

OBITUARY

Ibrahim Abu-Rabi' (1956–2011)

Karim D. Crow, IAIS Malaysia

Professor Ibrahim Muhammad Abu-Rabi' passed away unexpectedly from a heart attack on 2 July 2011 at the age of 55 while attending a conference in Amman, Jordan. He was the holder of the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities Chair in Islamic Studies since 2008 at the University of Alberta (Edmonton, Canada). Previously, he served from 1991 at the Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, United States, as Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian–Muslim Relations and co-Director of the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations, as well as Senior Editor of its well-known journal *The Muslim World*. A Palestinian born in 1956 in Nazareth on the West Bank, he took his BA from Birzeit University (1980). Abu-Rabi' emerged since the mid-1990s as a prominent intellectual historian of twentieth-century Arab religio-political thought, acquiring a global reputation as a keenly astute observer of contemporary Middle Eastern Muslim affairs and political Islam.

Noted for dedicated high-calibre research and passionate devotion to teaching, Abu-Rabi' wrote and edited 19 books, including several outstanding works fundamental for understanding modern Arab Islamic intellectual culture. His 1987 doctoral dissertation, "Islam and Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: An Intellectual Biography of Shaykh al-Azhar 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud", was submitted to Temple University's Department of Religion. His first major book, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (SUNY Press, 1996), came at a time of growing Euro-American interest in Arab-Islamic movements. Perhaps his most significant contribution is *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London and Sterling VA: Pluto Press, 2004), wherein he delineated major trends in religious and political projects in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This landmark book includes Abu-Rabi's detailed analysis of major figures such as Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (al-Jābirī) who wrote the seminal *Naqd al-'aql al-'arabī* (Critique of the Arab Mind). I remember Ibrahim telling me in early 2006 (when he was Senior Fulbright Scholar in Singapore and Indonesia at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological

University, Singapore) that *Contemporary Arab Thought* had taken him ten years of constant research and writing, and he had enjoyed every minute of it.

Regarding his latest work, *The Contemporary Arab Reader on Political Islam* (University of Alberta Press, 2010), he stated: “Most Islamist groups are pro-democracy and anti-violence, but you’d never know this from what’s reported in the press; I wanted to give Islamists the chance to speak for themselves.” Abu-Rabi’ was convinced that the ‘soft power’ of education provides the key to enhanced understanding between Muslims and the West. His personal integrity, conduct of life, and high quality intellectual effort testify to the reality that the West must learn to appreciate the diversity of contemporary Islamic civilisational and intellectual experience. Ibrahim’s students from Canada, America, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Indonesia, Singapore, and Pakistan will feel his absence keenly.

Professor Abu-Rabi’ held dual citizenship in the United States and Israel and is survived by his wife Fatimah and two children. He was honoured in a memorial service held at Hartford Seminary at the beginning of the Muslim fasting month of Ramaḍān in early August 2011.