

Editorial

Can we justify scholarship in apocalyptic times? “Across the world, genocidal states are attacking Muslims,” reads the title of an opinion piece by sociologist Arjun Appadurai, “Is Islam really their target?”¹ “As Israel incarcerates Palestinians and Myanmar drives out its Rohingyas, a reflection on the predicament of ethnic and racial biminorities,” reads the by-line. Welcome to the club, I thought. For decades, this has been the question Muslims have asked themselves. The piece ends with little great insight, but it is the banality of the observation, one made by an Indian-American sociologist, not an al-Qaeda operative ready to blow things up in revenge, that caught my attention. The banality of Muslim blood, that is.

Palestine is being shot and bled to death by a fanatic ethno-religious, nationalist, colonizing, apartheid state. We are Palestine. The Rohingya are being burned, raped, and annihilated by another ethno-religious, nationalist state. Rohingya mothers are birthing en masse the children of their Myanmar rapists. We are Rohingya. The Kashmiris and millions of Indian Muslims are being deprived daily of their dignity, humanity, and life by yet another religiously-inspired ethnic nationalism. We are Kashmiris. In China, Uighur Muslim men are being exterminated, held in torture and brain-washing camps, while their women are forced to cohabit with Chinese men.² In all four cases, an ancient religion has been conscripted to provide identity, unity, passion, and even the narrative to justify the carnage, some bordering on genocide. A secular, enlightened Europe is pulverizing its Muslim minorities, minorities that are there only because their lands were invaded, exploited, divided, and left to rot under ruined institutions and puppet regimes propped up by the very same Europeans who cannot tolerate Muslims in their midst. And now, China, the emerging superpower, surpasses them all in its systematic extermination of its Muslim population or identity. We Muslims (ought to) know better than to blame all Jews, all

Christians, all Buddhists, all Hindus, and all Confucianists. Yet the pattern cannot be lost on Muslims, even if it is a passing curiosity for others.

This is not all, of course. The small men who have inherited power after colonialism in Muslim lands, the small men who have sold their people's wealth to buy golden yachts and guns to shoot them, whose weakness and illegitimacy has bequeathed to them a unique and insatiable ferocity and mastery in the art of torture, repression, and intrigue, are eager to strike deals with the devil to save their rotten thrones. The butchers of Yemen and Syria are not foreigners, even if they are propped up by foreigners. There are even smaller men who serve as their clerics and rubberstamp every murder.

In short, Muslim scholars and academics who manage to keep their faith and their wits about must work in a world that seems to be closing in. The question is, how?

For most, of course, the threat is felt only vicariously. Some hide our heads in books or laptops, others cautiously tweet their minds, others spiritualize the Umma's problems while monetizing their own, yet others master the art of not feeling, not sensing, and even not identifying as Muslim. Like the believer of the People of Pharaoh who hid his faith in Moses's monotheistic call, perhaps some of us are waiting for a Moses to raise the banner. Yet others find partial and parochial causes approved by liberal secularity to vent their passion for justice. Even the language in which we speak of our pain is often borrowed, tailored to be CNN-compatible, worthy of being liked by our friends on the left. Our causes are parochial and divisive.

Such are the conditions in which we, as scholars, must learn, record, think, question, read and re-read, and write. For many spokespersons, commentators, scholars, and intellectuals, the suffering, as I noted, is vicarious. Such suffering is what makes us human, and part of a global community. Yet, vicarity is also risky. Much havoc is wreaked in the world in the name of vicariously-felt suffering. Ideologues build their programs on its basis. God's existence or mercy is routinely denied by armchair humanists vicariously feeling others' pain. The very capacity that makes us human endlessly beguiles us, and perhaps never more so than in the age of social media. Well-fed, bored youth choose everything ranging from atheism to some radical ideology (ISIS being the latest) in the name of vicariously-felt suffering that they watched on social media. Vicarity is human, yet it tremendously simplifies and hence distorts human experience. We are, in fact, not really Palestine. We can experience some of the Palestinian sense of deprivation, starvation, and rage when they are shot at with explosive bul-

