

Editorial

In the last issue, I wrote about the limits of suffering vicariously, and that true solidarity requires constant engagement and practical acts of solidarity. In this editorial, I have invited a young Muslim activist of Uyghur roots to reflect on the present moment. Aydin Anwar was my student at a summer program in Istanbul last year at Ihsan Academy. She is a courageous, articulate, and inspiring voice for the horrendous violation of the basic humanity and rights of the Uyghur Muslims by the occupying Chinese government. Governments of Muslim countries are quiet. In a report two weeks ago, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed alarm at the “numerous reports of detention of large numbers of ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities held incommunicado and often for long periods, without being charged or tried, under the pretext of countering terrorism and religious extremism.” Over a million Uyghur Muslims have been sent to concentration camps, according to Uyghurs as well as independent observers. A Human Rights Watch report noted that millions of Xinjiang residents were having their DNA, fingerprints, and retinal scans collected; earlier in 2017, the region’s Muslims were banned from wearing long beards or veils in public.

We Muslim academics, intellectuals, and scholars need to listen to and strengthen voices like that of Aydin Anwar. In fact, we must follow her lead. I will let her speak for herself; I hope you can hear the disciplined rage and resolute voice of her words as you read these meticulously documented statements:

A Brewing Genocide in Occupied East Turkestan

I sat in a room with around thirty refugee women in Istanbul during summer 2016. We were listening to Munawwar, an Uyghur activist and Islamic teacher who fled China in the 1990s, explain the meaning of a chapter in the Quran before ending the session with a prayer. Soon into

the prayer, I heard faint cries that quickly turned into sobs. Some of the women were using their hijabs to cover and wipe the tears off their faces, and some were clutching one another. Munawwar was asking God to ease their pain and to alleviate the hardships the Chinese government was inflicting on their families. Like me, they are all ethnically Uyghur. All are refugees from East Turkestan, a nation that's been under the occupation of China since 1949 and what Chinese government calls Xinjiang (meaning new territory).

I was born and raised in the U.S. and was eager to hear and share the stories of my fellow Uyghurs. I went to Turkey to interview and film some of the Uyghur refugees living there. The first woman I talked to in the room was Gulmire, a mother of six who told me her 19-year-old daughter was sentenced to nine years in prison for wearing the hijab and a long dress. She came to Turkey with her husband and four of her other children. Gulmire left her one-year-old son behind because, like two of her other children, the baby was not documented in the Chinese system. They are undocumented because China enacted a two-child policy for urban Uyghur families and Gulmire had them after the policy was implemented.

Later, I visited Gulmire's home to meet her family. Her husband exhaled heavily between his sentences. He said he would rather have his sons be in the prison instead of his daughter. He thought his 16- and 17-year-old sons, who sat quietly on the couch across from me, would have been better able to endure prison mistreatment. The strain of their ordeal seemed to have aged the two boys prematurely—I could see that much of their hair had already greyed. I learned that they knew very little Turkish and were struggling to find work to help the family. Gulmire's sister, who worked as a medical doctor back in East Turkestan, told me that detained Uyghur girls would be sent to hospitals every three to four months to get abortions because they were raped by Chinese officials.

It wasn't until I interviewed these refugees that I came face to face with the meaning of oppression, familial separation, torture, religious persecution and cultural genocide. I grew up aware of the oppression suffered by Uyghurs. I have worked to raise awareness including through conferences and media outlets. Speaking with Uyghur victims has given me a fuller sense of how oppression is experienced. Although our conversations were brief, it made me realize how much I didn't understand about

their lives under the Chinese state's intense crackdown. Prior to this, I was aware of China's repressive policies toward Uyghurs, but I lacked a clear emotional connection with the victims. This sparked a passion for me as an Uyghur American to try to keep Uyghur voices from being silenced and their repression from being known.

