

## BOOK REVIEWS

***Muslims in Global Politics: Identities, Interests, and Human Rights*** by Mahmood Monshipouri. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, pp. 328.

The global world order that has emerged after September 11, 2001, has for many reaffirmed the clash of civilizations thesis. The war on terrorism is seen as a war between Islam and the West, with an indispensable view of Muslim identity that intermingle it with Islamic terrorism. The question of how the West should respond to this threat has come to dominate global politics. In Western discourse, this terrorism is often framed as resistance to Western values and norms. Hence, prescriptions for dealing with the challenge of global jihadists have included not only military responses but also a campaign for "winning the hearts and minds of Muslims" that usually takes the form of initiatives to introduce "Western" secular and liberal democratic values and human rights norms to Muslim populations (p. viii). Meanwhile, the global jihadist framework is a mirror image of Western perceptions of threat and destruction, and calls for defensive action by Muslims united as a community of faith that condones violence.

In his latest book, *Muslims in Global Politics*, Mahmoud Monshipouri offers an alternative to the project of global jihadists. He convincingly depicts this movement as only one among many competing to win the Muslim hearts and minds. He sees a crowded field of contention over how to reconstruct Muslim identities and reformulate their interests. These competing movements differ in their reactions to globalization and their position on the preservation of Islamic identity. He recognizes, however, that the current socio-cultural context, which has been shaped by decades of Islamist activism coupled with domestic repression and Western hegemonic practices, is more conducive to the expansion of the global jihadists' agenda.

Monshipouri's prescription for preventing the spread of the transnational community of Islamist militants and for enhancing the enjoyment of human rights is inclusionary politics. This would encompass the integration of Islamic reformists into the political process within Muslim majority countries and of Muslim minorities into the Western societies they are living in, as well as Western engagement with Islamic reformers who have already illustrated their receptiveness to universal values, such as democracy and human rights.

The author develops this policy-relevant advice through a study that clearly demonstrates his argument that "Muslim identities are multiple, fluid, and contentious" (p. 260). Drawing on constructivist insights from international relations, his analysis takes into account the dialectical relationship between material and ideational transformations within the international system and domestic environments that continually shape and are in turn shaped by the growing number of claimants to distinct identities.

In chapter 1, he discusses the international and domestic factors that set the stage for Islamic revivalism, and how processes of both modernization and globalization have strengthened the authoritative status of Islamists of various stripes in shaping identities at the individual, national, and transnational levels and transformed existing formulations of Islamic national and state identities into new and hybrid forms.

Chapter 2 introduces a typology of four competing schools of thought--Islamic conservatives, neoconservatives, reformists, and secularists--focusing especially on their perceptions of globalization, in particular the universalization of human rights discourse and their strategies of action. The author argues that while the conservatives and neoconservatives resist global norms which they perceive as instruments of Western hegemony and secularists adopt them as the correct model, reformists look for ways of reconciling and

accommodating human rights norms within Islamic principles. He illustrates throughout the book the increasing interconnectedness of the assertion of Islamic identities and struggle for the protection of human rights alongside mounting criticism of the universal human rights regime in the post-Cold War period. Monshipouri strongly endorses calls for intercultural dialogue to negotiate a set of non-ethnocentric universal rights.

Especially commendable is chapter 3 on gender identity, which is the issue at the heart of the debate between Islamic and universal human rights. He investigates the unique role of Islamist women who have to struggle not only against state repression but also against conservative Islamism and patriarchy. He demonstrates the empowerment of women's movements and the increasing trend of cooperation between secular and Islamist women at the national and transnational levels as a clear example of the diffusion of global norms and social networks among Muslims.

In the case studies that follow, Monshipouri explores the question of how to reconcile conflicting identities that have emerged within the context of the rising influence of Islamism and Western-led globalization.

Chapters 4 to 9 provide an elaborate account of the current status of the competing claims on Islamic national and state identities in six Muslim majority countries (Egypt, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Iran, and Indonesia) by tracing the history of the contestation between the state, secularists, and Islamist movements with conservative, radical, and reformist visions. In his analysis of Egypt, Turkey, and Indonesia, author underlines the trend toward Islamic reformism. He strongly praises the reformists for their adoption of the universal values discourse based on human rights. This is especially true of his treatment of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, which he identifies as a successful example of Islamist

transformation. He argues that in sharp contrast to the Turkish case, the Iranian reformist movement failed to sustain political liberalization and rapprochement with the West because they have neglected economic development.

