

Editorial

This special issue was suggested to us by a reader during my term as AJISS book review editor. Soon after 9/11, many bookstores and popular websites, among them www.amazon.com, stocked up on Islam-bashing books whose main arguments were that Islam posed numerous threats to the United States, in particular, and to the West in general. Authors took umbrage with President Bush's claim that the "war on terror" was not a war on Islam, and that, indeed, it was Islam that was the problem and the enemy of the modern age. How about making some scholarly responses to these books, our reader asked.

I was initially of two minds, for these books were not academic treatises. Should an academic journal spend time on non-academic books? On the other hand, given how important these books were (and are) in shaping public opinion about Islam and the presence of Muslims in the West, it seemed essential that Muslim intellectuals should respond. To do nothing in the face of the barrage of negative and hostile arguments ultimately seemed irresponsible. The Muslim community was under attack – spiritually and physically. If there were no intellectual counter-arguments from a Muslim perspective, what could an uninformed and curious reader rely on to hear from the other side? A non-response by Muslims would count as affirmation, because the reader would have no alternative sources with which to think about the issues being raised. Thus, we decided to provide scholarly responses to the Islam-bashing books from Muslim intellectuals (or non-Muslim scholars empathetic with Islam) that would do more than say "these books are inflammatory" by providing reasoned analysis and argumentation as to why such books were not only wrong and misguided, but also that they were actually inciting hatred toward Muslims.

Not everyone agreed with our thinking, and some Muslim academics felt it would be a waste of their time to review (hence give unwarranted credence to) nonacademic populist diatribes against Islam and Muslims. Others embraced the project with enthusiasm. A few reviewers who had initially consented found that in the end, they were unable to complete their assignments because they could not stomach such biased and non-academic books.

When I became editor of AJISS, we decided to devote an entire issue to Islamophobia and not just review a few influential Islam-bashing books. By this stage, enough time had passed for it to become obvious that Muslim-

bashing post-9/11 was not simply a passing phenomenon based on revenge, but a deeper-seated structural issue in western societies, from the UK to North America to Australia. In addition, the United States Congress, in a concerted effort, was threatening academic freedom, and neo-conservative academics were attempting to discredit Muslim voices (even being presumptuous enough to set up their own “Muslim” think tanks!), in hopes of silencing Muslim perspectives altogether. Thus, we issued a call for papers to address neo-Orientalism and Islamophobia since 9/11. This issue is the result of that. And we are pleased to offer you a strong and comprehensive special issue on the topic of Islamophobia and Orientalism post-9/11 with international dimensions. Jasmin Zine worked hard to have a wide range of books related to the issue’s theme reviewed, and I am sure you will find the book review section rich with considered critiques of both relevant populist and academic books.

Ahmed Ahrar has written a discerning extended review essay on Ibn Warraq, one of the most well-known populist Islam-bashing authors who has been having a field day since 9/11, courtesy of our “friends” at Prometheus Publishing house. He provides a timely and scholarly rebuttal of Ibn Warraq’s diatribes against Islam.

Two articles from the UK open the issue. Christopher Allen and Tahir Abbas seek to theorize Islamophobia, using Britain as a case study. Allen’s paper explores whether or not 9/11 has significantly altered the forms and structure of Islamophobia. He looks at the immediate post-9/11 period, begins with the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia’s “Summary Report into Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001,” and then moves on to Britain as a case study. Allen finds that 9/11 has sharpened an already present Islamophobia, with the left and far-right coming together in their anti-Muslim pronouncements. He concludes, worryingly, that Islamophobia is being normalized across British society.

Abbas concurs, arguing that “British discourse on racialized minorities has transformed from ‘color’ in the 1950s and 1960s, ‘race’ in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, ‘ethnicity’ in the 1990s, to ‘religion’ in the present climate,” with religion meaning “Muslims.” Abbas maintains that in spite of the Muslim presence in the UK for generations, Muslim loyalties to Britain are still being questioned, and Muslims often feel forced to choose between “Islamic” or “British” identities on the one hand, or from inside the Muslim community “liberal” or “radical” on the other.

Both Allen and Abbas highlight the role of the media in helping to shape and form the public’s perception of Islam and Muslims. By and large, and in spite of numerous articles giving voice to Muslim perspectives, the

media's images of Islam remain sensationalized and negative – with a main message to the general public that Islam and Muslims are violent, oppress women, and threaten western civilization.

