



**Engaging the Other: Public Policy and Western-Muslim Intersections.** Edited by Karim H. Karim & Mahmoud Eid. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. ISBN 9781137403681.

What is productive engagement between the Self and Other? How can it counter the war-on-terror conflict model dominant in geopolitics over the last two decades? Conceived as a learned attempt to displace Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis—which Sut Jhally and Edward Said (1998) have called a “rather crudely articulated manual in the art of wartime status in the minds of Americans”—*Engaging the Other: Public Policy and Western-Muslim Intersections* makes a crucial contribution to answers for these and other urgent questions. Like Said (1998), the editors Karim H. Karim from Carleton University and Mahmoud Eid from the University of Ottawa, begin by unmasking the Orientalist tricks in Huntingdon’s work. The contributing scholars in *Engaging the Other* are diverse in age, gender, and ethnic and disciplinary origin, writing from the perspectives of law, Ismaili studies, architecture, political psychology, communication, religion, and world politics. They share the view that the Muslim worlds—accounting for over a billion and a half followers globally and projected to equal Christians in number by 2050, according to the *World Economic Forum* (2015)—are pluralistic and restless, engaged in a “great and often silent exchange and dialogue” (Said, 1998) with the West. The articles in the book employ three main pedagogical approaches: counter-historiography, sociology of law, and analysis of political attitudes and participation.

Karim and Eid start not from their subject positions in the West, but from the Muslim worlds, translating them for the neophyte Western reader. The Western caricatures of the history of Muslim civilization as leading “to scriptural dogmatism, authoritarian morality, and unreformed medievalism” (p. 76) are turned on their heads. Masud Taj, an expert on Muslim civilization and the history of architecture, explores Toledo in Spain over successive conquests to remind us that the early Muslim presence in Spain has been there for a period longer than since the Enlightenment. He points out that the Renaissance itself is indebted to a massive transfer of scientific knowledge and Moorish rationalism from Muslim lands to Europe and that Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* is adapted from an earlier Arabic text authored by a Muslim scholar. Exchange is two-way, when successive rulers (from Alfonso VI to Alfonso X as pioneers of the “Convivencia,” or the period when Muslims, Christians, and Jews are said to have harmoniously co-existed) adapt their own construction of Muslim law from the first codified volume of laws in Europe.

Marianne Farina (a sister of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross and student of interfaith scripture) demonstrates how, as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries, formative Muslim thinker Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Christian scholar Saint Thomas Aquinas share a respect for “intellectual magnanimity” (p. 44) that “doesn’t wilt in the face of conflict” (p. 49) in its negotiation for the common

good. Al-Ghazali and Aquinas both value the dialectic between faith and reason. Search for truth deepens faith. Faith is not “dictated” but “handed on” and in turn rewoven with the experience of the day. Author Shiraz Thobani of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London provides an equally insightful and nuanced reading of the dialectics between universalism and culturalism in liberal education theory, and a welcome critique of Martha Nussbaum’s conception of a cosmopolitan “world citizen” (p. 75).

The second pedagogical strand examines commonalities between Islamic and Western law and society. Anicée Van Engeland (from the SOAS University of London’s School of Law) develops a close textual hermeneutic reading of Islamic law in Muslim majority countries to challenge the Western reader’s unthinking reflex that democracy equals human rights, and that human rights thrive only in secular thought. Western readers are introduced to Muslim thinkers such as Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im who champion autonomous Shariah. Van Engeland also points to a range of reforms implementing human rights in authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world, including changes to child custody in divorce in Iran in 2003, abortion law in Indonesia in 2009, and the prohibition of female genital mutilation in Mali in 2011. Like Western feminist historians, Van Engeland notes such progress in Muslim majority countries may be erratic and subject to reversal, but it tends to be more enduring if bottom up rather than top down. Co-editor Karim H. Karim is also concerned with the ontological and epistemological basis for autonomous institutions in Muslim societies. He traces the evolution of the mosque as social centre and increasingly interfaith negotiator, the rise of Islamic Banks, professional associations, foundations, and movements, such as the Turkish Gulen, devoted to fostering a Muslim consciousness while drawing on Islamic values of providing welfare to the disadvantaged. Karim acknowledges most major Muslim organizations are fairly conservative. Efforts at forming global progressive unions have failed, but Karim singles out the Canadian Council of Muslim Women for its strong record for engaging productively with the larger Canadian society.

