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Melody Moezzi



Humanizing Islam



Melody Moezzi is dismayed by the portraits of Islam and her fellow Muslims she sees in the American press. Where are the people like herself and the people she knows—the people who lead workaday lives and follow a religion that is far removed from terrorism?

“What I want to do is humanize Islam,” Moezzi says. “I want to remind people that these are human beings who

are very different from what you see on the news.”

Out of that desire comes *War on Error: Real Stories of American Muslims* (Univ. of Arkansas Press, Dec.), Moezzi's first book. In it, she profiles 12 American Muslims, from college students to mothers, rappers to radicals, who do their best to live up to the tenets of Islam. Though the people in the book all approach Islam differently and derive from it an array of meanings, they are linked by the fact that they are Americans who were horrified by the 9/11 attacks and the ramifications that terrible day had for their faith.

Now 28, Moezzi came to her subject after her own religious awakening. During college, she was struck with an ailment that put her in the hospital and puzzled her doctors. After many frightening months, she was finally diagnosed with a rare but benign stomach tumor,

which was ultimately removed.

“I started questioning my life,” she says, and the search led her to explore many different faiths and philosophies. Then, on a trip to Montana in 1999 she had what she describes as a kind of awakening. “It was the face of God looking at me,” she says of gazing at the summer sky. “I could not avoid my faith any longer.” After 9/11, she says, “I realized people were not seeing a human version of Islam, but a political version, something that has to do with power and control and manipulation.” Writing the book carried Moezzi even deeper into Islam. Raised in Dayton, Ohio, by Iranian parents, she always considered herself Iranian first and Muslim second. And like most Americans, she too had certain ideas about Islam that were challenged by interviewing other Muslims.

“I grew up with a lot of biases that I did not know were in my head,” she says. “Each person I interviewed showed me Islam was something completely different. It helped remind me that Islam is not politics, Islam is not the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is in your heart. It is how you live your life.”

—Kimberly Winston