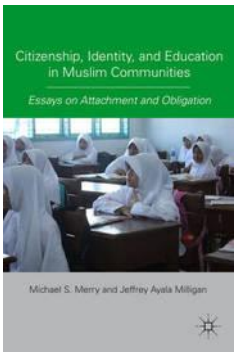
Professional Book Review

Merry, M., & Milligan, J. (2010). *Citizenship, Identity, and Education in Muslim Communities: Essays on Attachment and Obligation.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. 232 pp., ISBN: 9781403979940 (hc). $85.00

Reviewed by Bruce A. Collet, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, U. S. A.



The year 2011 began with a series of unprecedented democratic reform movements across much of the Middle East, as people called for the overthrow of regimes which had for decades curtailed their civil liberties as well as economic opportunities. The public outcries for democracy have largely, if not completely, involved Muslim populations, and the style of democratic reforms called for is anchored within distinct social and cultural contexts. In a February 9th Op-Ed piece to the *New York Times*, Essame El-Errian (2011) of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for instance, wrote, "In Egypt, religion continues to be an important part of our culture and heritage. Moving forward, we envision the establishment of a democratic, civil state that draws on universal measures of freedom and justice, which are central Islamic values. We embrace democracy not as a foreign concept that must be reconciled with tradition, but as a set of principles and objectives that are inherently compatible with and reinforce Islamic tenets."

The unique circumstances and flavor of the 2011 democratic revolutions in the Middle East make Michael Merry and Jeffrey Milligan's co-edited volume, *Citizenship, Identity, and Education in Muslim Communities: Essays on Attachment and Obligation*, that much more timely and important. Islam and democracy, puns aside, mix like oil and water in much of the Western public media and public mind, and an explicit aim of this text is to challenge this notion, seeking instead to establish a theoretical possibility of a "philosophical and doctrinally plausible overlapping consensus between Islam and democracy" (p.19). Examination into the policies and practices of schools serving Muslim communities in various sociohistorical contexts provides, in the editors' view, insight into more effective ways to educate for difference and democratic citizenship. Notwithstanding some issues concerning the compatibility of chapters across the text, this volume represents an intellectually rigorous multidisciplinary contribution to the growing literature on citizenship, identity, and education in an array of majority and minority Muslim communities.

The text is divided into two parts. Following an informative introductory chapter, the first consists of four chapters by international scholars addressing, from largely theoretical viewpoints, the plausibility of and potential for an overlapping consensus between Islam and democracy. The second examines

education and Muslim communities in the contexts of Pakistan, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. Andrew March opens the first part of the volume with a chapter examining Islamic legal discourses on the question of the permissibility of Muslims' citizenship in non-Muslim states, as well as the nature of Muslims' obligations to such states. March's chapter is followed by a contribution by Lucas Swaine who articulates central values of political liberalism and democratic citizenship with the goal of investigating their compatibility with Islam, and with the actual practices of Muslims in both Muslim as well as non-Muslim democratic societies. Tariq Modood then follows with a chapter interrogating a schism between classical liberal and multicultural conceptions of citizenship, which has resulted in what he describes as a "crisis of multiculturalism," challenging Muslims in Britain. Part One of the book closes with a selection by Yedullah Kazmi and Rosnani Hashim, examining whether being Muslim amounts to a "fact or challenge," associating the former with a monolithic and pre-ordained identity and the latter with a dialogical process between individuals and their particular sociohistorical contexts.

The selections comprising the first part of the text establish an interesting and broad range of ideas within which to situate at least some of the questions raised in Part Two. Each of the contributors represents a unique angle on the topic of overlapping consensus. In arriving at a doctrinally possible, although not guaranteed, social contract between Muslims and a non-Muslim liberal democracy, March appeals to Islamic doctrine as a primary source of guidance. Swaine in turn works from core tenets of liberalism, particularly normative issues concerning democratic citizenship, to find areas of compatibility between Islam and liberal democracy. Contrastingly, in his defense of a robust and difference-sensitive version of multiculturalism, Modood begins with a *critique* of classical liberal conceptions of citizenship that, through aggressive assertions of equality as well as secularism, obfuscate important understandings of difference. Finally, Kazmi and Hashim appeal to human agency rather than doctrine or policy in rejecting the idea of a monolithic Muslim identity in favor of viewing identity as something "created in a given socio-historical context" (p. 86).

The varying angles portrayed in Part One broaden the possibilities for meaningful comparisons with the second part of the text. In his chapter on religious education in Pakistan, Matthew Nelson finds the challenge to democracy from religious education to stem not so much from the *maktab*, or mosque-based school, as from mixed religious and secular schools. Here existing education sector markets have pushed religious education in the direction of sectarian homogeneity and have thus reinforced doctrinal "monopolies." The resistance to acknowledging religious difference that Nelson finds endemic within Pakistani communities maps in interesting ways to Modood's work; difference may be denied through both secular as well as sectarian enforcement. In his chapter on Islamic schools, social movements, and democracy in Indonesia, Robert Hefner writes optimistically about the potential for a transformative education that merges Islam and democracy in ways perceived as acceptable by the wider population. Such a project resonates with

the emphasis Kazmi and Hashim place on dialogue and deliberation in forming an Islamic identity congruent with its place and time.

Charlene Tan and Intan Mokhtar's chapter on Islamic social studies in Singapore shifts the focus to critiquing a curriculum that appeals to an Asian communitarian ideology in its framing of the "good" Muslim citizen. In their analysis that the curriculum serves mainly to advance a dominant state narrative, they call for the opportunity to allow students to consider alternative perspectives and draw their own conclusions, a position consistent with both Kazmi and Hashim's work as well as Swaine's emphasis on reciprocal and inclusive political deliberation. Finally, Rosnani Hashim's chapter on identity, education, and citizenship for Muslims in Malaysia posits that the challenge for Muslim educationists in the country is to design an education system that "not only helps to regain Muslims' identity" but also "imbues them with a sufficiently robust historical consciousness to be effective historical actors while simultaneously celebrating diversity without surrendering commonality" (p.169). Of the contributors to the volume, Hashim is perhaps the most overtly religious in her writing. Her turn to Qur'anic principles and goals as a primary data source reflects a methodology consistent with the doctrinal analysis of March, even if their respective philosophical orientations may differ.

Despite the illustrations of congruence listed above, this book also suffers a problem with respect to the compatibility of its contents. This concerns an absence of any studies of education and Muslim communities in Western contexts. The authors do stipulate that the book examines education practices in a cross-section of the Muslim world, yet a great deal of material in the first half of the book, including Merry and Milligan's own chapter, is devoted to the challenges facing Muslims in distinctly Western liberal democratic states. As noted, these discourses can and do translate at times to non-Western contexts, yet the absence seems a missed opportunity to gain more traction from the excellent discussions provided in the first part of the book. The above notwithstanding, this book is an excellent resource for scholars and practitioners wishing to gain insight into one of the most pressing issues in citizenship education today.

Reference

El-Errian, E. (2011, February 9). What the Muslim bothers want. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/10/opinion/10erian.html