

## *Editorial*

The issue before you features important studies that offer new ways to understand the modern and exogenous forces, such as territorial nationalism and neoliberalism, that have shaped Muslim societies and Islamic discourses over the last two centuries.

Luke Peterson's "Palestine-Israel and the Neoliberal Ideal" argues for theorizing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict not primarily as a nationalist or cultural conflict, but as a casualty of neoliberalism. Among the chief motivators of the now infamous duplicity of the British in the course of the First World War, Peterson suggests, were the region's economic benefit and natural resources. Peterson argues – against the conventional understanding of neoliberalism as a largely post-1970s phenomenon that reversed the doctrine of managed capitalism in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War – that British policies even during the First World War can be fruitfully characterized as a kind of neoliberalism.

Indeed, he notes that neoliberal economics has a structural affinity to imperialism, for they are both ideological and require an expansive military and propaganda apparatus. In both phenomena, a small elite seeks to master regional and international economies for its own benefit. Both thrive at the cost of local political autonomy and governance. Moreover, both exploit war as a profitable opportunity.

This interesting study seeks to bring together three strands of argument – neoliberalism as imperialism in the origins of the conflict; the precepts of contemporary, international neoliberalism; and the global, neoliberal characteristics of contemporary Palestine-Israel – to bear on a fresh understanding of the forces that affect this momentous conflict. Dwight Haase's response invites us to expand the scope of the framework proposed by Peterson.

David Warren's "For the Good of the Nation: The New Horizon of Expectations in Rifa' al-Tahtawi's Reading of the Islamic Political Tradition" offers a careful reading of the works of al-Tahtawi (d. 1873). The career of this al-Azhar-trained reformist scholar, and later an administrator and educator under Muhammad Ali, coincided with the establishment of the printing press in 1822 by the relentless Albanian modernizer of Ottoman Egypt.

Warren's argument is nothing short of a challenge to Eurocentric historiography, which has often seen al-Tahtawi's politics as a failed attempt to assimilate the ideas of the French Enlightenment and the 1830 revolution between the monarchists and the constitutionalists. He demonstrates that whereas al-Tahtawi was indeed inspired by the nationalist cult around the memory of Napoleon Bonaparte (the conquering despot he wished to see in his own patron, Muhammad Ali), he did so from his own grounding in Islamic political tradition, in particular as articulated by al-Ghazali (whose works were among the first to be published in Egypt). Al-Tahtawi sympathized with a strong, enlightened despot rather than those who sought to place constitutional limits on his actions, a dispute that he saw played out in both France and Egypt.

Warren alerts us to the classical Islamic roots of his understanding and, even more remarkably, to the crucial selectivity, transformation, and innovation that this scholar introduced. Among the most significant was his embrace of Egyptian territory as the marker for the *ummah*, which was then, using traditional materials, infused with sanctity and religious authority. He deems the old Islamic ideal of the *ummah* electing the ruler to be impractical, but maintained a role for the *ummah* (now understood as the national community with a unified will) to offer consultation to the monarch. His concern for legitimating political life through the will of the community was not (merely) a borrowing from Europe, but was grounded in (and a response to) premodern Islamic debates.

The function and scope of social and political education also changed. In the past, the *ulama* had written "mirrors" for princes to instruct them in etiquette, religion, and the ways of politics in an attempt to ensure prosperity for the kingdom and the lands of Muslims. Al-Tahtawi, Warren astutely observes, expands this genre to now instruct the entire nation for its own prosperity. The *ulama* had traditionally taught men their religion either for general piety or as part of the educational practice to reproduce themselves; however, they were now charged with instructing them in the service of the nation.

A second set of innovations, Warren suggests, were introduced in the notion of time and history. The arc of history had been understood primarily in religious terms as being cyclical, namely, as the periodic rise and fall of this or that contender. Even the great Mongol invasion had been ultimately domesticated into this narrative. For al-Tahtawi, time opened up to entirely new horizons, to vistas of progress into the unknown, with the Egyptian nation under an enlightened despot catching up to the company of rival Eu-

ropean nations. So powerful was this vision that it has not yet fully dissipated among Islamic or Islamicate thinkers.

Warren's contribution is all the more significant for bringing insights from studies in classical political Islamic thought together with a careful rereading of a crucial early modern figure – a figure who produced his own innovative work through a similar bridging of a thousand-year-old tradition to his contemporary world.

Last but not least is Imtiyaz Yusuf's forum article, "Nationalist Ethnicities as Religious Identities: Islam, Buddhism and Citizenship in Myanmar," which offers a thoughtful historical analysis of the ongoing tragedy of Myanmar's systematic ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims. The story will sound familiar to many: an ethno-nationalist movement aligning itself with a powerful religion to produce a culture of radical exclusivism directed against a minority. In this case, the religion being yoked for nationalist chauvinism is Buddhism and the targeted minority is the Rohingya Muslims.

Racism, a loathing for the "dark-skinned" Rohingya by other Burmese ethnicities, is the enabling factor that facilitates the necessary task of dehumanization prior to mass killings, just as anti-Semitism did for the Nazis and white supremacy continues to do in Europe and the United States. Ethnonationalism, racism, and the general support for Islamophobia from the most powerful centers of the world are the elements (familiar to Western Muslims as well) that make up the heinous crime against the Rohingya people, which some international bodies are describing as genocide.

Eschewing rhetoric and hyperbole, and always careful to remind us that this is not a Buddhist problem so much as a modern ethnonationalist curse, Yusuf draws on his considerable expertise on the conflict's historical and ideological dimensions to provide a most enlightening historical account of the unfolding tragedy.