In chapter-10, the author examines the relationship between Muslim minorities living in Europe and the states they are living in. He illustrates the growing influence of transnational Islamic identity as these immigrants feel alienated by societies and discriminated against by state policies. By situating Islamist movements within the larger field of contention over identity, the author contributes to the debate on the relationship between universal and particularistic views of human rights in general and between Islam and international human rights specifically.

The book is rich in detail and references and will serve as a great resource for scholars, advanced students, and public policymakers interested in the topic. Yet two interrelated limitations of the study stand out: the terminology he utilizes and the recommendations he offers. In addition to his four category typology, Monshipouri frequently adds qualifiers, such as modernist, moderate, radical, and mainstream, when referring to different movements without providing his criteria for differentiating them. These terms, though frequently used in academia, are still being debated. The reviewer expected acknowledgement of the fact that naming has political consequences.

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***Samul Beckett, Wordmaster Waiting for Godot Text with Critical Commentary*** by Prof. Ira Hasan, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 187.

Prof. Ira Hasan, an acclaimed educationist and literary critic, has authored this commentary on Samuel Beckett's (1906-89) famous play *Waiting for Godot* 'with the mature Pakistani student in mind, providing access to latest criticism and developments on the theme of the play' along with 'an easy to follow explanation of the text'. It is a new kind of play categorized as absurd drama wherein its author has achieved 'a theoretical impossibility --- in which nothing happens, twice' notwithstanding its 'second act being a reprise of the first'. (Vivian Mercier)

The play was actually written in French (*En Attendant Godot*: 1949) later translated into English by its author with subtitle --- a tragicomedy in two acts (1954). It came to be considered as an example of what critic Martin Esslin later called "heater of the Absurd" which discards traditional plot, characters, and action to encumber its audience with 'a disorienting experience'. Characters indulge in apparently meaningless dialogue or activities and as a result the audience perceives what it is like to live in a universe that doesn't 'make sense'. *Waiting for Godot* is a classic example of this form of drama that can 'generate considerable suspense and dramatic tension in spite of being a play in which literally *nothing* happens, a play designed to show that nothing *can* ever happen in human life'. Despite its peculiarly facile surface, it is one of the most important dramatic works of the preceding century revolutionizing the theatre as it did and opening it to 'possibilities that playwrights and audiences had never before imagined'. The author of the present book presses the argument thus: 'After *Godot*, plots could be minimal, settings unlocalized, characters contradictory, exposition done away with, dialogue

unpredictable, one actor could talk for several minutes, another remain absolutely silent – the possibilities were suddenly inexhaustible.

Religious interpretations hold ‘Vladimir and Estragon as humanity waiting for the elusive return of a saviour’. Political interpretations stipulate ‘the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky as that of a capitalist to his labour’. Albeit its existentialist undertones, the play seems to be ‘primarily about hope’ --- the two protagonists pitifully awaiting hope to arrive. At times in the play it (hope) is constructed as a form of ‘salvation’ in the personae of Pozzo and Lucky, or even as ‘death’. How to pass the time in a situation which offers no hope, may also be deemed to be a subject of the play.

One would readily agree with the author that “Great texts in literature share a universality of application beyond time, creed, colour or place. Though expressed by two individuals, Vladimir and Estragon’s concerns are universal --- and the response to such texts remains always new because they are capable of absorbing new ideas. Texts like *Waiting for Godot* are ageless.”

Prof. Ira Hasan’s *Commentary on Godot* comprises six chapters dealing with some useful but relevant information on its author Samuel Beckett, structure of the play, an indepth critical evaluation of its contents and model questions and their answers followed by a select bibliography. Written in a scholarly but lucid style, the book is a compendium of authentic academic as well as critical information on Beckett’s supreme classic *Waiting for Godot*.

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***Jisay Raat Lay Uri Hawa*** by Muhammad Iqbal Diwan. Karachi: Scheherzade, 2010, pp. 399.

The seminal difference between an autobiography and a memoir, as the expert academics say, is that the former is chronological and sequential in character and follows a certain timeline while the later is a random set of recollections, significant episodes which does not necessarily follow a necessary timeline.