lets designed to shatter all they touch, when their last water plant is targeted by a state that then turns around and blames them for mere existence, for throwing rocks at orcish soldiers armed to the teeth. But few of us really know the world of pain that descends on those who (or whose children) are brazenly shot for the charge of throwing rocks, or the assault of despair when they learn that those who were supposed to come to their aid have turned their back. What is more, few of us have the slightest inkling of the resources of hope, resilience, faith, and spirit of solidarity and self-sacrifice, and the deeper wellsprings of faith and faithful resistance, that the Palestinians, the Rohingya, the Kashmiris, and the Uighur draw on. Vicarity produces only one-dimensional pity, exaggerated and artificial in some ways. What we need is true, long-term solidarity, the willingness to hitch our fates together, and the willingness to own the bleeding organs of the Umma and take that task on as part of a permanent intellectual agenda to fight and resist the tyrants. Permanent, I say, not because I expect any of these open wounds to be permanent, but because part of being a global community—especially one that aspires to be the “justly balanced community raised for humankind, enjoining what is good and forbidding evil”—is to accept that some manner of wounds are part of life. This commitment is perfectly captured in the words of the beloved Apostle of God, God grant him peace and blessing, on the authority of Nu`man b. Bashir, recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim:

The faithful in their mutual kindness, compassion, and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with sleeplessness and fever.

But what about solidarity in ordinary times, with those whose suffering is not so conspicuous? And what about the oppressors within? I need not mention here that solidarity with the latter demands, in famous Prophetic reports, that we prevent them from their tyranny, and to do so by our hand, tongue, or at least in our heart. The most challenging yet most important kind of solidarity is one that is about suffering as well as joys that are inconspicuous, that cannot be mediated and shared in brief video clips. To be one body is to be one body even when one is not being shot at and violated. But is meaningful solidarity possible at such great distances and with such few shared interests as between Muslims in different parts of the globe?

The answer is not easy or even, for many, imaginable, but the quest for such solidarity is, I believe, the highest priority both by faith and reason.

The first task, in any event, is to know and remember, to know that we are in this together, and that we are in this for the long haul.

Scholarship is one answer, and a necessary one (however partial). Memory is fickle and open to manipulation unless it is preserved and memorialized with responsibility and integrity. We must not forget Palestine, Rohingya, Kashmir, Yemen, Syria, and others; but not because scores must be kept and vengeance exacted. Ultimate justice, the faithful must know, is served by God—in this world, we must be as prepared to forgive as to fight back, and to resist tyrants both internal and external. But never to forget.

Scholarship, at its best, allows groups to keep from being erased and utterly distorted by the enemy, or at their own hands. Scholarly networks stretched across the lands of Islam had always been the nervous system of Islam that maintained that memory; this enterprise was never perfect, and to the extent that Muslims failed in preserving such memory, false accounts and endless sectarian fabrication resulted. The rise of nationalism in the Muslim world is a case in point. Who could doubt in Saddam's Iraq that their leader was a notch above Saladin, the liberator of Palestine? Who could doubt in Nasser's Egypt that the Prophet Muhammad was a great national hero of the Arabs? Who can doubt today in Iran that the Arabs were the accursed, hungry invaders against a timeless Iranian civilization which saved Islam from them? Who can doubt today in Saudi Arabia that the Shi'a are worse than Zionists and Crusaders in their animosity to Islam? This tip of the iceberg of falsehoods makes it impossible to separate fact from fiction for ordinary people; what Americans have only recently realized as the triumph of "truth" over "fact" as a virulent phenomenon in their culture, populations of the Muslim world have long practised as a coping mechanism.

Today, the hold of the nation-states that cut up Muslim regions and pitted them against each other is waning in favor of neoliberalism, a force no less virulent in that it seduces societies directly rather than dealing with their powerful elites. If the old developmentalist framework of the Cold War environment empowered the autocrats as puppets of great powers, the new post-'70s neoliberal framework empowers the business elite and summons, in its response, protests like the Arab uprisings of 2011. Each transition imposes new tyrannies but also exposes new cracks in the totalistic pretensions of world powers, and offers new opportunities for Muslims to act. Islamic networks of learning and faith once again have a chance to flourish and offer spaces of resistance.

