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Abstract

A review of:

Muslims in Global Politics: Identities, Interests, and Human Rights. By Mahmood Monshipouri. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. 325pp.

Keywords

Human rights, Muslim identity, Globalization, Politics, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, Islam

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Muslims in Global Politics: Identities, Interests, and Human Rights. By Mahmood Monshipouri. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. 325pp.

In *Muslims in Global Politics*, Professor Monshipouri explores the relationship between identity, globalization, and human rights. He examines the basic question: how does a Muslim navigate his or her identity in a globalized world? Monshipouri suggests that the issue of identity should be understood in the context of human rights, and global politics would benefit from a better understanding of identity-politics in the Muslim world. His task is not easy given the complexity revolving around globalization and identity formation, to say nothing of the diversity of the more than one billion Muslims in the world. Despite the daunting nature of this project, Monshipouri's main contribution to the literature on human rights in Muslim societies is to provide a framework to better understand these important aspects of global politics.

The book's first three chapters offer a theoretical framework to understand how culture and identity shape the lives of Muslims in different parts of the world. In these opening chapters, Monshipouri explains how identities are constructed due to the context and circumstances in which an individual finds himself/herself. He notes that colonization, modernization, and Western ideas have all impacted the identity of Muslims: "Political Islam is a post colonial or anti-colonial phenomenon to the extent that it is a response to the incursions of western ideas into Muslim lands. It is also part of the drive to restore the identity and dignity of Muslims" (13). Later chapters further elaborate on these themes when Monshipouri discusses the British influence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the US impact in Iraq. The Iranian Revolution, he reminds us, was due in part to the cultural and religious attacks by the Shah's Western-inspired modernization program (168).

Next, Monshipouri develops a typology of Muslims to show the diverse ways that conservatives, neofundamentalists, reformists, and secularists construct their identities, and how they interact with politics at the local, national, and international level. In explaining the differences between these groups, Monshipouri describes the agents involved (for example, clerics, versus Islamic scholars, versus human rights activists), the sites where these agents press their agendas (mosques, versus national community, versus global spaces such as the internet), and the strategies they employ (grassroots activism versus seeking local or global alliances).

Gender and identity are themes throughout the book. Monshipouri examines how secular feminists and Islamic feminists have pursued greater rights and freedoms in a globalized world. Women have many obstacles to overcome in many parts of the Muslim world. In UAE, for example, a woman's inheritance is half that of a man's (133). Women in diverse countries such as Indonesia, Iran, Iraq and Turkey have many civil and political rights, including the right to vote and work, but may face unequal treatment in the area of family law. In response to various barriers, women throughout the Muslim world have created non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (e.g., the KPIKD: Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy) and started journals and magazines (e.g., *Zanan* in Iran). Others have sought political office or attempted to reform the domestic legal system.

Following these theoretical chapters Monshipouri then proceeds to offer case studies on Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Diaspora Muslims in Europe to compare how Muslims have created their identities and pursued their interests and rights. Some of the materials presented in these case studies are based on interviews he conducted throughout the Muslim world.

One proposal that Monshipouri offers for how to deal with Islamic groups that pursue their interests in the political system is to be inclusive. A more inclusive political space is needed not only to respect identity, but also to promote greater democratization:

“The surest way to advance stability and progress towards democracy in the Muslim world is to incorporate Islamists into the political and legal systems. The exclusion of Islamists is bound to lead to greater political instability and creeping Talibanization of politics in the Muslim world” (23).

In Turkey, we have witnessed a greater opening for Islamic groups and respect for the democratic rules of the game. Turkey (Chapter Seven) is a good example of how identity for many citizens has undergone significant changes from the days of Ataturk to the success of the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP) party with its roots in Islam. Prime Minister Erdogan has attempted to promote human rights, especially with regards to Turkey’s Kurdish population, and entrance into the European Union without shunning Islam. Turkey is one of the strongest examples of how Islam can have some influence on politics within a political system that respects identity and human rights.

Undergraduates taking an upper level global politics class or human rights class would greatly benefit from the historical information presented in each of the case studies. The strength of this book is the regional diversity of states and societies that Monshipouri examines. By covering Muslims not only in the Middle East, but also in Asia and Europe, the author gives a much better sense of how diverse Muslim societies are adapting to a globalized world.

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