*Jisay Raat Lay Uri Hawa* by Muhammad Iqbal Diwan is fascinating and unputdownable memoir of a sitting bureaucrat. From the outset a reader gets the impression that despite having mastery over the Urdu language and beautiful craftsmanship the writer is not as forthcoming and candid in the narration of events and the complete story and description of certain weird events and the disclosure of their characters and their bizarre feats are being withheld for the future. The main character of the book is Mr. Adnan, a bureaucrat, who is the linchpin of all the events of the book. One may safely assume that it is the *nom de plume* of the author.

The book under review is divided into five parts. Most of the book is the portrayal of certain characters (with their real identity hidden) and sharing of the author's experiences with these personas, to an extent, in a fictional context. The first part of the book deals with certain characters like Tajamul Hussain Khan and Admiral Sahib. These are not only a vivid description of demeanors and misdemeanors of serving and retired government servants but a forceful satire on their role in a developing country like ours. In the second part the writer describes the childhood memoirs of the central character of the book Mr. Adnan, his early education and some characters which influenced his upbringing and school education. This part also sheds some light on the Indian state of Gujarat and its famous personalities who played a pivotal role in the realms of politics, religion and business in the

subcontinent. The brief history of stick dance in the Gujarat and Rajasthan regions of India is fascinating and grips the readers. The third part of the book is almost devoted to the ominous and eerie working and characters of Karachi underworld. This part is not only interesting but instructively eye opener to the common readers. It shows how a surreptitious world exists and operates with impunity in a way it wants. The fourth part of the book is a collection of some rambling episodes which show machinations and espionage of secret services such as RAW and MOSSAD and the assassination of Bengali leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the events which precipitated this tragedy. The fifth part of the book captioned "Aunty M" is an excellent study of Sufism which revolves around a female mystic and her real or presumed supernatural powers. But the beauty of this part is succinct delineation of the spirit, philosophy and practice of Islamic mysticism. Historical anecdotes and appropriate citations from the Sufi texts increase the worth of this part and make it illuminating and incisive.

The abundant merits of the book make it worth reading. The literary style, lucidity and flow of language make it impressive. Mr. Diwan in writing of this book has fully made use of his command over Urdu language. Such an appropriate use of diction is hard to find in the writings of many contemporary Urdu writers. Mr. Diwan appears to be a voracious reader of not only Urdu prose but also of Urdu poetry, classical and modern both.

The book does not just offer the pleasure of prose reading but a variety of quality verses also. The appropriate selection of verses at the relevant places accentuates the language as well as its effect. These verses make the reading of the text a pleasurable experience. Interestingly, the writer not only makes use of verses from poetry of known poets from the subcontinent but also quotes many songs from Indian and Pakistani films. The language creates an impact of poetic



prose and the reader finds himself carried away because of the beauty of the text's language and diction.

What makes this book an interesting text to read is the fact that it is not just the tale of one character but is fused with the narratives of lot of characters – each having its own tale to tell. Whether these characters are from the bureaucracy and the government circles of Pakistan like *Tajjamal Hussain Khan*, *Roe Peetiyo Baloch* or *Admiral Sahib* or from the Karachi underworld like *Tahir Babu* or from the mystical realms like *Aunty M*, all are dealt with in detail. He seems in love with all the characters he talks about in his text and develops them in way that not a single necessary detail remains untouched. Each new character turns up with a new tale, more interesting than the previous one.

The writer has a keen and sensitive eye to what is worth mentioning and what should remain untold. Writer's focus on the minute details is absolute and his description of such details seems inevitable in the texture of the narrative. While reading this book one can't help but be reminded of Quadrat-ullah-Shahab's *Shahab Nama*. Mr. Iqbal Diwan also seems to be treading on the same path; a bureaucrat turned writer turned Sufi, highlighting the enigmatic socio-political milieu of Pakistan in a Sufi framework, coloured with many fictional and real tales of the elite as well as of common people.

Despite merits, the book is not free from its share of pitfalls and loopholes. Typographical mistakes are not uncommon. On couple of occasions historical details and facts are not described accurately. For example Shaikh-ul-Hind Mahmud Hassan is written as Mahmud-ul-Hassan (P. 52, 345). The known Muslim polemicist Dr. Zakir Naik has been mentioned as belonging to Gujarat rather than Mumbai (P. 105). Mario Puzo rather than Harold Robbins has been described as the author of the book *Dreams Die First* (P. 175). Similarly Pnina Werbner's wonderful study *Pilgrims of Love* is written as 'The Pilgrim

of Love' (P. 360). One expects that the next edition of the book would be free from such galling errors, both factual and typographical.

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