

Book Presentation

ISHTIAQ AHMED

# Islam Outside the Arab World

**Islam originated in the Arab peninsula in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Currently, of the 175 million speakers of the Arabic language, some 90% are Muslim. The fact is, however, that they constitute only 15% of the estimated 148,750,000 Muslims of the world. As the second major proselytizing religion (second only to Christianity) to emerge within the Semitic tradition, Islam, in the past, spread to the various regions of the world through peaceful as well as military means. In that very long phase, it established itself primarily in Asia and Africa. Of the six most populous Muslim countries of the world – Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Turkey and Iran – none are Arab, and in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria has more Muslims than any of the Maghreb countries of North Africa.**

Since the Second World War, a major route to the internationalization of Islam has been the migration of Muslims in large numbers to Europe, North America, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand. The Muslim immigrants comprise various sorts of economic migrants as well as political and humanitarian refugees. Today Muslims are to be found in all corners of the world. They form the second major religious group in almost all European countries as well as in the United States and Canada. They observe the Islamic obligations

such as fasting during the month of Ramadan in places as far-reaching as Anchorage, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, Stockholm and Christchurch.

The contemporary processes of economic globalization, on the one hand, and political universalization of human rights issues and democracy, on the other, are exerting contradictory pressures on states and societies to develop appropriate mechanisms for dealing with an increasingly variegated and complex social order consisting of diverse faiths, practices, attitudes and aspirations – a new situation to which both Muslims and non-Muslims have to respond. The responses are not always benign and productive, but adjustment and understanding have been improving.

*Islam Outside the Arab World* fills a major lacuna in the study of contemporary Islam and Muslims, which hitherto has concentrated on the Middle East or the Arabic-speaking world, by its focus on all regions of the non-Arab world. The following areas are examined:

- Africa, including Somalia, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and South Africa;
- Asia and Oceania, including Turkey, Turkic Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and Tajik-

istan, China, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand;

- Europe and the Americas, including Bosnia-Herzegovina, Germany, Austria, France, Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Russia, Transcaucasia, the United States, Canada, the Caribbean Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, Central Americas, Venezuela, Guyana, Surinam, Brazil, Argentina and other places where significant Muslim presence exists.

## About the authors

The authors, who have been selected from all over the world and are country or area specialists, belong to disciplines as diverse as history, anthropology, political science, theology, peace and conflict research, history of religions, linguistics and languages, ethnography, and Islamic and comparative religions. They probe, within a comparative framework, common themes such as the Islamic revival, the sectarian divisions within Islam, the common rites and rituals of the various groups and sub-groups, the position of women and religious minorities within Muslim-majority states and of Muslim minorities in non-Mus-

lim social and political orders. Special emphasis is given to Sufism as an alternative approach to Islam.

*Islam Outside the Arab World* is a very ambitious undertaking. Each author has produced, in an easily accessible language and style, information-rich descriptions and sophisticated analyses of their particular case studies. Historical backgrounds are provided, but the main emphasis is placed on the current period. In this sense, the book is a unique work of scholarly collaboration, which is likely to become the standard reference on this vast subject. French and German translations are soon to follow. The introduction to this work is authored by Dr Ishtiaq Ahmed. ◆

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Dr Ishtiaq Ahmed is associate professor of Political Science, Stockholm University, Sweden.

E-mail: Ishtiaq.ahmed@statsvet.su.se