

Z. Fareen PARVEZ, *Politicizing Islam: The Islamic Revival in France and India* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017)

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Parvez's *Politicizing Islam* is a rich and incisive multi-sited ethnography, based on more than two years of field work in France and India, that asks how religious minority communities experience and navigate life under different types of secular regimes. In these two countries, the book focuses on Muslim communities in which there has been a significant Islamic revival over the past few decades. While the Muslim experience in Europe (particularly in France) has received a fair amount of treatment, this is the first study of its kind, to my knowledge, to systematically compare cases from the Global North and Global South. The book's original comparative design leverages the fact that France and India represent the secular states with the largest Muslim populations in Europe and India respectively. By narrowing her fieldwork down on Lyon and Hyderabad, second-cities with significant Muslim communities, the author is able to traverse scales from the national to the local municipal level and to encompass both state and civil society actors.

Perhaps most interestingly, the analysis also intentionally crosses the class line: Parvez' interlocuters include middle and upper class leaders of Muslim associations and philanthropic organizations but also include the objects of that philanthropy, giving equal treatment to the subaltern and marginalized working class communities in the *banlieues* of Lyons and slums of Hyderabad. This is one of the very few studies of the politics of Islam to explicitly address class, and the author skillfully draws on a finely-nuanced ethnographic analysis of interactions across class lines to support her larger findings about important variations in how Muslim minority communities navigate different national secular contexts.

The politicization and depoliticization of Islam and the related question—who politicizes Islam—is one of the central tensions in the book. Though counterintuitive, Parvez finds that it is not really the Islamists, or so-called Salafi extremists, who are politicizing Islam in France or India. It is the secular policies and practices of the French state, the Lyon city government, the Indian federal state, and the

Hyderabad government that function as the primary driver for politicizing Islam. Parvez argues, first, that different secular contexts—assimilationist and pluralist—politicize Muslim identity in different ways in France versus India. Second, she emphasizes that this varies by class. In Pluralist India, where a politics of recognition has marked Muslim identity since independence, middle class Muslims are focused on economic redistribution while the subaltern classes care most about community building. In Assimilationist France, the Muslim middle class seeks to achieve political recognition from the French state, while working class actors practice what Parvez labels “antipolitics,” the “expulsion of politics altogether,” working instead “to protect and nourish their private spheres, build a moral community, and achieve serenity and acceptance of divine will” [5].

The empirical chapters delve into this four-fold comparison of middle and working class Muslim communities and their experience as minorities in France and India. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Hyderabad, analyzing the redistributive politics that the middle class and elite activists prioritize, then turn to the community building concerns of the subaltern groups. Chapters 5 and 6 shift to the Lyon case, looking at the political struggle of the Muslim middle class for recognition vis à vis the French state, and the unique antipolitics—an inward focus on faith and participation in a moral community—practiced by working class Muslim communities living in Lyon’s “below the poverty line” districts.

Each of these empirical chapters highlights the salience of gender in politicizing Islam, with both state and Muslim community actors making women’s questions—with respect to dress, particularly the wearing or not wearing of the veil or the burqa, and in terms of the use of Islamic family law—central to defining and maintaining a secular order or in defining Muslim community. The book’s original comparative structure clarifies that there is no neutral state umpire with respect to religion, no unmarked secular state, but that each regime has an implicit religious bias that is deeply connected to trajectories of state formation.

The comparative structure also provokes several important questions. For example, the brief discussion in Chapter 2 of the longer colonial trajectories structuring both cases offers tantalizing prospects for further comparative analysis of the symmetries and asymmetries in the two cases. One could further trace out the different state negotiations of secularism in a comparative sociology of empire looking at the French and British cases. How did France and Britain

negotiate the state-religion relationship in the colonies versus the metropole and what legacies did this generate in both the post-colony and the post-metropole? In another direction, while this book focuses on Muslim subgroups in France and India, further research could expand to include other religious minority groups (Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witness, Jews, Sikhs, Indian Christians) or bring in race to increase comparative leverage on the specificity versus generalizability of the Muslim experience. Also, Parvez' discussion of the antipolitics practiced by the working classes in France in many respects corresponds to the Egyptian women's piety movements studied by Saba Mahmood: are these in fact similar or does the religious/secular politicization of Islam in Muslim-majority contexts like Egypt differ for these populations?

*Politicizing Islam* will surely prove of great interest to a range of readers spanning sociology, political science, anthropology and sub-fields related to religion, gender, and politics. It also important to draw attention to the Appendix, which contains an insightful reflexive meditation on the author's positionality as a researcher and the struggles this type of fieldwork provoked. This section relates the dilemmas and guilt one experiences as a social scientific observer: the bifurcation of self required in seeing the world as sociological spectacle, the standing in and out of ourselves required when undertaking ethnographic participant observation, the personal dimension of interacting with others about God and possibilities for faith, and the very real ethical conundrums of producing knowledge about populations the state regards almost solely through a securitized lens. In this section, Parvez wrestles with how to reconcile being authentic to herself and to her interlocuters in a remarkable statement that will prove an important reference for reflexive sociology.

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