sharia-inclined state where religious officials do not actually rule). However, there are numerous other examples (and precedents), such as those found in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan (both during the 19th century Mahdist regime and under the current government). Chapter 8 examines the question of Muslim minorities living in the West. At issue are the various challenges

associated with integrating into Western society while retaining one's cultural and religious heritage. On the one hand, there is an understandable resistance among Muslim minorities to assimilate into a largely secular culture, while on the other, there is an often visceral opposition within majority communities to tolerate in a non-discriminatory manner minority populations in their midst. This is not a new challenge, but is an enduring feature of human history. What makes the issue of Muslim minorities living in the West so unique in the 21st century is the high level of emigration that has transpired since the end of World War II.

Part III focuses on regional examinations. The next four chapters offer a survey of Muslims in different regions and continents. These regions were selected, in large measure, by their significant history and size of Muslim populations. They were also selected to provide a glimpse into the diversity of Islam culture and traditions. Chapter 9 begins this exploration in Africa. It looks at the penetration, expansion, and assimilation of Islam on the African continent, with a particular focus on the regions south of the Sahara desert. This review sheds light on the diversity of the religious experience, the historical context and, ultimately, the emergence of powerful Muslim states. The chapter also looks at the development of important movements of Islamic reform during the colonial and postcolonial eras. This helps to shed light on both the past and present traits of Islam in Africa, often neglected in the study of Islam as a global phenomenon. Chapter 10 looks at Islam within the countries of South Asia: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Out of the roughly 1.6 billion who live on the sub-continent, nearly a third are Muslim. This gives the subcontinent one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Like the other regions in Asia, Islam first arrived via commercial traders in the 8th century, though its influence became most pronounced in later centuries, particularly with the rise of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century. While the Mughals were eclipsed by British colonial rule in the mid-19th century, Islam has nonetheless remained a powerful cultural and political force in the region. It has given rise to a variety of political movements, and various South Asian thinkers have greatly influenced popular understandings of Islam throughout the world.

In Chapter 11 we explore Islam in the much understudied regions of the former Soviet Republics. This area is home to more than 50 million Muslims. Scholars have previously only focused on the non-Muslim peoples, presuming that Islam had been relegated to extinction by decades of policies of eradication. This chapter provides a look at the Islamic revival present in the region. The focus of Chapter 12 turns our attention to the experience of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesia is, of course, the nation with the largest Muslim population on the planet, and would be of interest for that reason alone. But it is also of interest because of its democratic governing structures, its pluralist vision of Islam, and its model of economic development. While Indonesia is not immune to the economic, political, and social pressures endemic in the region, the country has, nonetheless, navigated these challenges in an innovative manner. Similarly, in Malaysia, the diversity of the population – with numerous Hindus, ethnic Chinese Christians, and other populations – has limited the appeal (and viability) of an exclusive religious politics. The chapter subsequently looks at the politics, culture, and development of these societies and how they were shaped by – and helped to shape – Islam in the region. In Chapter 13, we examine the Muslim histories in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Though not traditionally considered a Muslim region, the history of Muslims in this area goes back over 500 years. Individuals of Moorish descent from both the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa arrived along with Spanish colonization. Though many came as slaves, they nonetheless brought with them their religion, tradition, and culture. Subsequent migrations came in later centuries, and have contributed to a distinct sensibility of the region. This chapter helps to reveal the global breadth of Islam and its indelible but often overlooked role in shaping the culture, architecture, and life in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Part IV, the final part of the textbook, examines Islam in a globalized world. Chapter 14 takes up this topic by viewing the challenges of teaching Islam in the post-9/11 West. Given the politicization of Islam and the involvement of Western governments in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, and other Muslim countries, providing unbiased information on the diversity of the Islamic experience has proved contentious and difficult. A central part of the issue is the lack of qualified instructors, as well as the unevenness of knowledge. A second feature is the atmosphere in which instructors are teaching. The politicized nature of the course content and the classroom make frank and open conversations difficult at best.

What makes the teaching of Islam particularly difficult in the contemporary context is the question of violence, terrorism, and extremism. Chapter 15 addresses these issues directly. It begins with a recognition that the connections between religion and violence can be found in all traditions. This is what Scott Appleby has referred to as the "ambivalence of the sacred," where religion serves as both a warrant for violent action and a call for peace and tolerance. While the core ethical teachings of Islam concern justice and peace, Islamist organizations such as al-Qaeda have nonetheless resorted to violence as a means of pursuing their political ends. This has contributed to a perception in the West that Islam (as a world religion) has a unique predisposition toward violence. Ironically, the moral judgment of the West with regard to the question of violence by Islamic activists is itself highly ambivalent. When the US supported the mujahidin (holy warriors) fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during the Cold War, they were seen as heroic and led Ronald Reagan to deem them to be the "moral equivalent of America's Founding Fathers." Nonetheless, it is the memories of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and, later, the first Gulf War, that shaped a view of Islam as hostile to the West.

In the conclusion, this book allows the readers especially the audience of Western world to understand Islam in a more contextualized and critical manner. Starting off from the very genesis of Islam and discussing religious structures vis-à-vis Islamic political theory, permeation of Islamic into Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Contextualizing Islam from its roots and tracing the challenges of globalization is the daunting task undertaken by these experts and makes it more compelling and important for students and researchers interested in understanding the history of Islam.