Playing crucial roles in establishing kingdoms and empires, the Uyghurs lived independently for centuries until they were invaded by the Manchu Qing Dynasty in 1759. Uyghurs rebelled against Qing rule, and in 1863 they were able to break free and establish Kashgaria, or East Turkestan. Two decades later, the Uyghurs were again invaded by the Qing, and this time the Uyghur homeland was formally incorporated under the Manchu empire as Xinjiang. Chinese nationalists overthrew the Manchus in 1911 and claimed all the areas the Manchus had ruled. Uyghur groups carried out numerous rebellions and briefly established the East Turkestan Islamic Republic in 1933 and in 1944. Soviet military action aided the Chinese Nationalist government in restoring its control on both occasions. The most recent occupation took place in 1949 when the Communist Party of China pushed the Nationalists off the mainland. Since then millions of Uyghurs and others in the region have been subjected to extreme cultural and religious controls—effectively a cultural genocide, or an attempt to eradicate all that makes Uyghurs distinctive.

The strategic and economic importance of East Turkestan has only increased since 1949. According to a 2016 *Congressional Research Service* report, the region contains the second-highest natural gas reserves and highest oil reserves of any province-level jurisdiction, reportedly producing more than 30 BCM of natural gas in 2015.¹ Between 1964 to 1996, an estimated 750,000 Muslim Uyghurs were killed in their homeland by at least 46 nuclear tests carried about China.² Today many continue to suffer from those nuclear tests as a result of the lingering radiation.

China continues its efforts to wipe out the people of East Turkestan. Uyghurs are attacked from all fronts—their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity—so much so that simply living as Uyghurs is effectively a crime in what the Chinese government officially calls the Xinjiang *Uyghur* Autonomous Region. In recent years, China's officials have stepped up their efforts under the pretext of cracking down on “Islamic extremism” and supporting the Global War on Terror, a military cam-

paign launched by the U.S. after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Some Uyghurs are alleged to want to break the region away from Beijing's control, and are lumped by Beijing together with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. In its actions, however, the Chinese state does not only target speech or action promoting an independent East Turkestan, but rather practices that are simply part of Uyghur culture.

There has been violence committed by both Uyghurs and the Chinese state. There have been numerous disturbances in predominantly Uyghur cities; for example, in the summer of 2011, violence erupted in the city of Hotan and resulted in the death of more than thirty people.³ In the same month, sixteen rioters and two policemen were killed when a police station came under attack.⁴ What is often missing in coverage, especially Chinese state media coverage, of such violence is that often it is a response to oppression and sometimes is part of a drive for self-determination. The East Turkestan movement is driven by the cruel and continued occupation of the region. Millions have died or been imprisoned. Millions more have endured systemic ethnic discrimination and an effort to destroy Uyghur religion and culture.

Practicing Islam is completely forbidden in East Turkestan, despite China's constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion.⁵ Islamic texts and names are banned, fasting during Ramadan is forbidden, and centuries old Islamic institutions have been destroyed and converted into communist propaganda centers. Last September, one Uyghur woman was sentenced to 10 years in prison for promoting the wearing of headscarves.⁶ Another Kazakh man was handed down 16 years in jail after Chinese authorities found audio recordings of the Quran on his computer and claimed he had ethnic separatist ties.⁷ Several Uyghur refugees I spoke with told me that even saying *Assalamu Alaykum* can get them locked up for 10 years. Saying *Insha'Allah* is also prohibited.⁸ The word God or Allah must be replaced with "Party" (Chinese Communist Party), or the name of the Chinese president, Xi Jinping.

Since 2016, China has arbitrarily detained over a million Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims in concentration camps, where they are forced to denounce Islam, adopt atheism, and pledge allegiance to the Chinese state.⁹ According to a Kazakh citizen who spent eight months in such camps, instructors lectured in four-hour sessions "about the dangers of

Islam and drilled internees with quizzes that they had to answer correctly or be sent to stand near a wall for hours on end.”¹⁰ Another former inmate said the instruction was aimed to show “how backward traditional Uyghur culture is and how repressive fundamentalist Islam is compared to a progressive Communist Party.”¹¹

Detainees of these camps are tortured, denied medical treatment, and many have already died in the camps, later to be cremated by “physically and mentally fit” ethnic Han security workers.¹² Three of my extended relatives have already come out of the camps dead. The facilities are so overcrowded that people must sleep on their sides with adjacent bodies touching each other, and they are not given proper clothing and undergarments even during freezing night temperatures.¹³ Government buildings have been shifted to makeshift camps because China cannot build new camps fast enough. Children of those detained in the camps have been sent to overcrowded orphanages in mainland China, where “they have been locked up like farm animals in a shed”¹⁴ and are abused to the point of suicide.¹⁵ Parents of these children often do not know of their children’s whereabouts or wellbeing.