Most original thinking, observed a political philosopher, is done in times of great upheaval when institutional breakdown allows for (if not demands) new imagination. For Muslim scholars and thinkers, now may just be that time.

This issue features two research articles and a research note. Darakhshan Khan's "In Good Company: Reformist Piety and Women's Da'wat in the Tablighī Jamā'at" is an original, meticulously researched, deeply thoughtful, and timely contribution. She makes three inter-related points. First, through her scouring of records and historical literature from the period, she discerns twentieth-century shifts in the socio-economic configuration in north India that led to shifts in the structure of the household, undermining the older forms of seclusion for upper-class Muslim women. The gendered social ideal transformed from women being members of a large inter-generational group secluded from the public to being pious wives of pious, salaried civil servants living away from their traditional domiciles as nuclear families. Second, this emergent mode of piety emphasized piety learned by women through books like Maulana Thanavi's *Beheshti Zewar*, rather than learned from women of an older generation. Men, similarly, learned from books and preachers rather than the older body of scholars and spiritual masters. Third, the Tablighī Jamā'at was a movement born in the 1920s in response to this socially and geographically mobile class of Muslims. Most importantly, the author highlights the crucial role women have long played in the Tablighī Jamā'at (and not by design). Her research, which is edifying and brilliant on a topic of great and continued significance, throws into sharp relief the crucial role women and family structure played in the history of even a movement that is often stereotyped as an all-male affair. Dr. Fareeha Khan and Dr. Usha Sanyal's rejoinders to the article greatly add to an already significant contribution; they highlight its strengths and tease out some of the avenues in which further exploration could be fruitful.

Paul Shore's "Lexical Choice and Rhetorical Expression in Ignazio Lomellini's 1622 Translation of and Commentary on the Qur'ān" is an erudite study of a unique seventeenth-century and rarely studied document housed in the University of Genoa library and consisting of the entire text of the Qur'ān in Arabic along with a Latin translation of same and commentary. Authored by Lomellini, a Jesuit priest, it is of considerable value as an example of how early Western Christian scholars of the Qur'ān grappled with lexical, syntactical and exegetical problems. Shore examines a series

of lexical choices made by Lomellini and touches on some of his exegetical discourses, and sheds light on the question of its intended audiences, possible sources and informants, and particularly the tension between Lomellini's mission to propagate the Catholic faith and in doing so attack rival religious traditions, and his desire to produce a translation faithful to the meaning of the original. Dr. Peter Feldmeier and Dr. Elliot Bazzano offer penetrating insights into the phenomenon that Shore has so ably explored.

We are especially grateful to the four responding scholars to agree to share their valuable scholarship by opening up conversations about our main contributions. We believe that this feature is tremendously useful at many levels, to the authors as well as the readers, and we hope to continue to expand the number and scope of such responses.

Finally, James Morris's fascinating research note explores the biography and visit of the first Muslim visitor to Japan, Sādōulūdīng, who arrived in Japan as part of a Mongol envoy in 1275CE and was ultimately executed. Given the paucity of research on the topic, this note provides a valuable evaluation of the relevant primary sources on the subject. Morris suggests that the visitor may not have been a Uyghur or an Arab, as previously thought, but rather a Persian, and goes on to discuss the significance of this episode in history.

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Endnotes

1. Arjun Appadurai, "Across the World, Genocidal States Are Attacking Muslims. Is Islam Really Their Target?," Scroll.in, 22 May 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/879591/from-israel-to-myanmar-genocidal-projects-are-less-about-religion-and-more-about-predatory-states> (accessed 29 May 2018).
2. Tom Phillips, "China 'Holding at Least 120,000 Uighurs in Re-education Camps,'" *The Guardian*, 25 January 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/25/at-least-120000-muslim-uighurs-held-in-chinese-re-education-camps-report> (accessed 29 May 2018).