Yenigun provides a sustained and theoretically informed study of the American media's representation of Islam and Muslims in the immediate post-9/11 period and the subsequent war on Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, he argues that the representation of Islam replicates colonial and Orientalist themes; however, he concludes that a new theme emerged: the differentiation between “moderate” and “fundamentalist” Muslims. In the paper's last section, he wonders if the unprecedented focus on Muslim voices allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the issues. In the end, he states, Muslim voices only replicated the mainstream media's categories of “moderate” versus “fundamentalist” and that, therefore, Muslim voices simply reinforced negative stereotypes rather than help create a new discourse.

Gallagher takes us through a case study of *Time* magazine's portrayal of Afghan women in the post-9/11 period to demonstrate the continuity of Orientalist themes of Muslims. She reflects on the Orientalist tradition in the United States, which viewed the Orient in a similar way to the Native American: the “noble savage,” whose very exoticness and savageness thrilled and attracted a bourgeois audience, but nevertheless reinforced the American sense of “Manifest Destiny” – a God-given right to rule. Like Halil's study of the media portrayal of Afghanistan, Gallagher's examination of *Time* magazine's portrayal of Afghan women finds that these American Orientalist themes are still being perpetuated: Afghan women are being portrayed as the oppressed exotic “Other” who needs to be rescued by American soldiers and set on the right path to modernization under American tutelage.

Stockdale takes a look at a very specific site of Islamophobia in the United States – the Holy Land Experience (HLE) theme park in Orlando, Florida, that had opened in early 2001. The HLE theme park aims to win converts to its version of Christianity, with a particular focus on Jews. The HLE belief is that the end of time will be marked by a Jewish return to the Holy Land of the Bible and the conversion of world Jewry to Christianity. HLE hopes to speed things along this route by actively supporting the state of Israel and missionary work to world Jewry. Stockdale finds that prior to 9/11, Islam played an uncertain role in HLE's cosmology, but that post-9/11, it has been brought in as a major focus. Islam is now being presented as a major threat to “Israel, Christianity, the United States, and the democratic free world.”

We see in the HLE representation of Islam, as well as comments by British leaders in the British press, a resurgence of medieval Christian

polemics against Islam, with many of the same ideas being recycled for the modern era: Islam as an imposter religion, predisposed to violence, and a threat to civilization (or “true”) values. Muslims are being recast into the old mold of a war-like threat.

These are extremely worrying trends. Hitler’s rise to power and subsequent genocide of German Jews, as well as other specific groups (e.g., Roma [Gypsies]), was predicated on a dormant anti-Semitism and feelings of German racial and moral superiority that Hitler was able to bring to the fore and exploit. The same is true of the genocide in Rwanda. Beginning in April 1994, Rwandan media outlets launched a propaganda barrage at the majority Hutu community about the “cockroaches,” members of the Tutsi minority, and then called upon the Hutus to do their “patriotic duty” and slaughter all of the Tutsi, family members included. The fact that during the following 3 months an estimated 800,000 Tutsis were murdered in cold blood, while the West closed its eyes, shows just how powerful and incendiary the media can be. The normalization of anti-Muslim sentiment is thus a dangerous trend that has, in the very recent past, led to ethnic cleansing.

Hence, the MENTOR’s anti-Islamophobia project, described by Jasmin Zine, our book review editor, is a vital and inspirational story about Muslim responses to Islamophobia. Most of us wear many hats, and one of her other hats is president and cofounder of MENTORS (Muslim Education, Network, Training and Outreach Service), a community-based group comprised of Muslim parents, educators, students, and community members that promotes projects supporting equity in education. With her fellow Muslim colleague, Suzanne Muir, currently diversity coordinator at the Halton District School Board, MENTORS developed multi-media resource kits for primary and secondary school children entitled “Toward Understanding: Moving Beyond Racism and Islamophobia.” The Canadian government and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation funded the initiative, and it recently won two prestigious awards: the J. S. Woodsworth Human Rights Award and the Ontario Elementary Teacher Federation Anti-Bias Curriculum Award. I hope that this project will stand as an example and inspiration to others to know that there are ways to combat Islamophobia that the public school system will embrace. May Allah (swt) reward them.

It is Muslims’ responsibility to combat Islamophobia intelligently, and we anticipate that this special issue achieves that goal admirably. Naturally this is not the end of our intellectual engagement with the issues raised by 9/11, so the reader can look forward to a continuing dialogue in the issues to come, *in sha’ Allah*.

Katherine Bullock