East Turkestan is a modern-day Orwellian society, if not worse.¹⁶ The Chinese government has employed mandatory tracking devices to monitor the actions of the Uyghurs, and has now forced Uyghur families to host government cadres (of Han ethnicity, China’s dominant ethnic group) in their homes. Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities are “literally eating and sleeping under the watchful eye of the state in their own homes,” with cadres submitting detailed reports on the religious and political views of the families.¹⁷ There are security checkpoints on nearly every block, and entering most buildings requires one to go through facial scannings and ID checks. Starting in December 2017, Chinese authorities in the region have forcibly collected DNA samples, fingerprints, and iris scans from all residents between the ages of 12 and 65 under the guise of public health programs.¹⁸

Today, most towns in East Turkestan are eerily silent because 70-80% of the towns’ population, mostly men, have disappeared—they have been detained, imprisoned, or killed. Uyghur women are sex trafficked and are being forced to marry ethnic Han men.

Where is the international outrage? Where are the global protests? A genocide is brewing, yet the world—particularly the Muslim world—chooses to put China’s integrity first and remain silent. The rights of Allah SWT are being violated as millions are being tortured for being Muslim. Let’s avoid having to say “never again” again. Spread awareness. Pressure your government leaders to speak out against injustices and sanction Chinese leaders before it is too late.

Aydin Anwar
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This issue features two main articles. The first article, by Dr. Mohammad Syifa Amin Widigdo, provides an historical overview of the adoption of Aristotelian dialectic within Medieval Islamic theology and law and Christian scholasticism, and puts forth an original and provocative thesis. It contends that whereas Greek dialectic influenced both Christian and Muslim scholarships, each tradition employed the dialectic to serve distinctive purposes. The Greeks aimed to defeat an opponent by showing logical contradictions, Christian scholastics searched for the truth by bringing out the preexisting truth in the mind of the teacher, thus serving a didactical purpose, and Muslim dialecticians employed it to arrive at a level of certainty in knowledge in both epistemological and psychological senses. This thesis gives Muslim scholars of dialectics much to think about and engage with and its boldness guarantees that it will generate disagreement and debate, the kind that is likely to be enlightening and fruitful.

The second reports multi-author empirical research by Drs. Bartkowski, Acevedo, Karakeci, and Campbell on the analysis of data extracted from the World Values Survey to test the hypothesis that “religious devotion among Muslim women in Turkey circa the year 2000 will be associated with greater support for gender inequality across several institutional domains, namely, family, education, the workplace, and politics.” It thus investigates early twenty-first century religious influences on Turkish Muslim women’s attitudes toward gender inequality, hypothesizing that religious devotion among Muslim women in Turkey is associated with greater support for gender inequality across the institutional domains of family. It finds that religious support for gender inequality is most robust within the realm of family life, as expressed by attitudinal support for a wife’s obedience to her husband. Significant but more modest support for gender inequality

among religious women in Turkey exist in two other institutions, namely, education and politics. This thesis, too, is provocative and we hope will generate productive dialogue.

Finally, the forum section features an extensive and erudite response by Professor Sherman Jackson to some crucial and timely issues raised by Professor Kecia Ali in her recent engagements. How have leading male authorities on Islam in the West neglected female scholars? Professor Kecia Ali, in her courageous essay, “The Omnipresent Male Scholar,”¹⁹ argued that Muslim male scholars often omit, overlook, undervalue, or dismiss the scholarly views and interventions of female scholars. Here, among others, she named Professor Jackson’s works such as *Islam and the Blackamerican* (2005). Later, she elaborated this argument in her Ismail R. al-Faruqi lecture organized by the International Institute of Islamic Thought at the 2017 American Academy of Religion meeting. Jackson’s response is thoughtful, engaging, and respectful, even if it refuses to grant the premise of Ali’s argument. It is my belief that Muslim academics and scholars, men and women, are in need of this kind of fair and frank engagement. I hope that this is the beginning. We most welcome Professor Kecia Ali’s response, if she so chooses, in these very pages.

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