The third pedagogical approach searches for commonalities in contemporary political and cultural practices among citizens in Muslim and Western countries today. Co-editor Mahmoud Eid explores the politics of out and in-group identity in immigration, security, and integration policies since 9/11, and finds little proof that racial profiling and discrimination are on the wane. Muslims remain at a disadvantage in movement across borders and in immigration. Eid cites polls across a number of countries that show increasing concern among citizens about the integration of newcomers. Eid argues Western policymakers need a much more nuanced understanding of the role of religion in this integration process to maintain a balance between religion and daily existence.

Perhaps the most provocative news is presented by Steven Kull, a political psychologist from the University of Maryland, and by Jocelyne Cesari from Georgetown University. Kull argues that recent polls in Muslim majority countries disclose that both liberal and Islamist principles are endorsed by citizens, and uncover unshakeable beliefs that great heights for Islamic culture will be regained in the future. Misconception about the Muslim people’s preference for strong authoritarian leaders is defused. But internal views are split over how fair Shariah law is to non-Muslims, or how strictly it must be applied. Inasmuch as Muslim society embraces clearly contra-

dictory values, this “inner conflict” is all too easily manipulated by unscrupulous leaders and projected onto the United States. In other words, Muslims may be the agents of at least some of the clash, but solutions cannot be externally imposed. In a West where visible Islamic immigrant identities are too often interpreted as signs of political or civic disloyalty, Cesari finds it is not personal religiosity, but attachment to group markers that are predictive of loyalty and democratic engagement. As a consequence, then, increased suspicion of Islamic practices, such as wearing the Niqab for citizens at swearing-in ceremonies, is not supported by evidence. A high degree of Islamic religiosity can coexist with high levels of trust and democratic engagement among Muslims in the U.S., notwithstanding 9/11, but not Europe. When they do vote, diasporic Muslims across the countries studied tend to align with the political left.

Faiza Hirji, a media studies scholar from McMaster University, looks at evidence in North American popular culture for the construction of alternative Muslim portrayals. She reviews recent TV series, ranging from *24*, *the Border*, *Blue Bloods*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, and *All-American Muslim*. While rife with problematic portrayals, the shows set up both confident Muslim feminists and progressive Muslim men for non-Muslims to identify with, and in some cases model conciliatory behaviour and show viewers that, if nothing else, Muslims participate in normal life and not just crisis situations. Combined with initiatives like those from the Canadian Islamic Congress, which monitor anti-Islamic bias and seek remedy from media outlets, there is hope for the alleviation of alienation and increase in mutual knowledge in popular culture. *Engaging the Other* concludes with attention to efforts to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue between Muslim and Western societies and combat extremist militancy led by past Iranian president Mohammad Khatami (through the Institute for Dialogue Among Cultures and Civilizations and Spain and Turkey) through the Alliance of Civilizations—but change will take many years to manifest.

While readers may wonder at the exclusion of economic or foreign policy intersections by the co-editors, this is a sweeping cultural review. Productive encounters between civilizations begin from respect for liberal and Muslim values and look for areas of social concordance. They challenge the either/or Huntington clash thesis with the “both/and” nexus, or what the authors call “relational” thinking based on the study of collective social and individual connections across civilizations. While a potentially useful antidote to the solipsism of the liberal individual, replacing conflicting fault lines with cooperative bridges as implied in relational thinking is only one part of the solution. World citizens today need to recognize their own subjectivities are self and group productions in need of translation. But, at the same time, more work is needed from the subject positions of the Muslim in unpacking “Occidentalism” or the sweeping dismissal of modernity, democracy, secularism, and the West (Odartey-Wellington, 2014). Overcoming the conceptual and ethical challenges facing scholars requires profound existential commitment and labour on behalf of the other to leave both the clash of civilizations and mutual ignorance behind. There is much basis for optimism about finding mutuality in engagement in this volume to appreciate and to guide further praxis.

## References

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