

Editorial

As this issue goes to press, the Muslim world is reeling from a number of events: President Bush has reversed decades of American foreign policy to come out in favor of Israel's annexation of huge swaths of the West Bank; Israel continues to murder top Hamas leaders in Palestine; in Afghanistan, Karzai is having trouble administering a country that is slipping back to the pre-Taliban war-lord era, and violence continues to escalate in an increasingly destabilized Iraq. Bush's insistence that the so-called "war on terror" is for the sake of freedom rings increasingly hollow, and the United States, under his administration, appears to be a major catalyst for instability rather than stability in the world. When I think of Bush and his team, I cannot help but recall the Qur'anic verse that says: "When it is said to them: 'Make not mischief on the earth,' they say: 'We are only ones that put things right.' Of a surety, they are the ones who make mischief, but they realize (it) not" (2:11-12).

The Bush administration's responses to the tragic carnage of 9/11 has unleashed mayhem in the Muslim world that is reminiscent not of the twentieth century, but of the nineteenth, in which the European powers attempted to colonize the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Thus, Salem's article, in a finely nuanced analysis of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's and Rashid Rida's responses to European colonialism, has reverberations in today's climate. Salem's main argument is that al-Afghani and Rida advanced similar political programs on three different levels: fighting colonialism, establishing modern Islamic states, and calling for *itjihad* in the interpretation and implementation of Islamic law. It is hard not to see the Muslim world's present condition reflected in their struggles nearly a century ago, and thus to feel a special relevance in studying the lives and works of these two influential nineteenth-century figures. What were the issues they reflected upon? What were their conclusions, observations, and suggestions? What worked and did not work for them? Salem's article is very instructive in this regard.

One of the thorniest issues al-Afghani and Rida attempted to address was the relationship and compatibility between a modern nation-state and an Islamic state. To what extent were these complementary or contradic-

tory concepts and realities? Al-Afghani and Rida addressed themselves to a debate that still remains unresolved within the Muslim community, as Hosen's paper on constitutionalism reminds us. He argues for the idea that the Shari`ah is compatible with the concept of constitutionalism. Outlining nine arguments put forth by both secularists and certain groups of practicing Muslims as to why Islam is incompatible with constitutionalism, he then demonstrates how these points are misplaced. His main point is that *ijtihad* is a legal tool that allows jurists to adapt Islamic law to different times and places, while remaining within the fold of the Shari`ah's status as derived from the divine revelation. He argues that such *ijtihad* enables jurists and other Islamic scholars and religious figures to conceive of the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the basis of a constitutional framework for developing a modern democratic and Islamic state. The very fact that Hosen must make this case demonstrates that Muslims still have to find their way in a world shaped by western concepts of nationhood and modernity.

Nevin Reda's paper on women in the mosque is part of the same discourse about Islam's compatibility with modernity. While western feminists still struggle with patriarchal aspects of western culture, women's equality is conceptually accepted as part of the meaning of "modernity." The cultural practices of women's exclusion from *masajid* the world over leaves Islam open to the charge of not treating Muslim women equally (by not giving them the same access to sacred space as is given to men). Muslim feminists have turned their attention to the changing status of Muslim women historically, and, in so doing, have discovered something rather surprising: Many entrenched practices in relation to women have their basis in later developments in the Muslim world, not in the practices of the first Muslim community.

An example of this is women's relationship to prayer in the *masjid*, for many *masajid* across the Muslim world, including North America, prohibit or discourage women from attending the prayer. However, Reda finds that this practice began during the caliphate of `Umar (raa) (634-44). Using a meticulous methodology that examines both the textual and material sources, Reda demonstrates that during Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) time, Muslim women had full access to the *masjid* and were not blocked off from the congregation by curtains, walls, or other barriers. In other words, they were full participants in the life of the *masjid*. Reda presents her well-grounded historical analysis in hopes that this knowledge will reverse cultural customs that discourage women from attending

prayers at the *masjid*, and thus being excluded from the center of Muslim community life.

Samory Rashid's paper is also concerned with the importance of historical accuracy and its relationship to shaping contemporary discourse. Rashid offers a provocative challenge to theorists of Islam in the United States who argue that the Islam of the African slaves died out and had to await new waves of immigrants during the mid-twentieth century to reestablish Islam in this country. Rashid's argument is that the Islam of the African slaves went underground and survived in black communities that were closed to outsiders due to official American policies of racial segregation. Thus, this aspect of Islam is unknown and undocumented, except to blacks themselves. Given that African Americans possibly comprise up to 42 percent of all American Muslims, historical accuracy concerning their relationship to Islam, as well as the United States' relationship to Islam, is important. His paper requires other scholars of Islam in the United States to be cognizant and aware of his argument whenever they make claims about the Muslim community's relationship to the United States, and to build on it while conducting research in the future.

This issue of AJISS inaugurates a new section, which we are calling "Forum." Building on the occasional inclusion of pieces under the title "Reflections" in past issues, "Forum" seeks to be a space for reflection, dialogue, and debate between the readers of AJISS. The essays will be shorter and on any topic chosen by the author. This will not be a peer-reviewed section of the journal, although we expect the essays to be academically informed. Mohammad Nejatullah Siddiqi's piece on "Muslims and Violence" is our first essay in this section. He analyzes the Qur'an's position on violence and then issues a call for Muslims to shun violence and move toward a politics of transparency, democratic culture, and ethical relationships with humanity at large. Only in this way, he asserts, will humanity be able to devise the realistic and just strategies needed to solve such global problems as poverty. Would that Muslims who preach and encourage violence as a solution to the Muslim world's ills take heed of Dr. Siddiqi's call.

Katherine Bullock

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