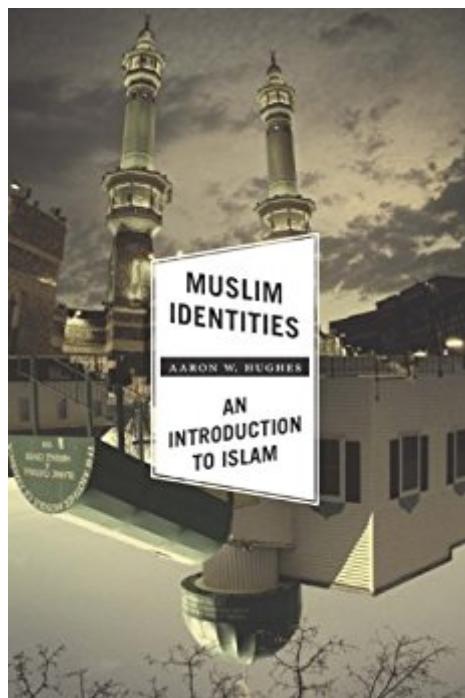


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Muslim Identities: An Introduction To Islam (NONE)



Synopsis

Rather than focus solely on theological concerns, this well-rounded introduction takes an expansive view of Islamic ideology, culture, and tradition, sourcing a range of historical, sociological, and literary perspectives. Neither overly critical nor apologetic, this book reflects the rich diversity of Muslim identities across the centuries and counters the unflattering, superficial portrayals of Islam that are shaping public discourse today. Aaron W. Hughes uniquely traces the development of Islam in relation to historical, intellectual, and cultural influences, enriching his narrative with the findings, debates, and methodologies of related disciplines, such as archaeology, history, and Near Eastern studies. Hughes' work challenges the dominance of traditional terms and concepts in religious studies, recasting religion as a set of social and cultural facts imagined, manipulated, and contested by various actors and groups over time. Making extensive use of contemporary identity theory, Hughes rethinks the teaching of Islam and religions in general and helps facilitate a more critical approach to Muslim sources. For readers seeking a non-theological, unbiased, and richly human portrait of Islam, as well as a strong grasp of Islamic study's major issues and debates, this textbook is a productive, progressive alternative to more classic surveys.

Book Information

File Size: 1420 KB

Print Length: 330 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 0231161476

Publisher: Columbia University Press (April 23, 2013)

Publication Date: April 23, 2013

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00C0JH00C

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #430,662 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #45

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > Theology #120 in Kindle

Customer Reviews

The author holds the Philip S. Bernstein Chair of Jewish Studies in the Department of Religion and Classics at the University of Rochester. He's a religion scholar with a Ph.D. from Indiana University-Bloomington. He's published a couple of previous books about Islam. Overall, I appreciated this book and learned from it. It's straightforward, suitable for an advanced undergraduate course in religion studies or comparative religion. It's not a textbook, though -- by which I mean it's not one of those crappy volumes cobbled together by a committee and marketed en masse. It's very well footnoted, and every chapter has a book list at the end, "suggestions for further reading." My biggest criticism of the book is that the author continually repeats a caveat that Islam is not a "one size fits all" religion. It gets really tiring. This is why I mentioned that undergraduate market -- I felt like he wanted to keep repeating this caution in case somebody picked up the book and only read one chapter. I've talked with a number of Muslims from different countries about their religious beliefs and practices. It's really interesting to get one person's perspective. But when you read an academic study (albeit a survey like this one) about a religion, you get a bird's-eye view. You get historical perspectives. You learn about why Sunnis and Shi'as are separate from each other. Hughes includes a chapter about Sufis too, which I enjoyed very much (see my Goodreads review of *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*). By far my favorite chapter was "Encounters with Modernity," because it brought in the collision of cultures (colonialism) that naturally reverberates in the Arab World even today. This book has almost nothing about how Islam is practiced in Southeast Asia. I can see why, but I felt like that could have added another dimension to the arguments about adaptation and interpretation. This book is very much like books I have read about the history of Buddhism -- in that it discusses what historical evidence exists, and what trained scholars have found and debated, about widely accepted beliefs and tenets of faith. This was exactly the kind of book I hoped to find when I went looking for a book about Islam -- I'm never going to read 10 or even five books about this religion and its history, so I wanted to find one that tried to look at all the viewpoints. I think this book does a good job of that.

I was very close to giving this book 5 stars. It is certainly a 4.5. This book has been the best primer to Islam that I have read and has helped my understanding Islam greatly. It has a lucid and compact introduction to the early history of the movement and its later developments. This book will probably

disappoint many who are looking for something to confirm their own feelings about Islam whether positive or negative. As the title suggests the book is about how Islam is really a broad religious movement containing many different and contradictory identities within, which all claim to be "true" Islam. The author identifies many of the different strains currently seen within Islam, has a chapter on the role of women and concludes with an examination of post 9-11 Islam, discussing both the fundamentalist and liberal reactions. The author uses a post modern perspective to show how the different groups use the source materials from the Koran, Sunna, Hadith, and schools of interpretation to create their own unique "Muslim identity". As someone who is outside the traditions it is not my place to judge what is true Islam or false, I can only listen to those who say this is what they believe. This book has helped me see that their allies within Islam to those who want to build peace, uphold the dignity of all people and solve problems in our world. Unfortunately it also reminds that there are very real movements that use the exact same sources to build an ideology of religious supremacy. It is because this book reveals this unvarnished reality that I recommend it highly. It is a book primarily dedicated to help the reader understand.

This book is a breath of fresh air for someone looking for an introduction to Islam through the perspective of religious theory. Contrary to other reviews, Aaron Hughes does not set out to *undermine* the religion. Rather, he offers a scholarly and informed take on the development and function of Islam, and its role in the construction of Islamic identity. Hughes is a notable scholar in theory and religion and he brings that scholarship to bear on his treatment of Islam. He is helpful in showing the complexity of its rise and outlining the genealogy of the sectarian strife within. Rather than viewing Islam as a clear and defined *religion* that produces orthodoxy and heterodoxy independent of its adherents, he sees the Muslims as social actors who employ a finite set of symbols deemed authoritative to produce their understanding of *Muslim identity*. If you want a helpful introduction to the religion that is thoughtful and provocative, then this is your source. If you want a scholar who is clearly conversant with scholarship in religious theory (e.g. Clifford Geertz, Talal Asad, Tamoko Masuzawa, Jonathan Z. Smith, etc.) then this is your source.

This book is extremely biased against Islam. The author writes in the beginning that he will follow a "middle path between theological introductions to Islam and works that seeks to undermine the religion." However, the book itself turns out to be a book that undermines Islam. The author did his best to find any single polemic that is around non-academic and anti-Islam settings and integrated

them into his "introduction to Islam." Throughout the book, he tries to discredit very well established scholars of Islam such as Karen Armstrong, Tariq Ramadan, etc... This is funny because the author himself is not a scholar on Islam. His major scholarship is on Judaism. He is the Philip S. Bernstein Professor of Jewish Studies at University of Rochester. I was really surprised how a prestigious press such as Columbia published this book as a textbook. It cannot serve as a textbook for Islam classes. This book doesn't introduce Islam. It introduces non-intellectual and polemical arguments against Islam.

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