

# The Academy of Political Science

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## POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

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Volume 127 · Number 1 · Spring 2011

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*Political Science Quarterly*  
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**The Mother of Mohammed: An Australian Woman's Extraordinary Journey into Jihad** by Sally Neighbour. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. 368 pp. Paper, \$26.50.

Sally Neighbour's book is an excellent insider's account of a convert's journey to radical Islam. Not since Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* has a book provided as much detail on the inner workings of the global jihad. Neighbour has spent hundreds of hours with Rabiah (Robyn) Hutchison, a twenty-year Islamic holy warrior from Australia. In the book, Neighbour takes the reader from Robyn's early life as a pot-smoking, surfing beach bunny to the pesantrens of Indonesia and eventually, to al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. Rabiah is a matriarch of radical Islam, and in Central Intelligence Agency circles, she is referred to as "the Elizabeth Taylor of the *jihad*." Throughout the book, the reader is afforded glimpses of how a convert becomes a true believer and how radicalized women have increasingly become important players in the global jihad, forming the emotional backbone of the movement.

Neighbour's interviews with Ms. Hutchison reveal how jihadi women see themselves and how they see the world. If Rabiah represents the norm, then Western interpretations about the patriarchy miss their mark. For Hutchison, her veil is not a symbol of oppression but of freedom of movement and association, and affords a supplemental layer of respect and protection in her community. When Rabiah's daughter decides, after their return from exile to Australia, that she no longer wants to wear the veil, her mother cuts all ties, confused as to why she would voluntarily surrender this advantage.

The book delves into the day-to-day life of the mujahadeen, including the many hardships, and how true believers survived. It documents how Islamic communities care for one another and for newcomers. Over the course of several moves between Indonesia, Australia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, Rabiah, with five children in tow, is taken in by families she befriends at mosques or Islamic community centers. The altruistic and generous nature of the community allows her to survive for years without employment. Following from Eli Berman's book, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism*, they are masters of mutual aid, creating supportive tight-knit communities. They thrive even as they insulate themselves from the outside world.

Neighbour's interviews describe the philosophic divide within the jihad. Through Rabiah's experiences with Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Umayma al-Zawahiri, the book relates how bin Laden created numerous schools in Afghanistan and supported the education and well-being of women and girls. Zawahiri personally deputized her to run a women's hospital in Kandahar—efforts their Talib hosts rejected. The book offers insight into how and why bin Laden was able to develop a cult of personality among the Arab Afghans, and how small gestures of generosity had a huge impact. Rabiah relates a story of how bin Laden followed a group of children to the local bakery. Seeing all the children

in line for bread without any money, and buying the bread on credit, bin Laden paid off everyone's debts, to the joy of the children and parents alike.

The book provides a wonderful contrast to the role generally presented of women in different Islamic organizations. When Rabiah attends the Jemaat Islamiyya pesantren in Solo, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakir Ba'asyir spend hours discussing the Sunna and Hadith with her as she offers critiques and suggestions. In contrast, when she meets with Zawahiri, she must do so behind a thick black curtain.

The book ends with Rabiah back in Sydney under house arrest and 24-hour surveillance. Designated "a threat to national security" and prevented from travelling abroad because she might "destabilize foreign governments," according to the Australian Security Intelligence Organization, Rabiah insists that she is just a regular grandmother. Although this book is the biography of one woman, it is incredibly informative for students of radicalization, those interested in Indonesia, and anyone interested in the study of gender and women's roles in jihad.

As a journalistic account, the book suffers from a few problems. Occasionally, the level of detail is overwhelming, and the accounts of Robyn's early childhood development growing up with an angry, drunken father imply that her conversion to Islam was prompted by family issues. The book tries a bit too hard to connect the dots between Robyn's broken home and her radicalization, unconvincing for students of the process. Moreover, the story is uncritical of Hutchison. There is scant analysis by Neighbour. Nevertheless, the copious amount of material that will benefit future researchers far outweighs any shortcomings. Chapters of this book will be useful for classes on Islam, terrorism, the role of women, and Indonesia.

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**Tax Evasion and the Rule of Law in Latin America: The Political Culture of Cheating and Compliance in Argentina and Chile** by *Marcelo Bergman*. University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010. 264 pp. Cloth, \$65.00; paper, \$28.95.

This is a great study that provides a crucial criticism of the literature on the new institutionalism in political science. The author persuasively shows that the nature of the tax agency, or even the enforcement of rules sanctioning non-compliance, does not explain the behavior of taxpayers. The force of the law is not sufficient to modify the behavior of cheaters. Taxpayers that were audited or even punished for non-compliance are not more likely to obey the law after the punishment. Marcelo Bergman argues that instead, perceptions of the strategies of other taxpayers and the information they provide about the likelihood of audits and sanctions have a stronger impact on tax compliance.