

Tamara Sonn. *Is Islam an Enemy of the West?*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016. 152 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5095-0441-1.

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Tamara Sonn asks an important question in this book: Is Islam an enemy of the West? This question is particularly relevant now, as Western societies are experiencing a rise of Islamophobia. In the United States, for example, anti-Muslim organizations held an anti-sharia national march, and ten states, so far, have adopted laws to ban the use of foreign law, which ultimately targets the influence of sharia law.[1] In the United Kingdom, anti-Muslim hate crimes have surged five-fold since the London Bridge attacks of June 2017. [2] Amid the hostile environment against Muslims, Sonn offers a thoughtful answer to this question. Sonn argues that Muslims have grievances with the West not due to religious differences but due to the result of Western policies toward the Muslim world. Therefore, Islam is not an enemy to the West. In fact, religion is not the main cause of conflict; politics is the problem. Grievances could feed terrorism, and politics causes grievances; politics has to be changed, not religion. Covering the politics of various Muslim countries in relation to Western countries, Sonn engages skillfully with a variety of sources to prove her point.

Sonn makes a number of important claims in the book. First, in discussing the political development of mainstream Muslim countries, Sonn argues that “Muslims want just and effective gover-

nance, and economic development. Most Muslims express support for representative governments, for government by consent of the governed, and for rule of law and human rights” (p. 11). Second, she shows that jihadi Islamists are as much the enemies of Muslims as they are the enemies of the West. Indeed, many Muslims are the victims of jihadi Islamists, yet due to terrorism in the West committed in the name of Islam, many Westerners have a negative view of Islam. Third, although al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) try to take advantage of Islam, recruiters for these organizations were “instructed to target only people who are not very religious” (p. 33). This tactic shows that terrorists have difficulty justifying their actions based on religion. Fourth, Islam prohibits, and the majority of Muslims oppose, terrorism: “Sharia is about preserving these human rights—life, religion, family, property, and human dignity.... Life is sacred in Islamic law” (p. 44). Fifth, conflating Islam with terrorism can create more enemies of the West rather than eradicating terrorism. Although Western policies often equate Islam with terrorism, we should not forget that the majority of Muslims are against terrorism. The Qu’ran does not teach people to be terrorists, and it cannot be understood and interpreted without considering the contexts in which it was written.

Sonn's book has many virtues. Writing clearly and effectively, Sonn shows her impressive knowledge about Islam and politics. This book will help policymakers as well as ordinary citizens to break their misunderstanding about Islam. While this book is an informative and engaging study, three weaknesses remain. First, when Sonn discusses Muslim grievances, she mainly deals with European colonialism and postcolonial conflicts. However, European colonialism and postcolonial conflicts in the Middle East do not alone explain al-Qaeda and ISIS. Thus, it would have been helpful to explore the other factors which contributed to the grievances and helped these groups reproduce, perhaps by discussing the recent US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as Muslim grievances against their own corrupt and incompetent governments. Second, while I agree with Sonn that context is critical in understanding the Qu'ran, Qu'ranic literalists would adamantly disagree with context-specific interpretations. Sonn needs to address Islamic schools of thought, such as Wahabism or Salafism, that adhere to the literal interpretation of the Qu'ran and Hadith (the sayings and customs of Muhammad and his companions) and influence extremists' violence. For example, a set of *Foreign Policy* articles debated whether extremists' violence can be traced back to Islam's core teachings. [3] These debates are polarized—one article finds the roots in the Qu'ran and the other finds the roots in socioeconomic problems. In order to have a full picture of how terrorists use Islam as their ideological weapon, Sonn could have elaborated more on how extremists interpret Islamic teachings. As their message of the caliphate draws foreign fighters from various countries in the world, more careful and in-depth dealing with strict interpretations of the Qu'ran and Hadith would have been helpful. Last, Sonn briefly discusses the political roots of conflict (pp. 113-117). More elaboration and analysis about how politics, in particular US foreign policy toward the Middle East dur-

ing the normal times, have influenced grievances and conflict would have been illuminating.

Overall, this book offers a very timely and important contribution to understanding the current status of Islam in the West. Given rising intolerance and misunderstanding toward Islam around the world, I highly recommend this book.

Notes

[1]. Carol Kuruvilla, "5 Things The Anti-Sharia Movement Gets Dangerously Wrong," *Huffington Post*, June 8, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-the-anti-sharia-movement-is-america-at-its-worst_us_59383f42e4b00610547ea348.

[2]. "Anti-Muslim hate crimes increase five-fold since London Bridge attacks," *The Guardian*, June 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/07/anti-muslim-hate-crimes-increase-fivefold-since-london-bridge-attacks>.

[3]. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Islam is A Religion of Violence," *Foreign Policy*, November 9, 2015; Manal Omar, "Islam is a Religion of Peace," *Foreign Policy*, November 9, 2015.

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