Directly following this editorial are an errata for Professor Brown's article in 34.3; a few minor errors were regrettably left uncorrected in the proofreading process.

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This is the third issue of this journal under a new editor (myself) and a new and illustrious Editorial Board. Some members of the Editorial Board raised an important issue in reference to our issue 34:3 on the theme of "Islam and Homosexuality." They noted that the two articles presented the conservative Islamic position, which rejects the homosexual act. My own editorial added to the impression that the journal takes a theological or ideological position on such issues.

This is simply not the case. Beyond the journal's well-known mission of the reform of Islamic thought and the concern to put social-scientific scholarship in conversation with Islamic textual scholarship, the journal has no ideological filters. My job as editor is to attract and publish the best and most consequential scholarship to advance disciplined knowledge in service of the aforementioned mission. The editor's own religious or personal views simply do not determine the content of what gets published.

It has been the tradition of this journal, as well as a wider practice, that the editorials to themed issues tend to be more substantive, expressing the editor's own vision of the nature of the contributions and the stakes involved. The editorials accompanying such thematic issues, then, clearly do not represent the views of all members of the Editorial Board. The Board members, in fact, are selected to represent a broad spectrum of scholarly interests and viewpoints and, as a consequence, are unlikely to be unanimous in any view or judgment.

The issue included two well-researched and well-argued pieces that advance the discussion of Islam and homosexuality, a debate that for over two decades has been underway in academia with particular intensity. I am confident that the quality of both pieces is such that no serious researcher on the subject writing in any language will overlook either Mobeen Vaid's assessment of the existing discourse on the Qur'anic teachings on the subject or Jonathan AC Brown's meticulous presentation of the traditional Hadith discourse.

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This is how our trade works. Over the course of the next few years, perhaps even decades, articles like these will be read by other scholars (mostly graduate students buried in books, or rather in gigabytes of PDFs), whose list of readings will include hundreds of studies on the subject. They will, ideally, read these contributions alongside many others, looking not to be converted to one position or the other, but to develop their own judgment based on a fair reading of all sides. Detached from the original context of the twenty-first century in which these studies are produced, future scholars will read these and other studies in their own contexts. They will remember those studies seen as worthy and rigorous and will, in turn, recommend them to their own disciples. By the standards of this slow and painstaking winnowing and sifting of arguments to arrive at the truth, good scholarship always wins. As a journal, we can do no more than encourage and publish good scholarship.

Western academics have always studied Islam through the lens of their most recent and ever-changing concerns, fads, and aspirations. This is, of course, not limited to Western scholars; however, the power differential between Western and traditional Muslim institutions has created relatively unilateral lines of influence and prejudices. The rise of hyperindividualism and fluidity in sexual behavior in twenty-first-century Euroamerica have inevitably colored the concerns of scholars in the same way that European trends over the last two centuries affected Western scholars as well as westernized Muslim thinkers' concern for the lack of constitutionalism, democracy, rational law, science, secularism, or the presence of this or that institution in Islam. None of this is, in itself, reason enough to dismiss all such scholarship.

It is a testament to the value of disciplined scholarship, however, that all those scholars who have approached the study with rigor, whatever their own pet ideologies and feelings, have often contributed to the growth of our collective knowledge of Islam and to the challenging of long-standing but indefensible fallacies.

Michael Cook and Patricia Crone's iconoclastic work *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977), for instance, postulated that having been born as a Jewish heresy somewhere in Arabia, Islam as we know it was a much later construct. The careful work of the same disciplines to which Crone and Cook belong, however, steadily challenged or decisively disproved most pieces of that argument. Crone's posthumously published note, while reasserting her disbelief in Islam, acknowledged that upon actually reading the Qur'an in the early 1990s – years after writing *Hagarism* and much else – she was shocked by a number of discoveries. These included that the Qur'an was remarkably non-violent for its context and that contemporary Muslim reformists' contentions (she names Mahmud Shaltut), which she had previously dismissed as misleading apologetics, were, in fact, right.<sup>1</sup>

The point of retelling this anecdote is that if one is disciplined enough (which enforces a measure of self-criticism), even flawed approaches may advance scholarship and are open to self-correction. More importantly, under the right circumstances, they challenge us to think better. And this is why all the ever-changing ideologies and sensibilities that the Orientalists and their Muslim disciples have brought to bear on the study of Islam have not rendered their work worthless. It is for this reason, and for my own commitment to God and His blessed name of *al-Haqq* (the Truth), that I find it wrong and harmful to silence those with whom I dis-

agree. Not unlike the imperial courts and private salons of Abbasid Baghdad at its height, an academic journal like AJISS must be committed to showcasing all sides of the argument, if only to encourage the discovery and constant refinement of truth.

## Endnote

1. Patricia Crone, *The Qur'anic Pagans and Related Matters: Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, vol. 1, ed. Hanna Siurua (Leiden: Brill, 2016), xiv.

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## Errata

In the production of AJISS 34:3, a few errors were introduced into Professor Jonathan Brown's article "A Pre-Modern Defense of the Hadiths on Sodomy." Corrections are provided below, with our regrets.

- p. 6: "of al-Khara'iti" should be romanized
- p. 6: al-Isbahani (not al-Isbahabi)
- p. 8: lam yaṣiḥḥā (not lam yaṣiḥ)
- p. 9: delete "while" from "While Kugle admits"
- p. 20: Allāh (not Allāh).
- p. 34, n.1: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah (not Dar al-Kitab al-'Ilmiyyah)