

## *Editorial*

Have the tragic events of 9/11 resulted in a profound change in the interactions between the Muslim world and the West, or has the carnage simply accelerated an already present trend of strained relations? It is too early to know, but when historians begin looking back, they will likely find evidence to support both assertions. With the introduction of the USA PATRIOT Act, which allows the government unprecedented opportunities to spy on people, greatly infringing upon their civil liberties, the treatment of the detainees at Guantanamo Bay, racial profiling, and the harassment and deportation of Muslims residing in the country, the Bush administration appears to be leading the “free world” into a new variant of right-wing authoritarian government.

On the other hand, the American occupation of Iraq and the Bush administration’s plans to reshape the Middle East bear an uncanny resemblance to a policy paper published in 1996 by an Israeli think-tank, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies: “A Clear Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm.” Of course the symmetry between the 1996 proposals (i.e., remove Saddam Hussein and weaken Syria and Iran) and the current policies are no surprise, since three of the eight co-authors now hold key Bush administration positions: Richard Perle, member of the Pentagon’s Defense Policy Board; Douglas Feith, undersecretary of defense for policy; and David Wurmser, Vice President Dick Cheney’s Middle East advisor. Thus, 9/11 has simply given the neo-conservatives an excuse and the ability to execute what had already been envisaged. The Middle East, long under colonial subjugation, is re-experiencing western aims to dominate, control, and reshape it. Thus, from a Muslim perspective, 9/11 appears to have confirmed, with a vengeance, global power structures instead of ushering in a new era.

In *Covering Islam*, published by the late Edward Said in 1981, Said observed: “For almost every Muslim, the mere assertion of an Islamic identity becomes an act of nearly cosmic defiance and a necessity for survival (p. 72).” Though written more than 20 years ago, how more true is this observation now? Even the simple act of naming a child (especially boys) is fraught with difficulties. Many of the best-loved Muslim names,

such as Osama, Abdur-Rahman, and even Muhammad, now carry negative connotations in the West. How many faith communities have to worry that their children will face ridicule in school or job discrimination simply because of their name? The mere fact of being a Muslim in the West, while always problematic, has now become even more so.

As this volume of AJISS attests, even academic scholarship cannot escape the snare of this negative relationship between the Muslim world and the West. Choudhury addresses the issue head on in his article on “The Politics of Symbols and the Symbolization of 9/11.” He analyses three different issues related to the symbolism of 9/11. Choudhury convincingly argues that while Bush and others may reiterate that their target is terrorism and not Islam, the politics of symbols reveal that the very meaning of Islam is at stake.

O’Shea-Meddour examines this negative relationship via a close textual rereading of V. S. Naipual, one of the prominent non-Muslim “experts” on the Muslim world. She highlights an anti-Muslim subtheme in his non-fictional accounts of contemporary Muslim life, which consists of using gothic techniques to heap unwarranted suspicions upon Muslims’ motives and rationality. She thus reminds us of the continuity and ubiquity of racist/Orientalist views of Muslims in western popular culture and the rather disturbing way in which westerners so readily accept such negative portrayals of Muslims as true.

Ho Wai-Yip, whose article is based upon a longer paper that won the Best Graduate Student Paper Award at the last AMSS Annual Conference, held September 26-28, 2003, in Bloomington, IN, highlights the life experiences of two Muslim brothers originally from Hong Kong, one of whom emigrates to Britain, while the other chooses to stay in Hong Kong. Based on a qualitative research methodology, Ho’s analysis of these two brothers’ life histories allows him to explore the trajectories of a group of Muslims that receive very little attention – those with a Southeast Asian background. The two brothers’ experiences of exclusion, alienation, and isolation from the mainstream non-Muslim societies in which they live are not unique to them; rather, they are representative of their community. Therefore, Ho’s article lends credence to the notion that 9/11 has not altered dramatically the landscape for Muslims; but rather, merely exacerbated already-present trends.

Even Roberto Marín-Guzmán’s article about Muslim rule in al-Andalus from 711-929, though not intending to be related, cannot escape being relevant to this largely negative contemporary debate that I have

outlined. Against the notion pushed by the neo-conservatives in the U.S., that Islam is a backward, destructive, and anti-civilizational force, Marín-Guzmán's analysis of the unity behind the major political, military, and administrative institutions of Muslim Spain shows otherwise. Marín-Guzmán argues that confronted with diverse societies with different histories and peoples, Muslim rulers established similar institutions in both al-Mashriq and al-Andalus. These similarities enabled centuries of efficient governance. Al-Andalus is known for being a society in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived in relative harmony and prosperity, and stands as a clear refutation of contemporary assertions that Muslims are incapable of creating good societies. History thus reminds us that while Muslim societies are currently in a state of malaise, beleaguered by corruption, mismanagement, poverty, and violence, this is not an inherent (genetic) trait of Muslims or of their faith.

In the last issue of AJISS, I announced that budgetary constraints had forced us to go biannual rather than quarterly. In this issue, I am very pleased to announce that that very temporary situation is now over, *al-hamdulillah*. AJISS will once again be a quarterly journal. I would like also to take this opportunity to welcome Dr. Jasmin Zine, who has assumed the position of book review editor. Dr. Zine is a graduate of the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto (OISE/UT). She has coauthored two books (*Reconstructing 'Dropout': A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students' Disengagement from School* [University of Toronto Press: 1997] and *Removing the Margins: The Challenges and Possibilities of Inclusive Schooling* [Canadian Scholars' Press: 2000]), and a teacher's guide dealing with anti-racism education and inclusive schooling. She also has published articles in several refereed journals based on her research of Muslims and education in Canada and in the field of Muslim women's studies. We welcome her to the AJISS team. I know that book review editors are always looking for reviewers, so if any reader is interested in writing a review for AJISS, please contact her at [jzine99@yahoo.com](mailto:jzine99@yahoo.com).

Keep an eye out for our special issue on Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism and Islamophobia: Post-9/11. The call for papers was mailed out with the last issue and has been posted on the Internet. We envisage a fantastic volume due out in the fall, *inshallah*.

AMSS's 33rd Annual Conference will be cosponsored by George Mason University's Center for Global Studies (CGS) and Islamic Studies

Program in Fairfax, Virginia, from September 24-26, 2004. The CGS is an appropriate venue for this year's conference, as it is a new multidisciplinary research center that was established recently to explore and emphasize the interconnectedness of peoples, cultures, ideas, and institutions as the basis of social life. Peter Mandaville, Ph.D., a professor in the Islamic studies program and the CGS director, is this year's conference chair. With his most recent research on contemporary Muslim sociopolitical discourse, including the book *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*, Mandaville is well-placed to host this year's conference.

I encourage everyone to submit abstracts and to attend the upcoming AMSS conference, which, as always, will be a superb combination of scholarly debate and fellowship.

Katherine Bullock