

Continuing Diversity:

A Column of Periodical Reviews

by Pamela M. Salela

The Muslim World Journal of Human Rights. Volume 1, 2004. Managing Editor: Shadi Mokhtari. Berkeley Electronic Press, 2809 Telegraph Ave., Suite 202, Berkeley, CA 94705; phone: (510) 665-1200; www.bepress.com/mwjhr. Annual. Subscriptions: \$225.00 (academic), \$675.00 (corporate).

No one can deny that since September 11, 2001, the relationship between the Western world and Islam has changed dramatically. Once barely acknowledged in the mainstream conscience of the United States, Islam now takes center stage in our national as well as international media almost on a daily basis. The war on terror has become the war on Islam, and embedded in that war are transgressions across the lines of religion as well as race, ethnicity, and gender.

Islam has come under attack as a religious ideology and as such, those who belong to its cultural community suffer from the reactionary projections of the uninformed. Within the Muslim world itself, there are equally contentious debates about the nature of civil society and the meaning of human rights. Hence, the dialogical enterprise of this journal is a look at Islam through its own eyes, from Islam outward, as well as a look at Western perceptions of Islam. Of central concern are “questions regarding the compatibility of Islamist agendas with international human rights norms,” the ways in which Islamic law can contribute to understandings of human rights, “concerns about the treatment of Muslims in non-Muslims states,” and finally, concerns about the impact on human rights due to foreign intervention within Muslim states.

In the fall of 2006, the journal ran a special issue entitled “Post-September 11th Developments in Human Rights in the Muslim World.” In the first essay, “Human Rights in the Post-September 11th Era,” Managing Editor Shadi Mokhtari explores the notion of universal human rights as explicated in the Western political philosophical tradition. What she concludes is that the United States has fundamentally *appropriated* the very idea of universal human rights to such an extent that it is only capable of “otherizing” the Middle East. The Middle East is presented as having the human rights problems. As she points out, “during the last four and a half years, American officials have been relentless in stressing U.S. moral authority and hence our right to speak authoritatively of human rights and women’s rights to legitimate various military, economic and political interventions in the Middle East” (p. 2). But while the United States espouses this, it conveniently sidesteps its denial of human rights to the “other” through such interventions as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. Mokhtari goes on to deconstruct the very words of U.S. officials who argue, behind the armor of being a world superpower, that our interpretation of human rights is the universal interpretation—an irksome twist of logic. The irony in this display of blinded logic, however, is the

opportunity that it presents to individuals in the Middle East to point to hypocrisies within their own system by vocally reflecting on Western double standards and raising consciousness about the need to address human rights from the standpoint of meaningful intentions. So in an interesting turn of fate, the imposition of Western imperialist ideologies (and tangible perversions and violence) has spurred a mood of introspection within the Middle East.

The Middle East, and Islam in particular, have become the locus of U.S. civil projections—we are pro women’s rights, you are not (and therefore barbaric), or we act on the separation of church of state and you have not learned to separate religious ideology from civil governance. And while we certainly espouse the rhetoric of these ideals, our civil society often reflects something quite different. Women suffer from poverty and discrimination, and certain fundamentalist religious ideologies affect the treatment of women in the United States in many ways.

In the final essay of this issue, “Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: The Politics of Muslim Women’s Feminist Engagement,” Jasmin Zine takes a multidimensional look at the Middle East from the standpoint of Western imperialism and the feminization of the other. The position of Western military and ideological dominance invokes a sexist symbolism of the other. If we look at the some of the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib, this is not difficult to see, and Abu Ghraib is not an aberration. Another aspect of U.S. domination techniques is for this country to portray itself as the savior of the poor oppressed women of the Middle East, who are forced to veil themselves or risk certain death, as in the case of Afghanistan. The mainstream media assert that the condition of women in this country has improved mightily since U.S. intervention, but a closer look at the facts defies this interpretation. But there is another dimension to the appeals to women, and that is the double bind Middle Eastern women can be placed in, in terms of acknowledging oppressions within their own cultural system. This invokes the gender vs. race conundrum, creating a philosophical tension for these women as they attempt to make sense of their world. Zine acknowledges and draws on the seminal work of such scholars as Edward Said (*Orientalism*), Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Irshad Manji, Chandra Mohanty, bell hooks, and others who have carved out a language through which the contradictions of imperialism can be discussed.

Other essays in this issue serve to deconstruct the specifics of various U.S. and Western actions: “Comprehending ‘Our’ Violence: Reflections on the Liberal Universalist Tradition, National Identity and the War on Iraq,” “Yemeni Reflections on Guantanamo and American Efforts for Political Reform in the Arab World,” and “Racial Profiling of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S.”

Perhaps one of the more intriguing ironies of U.S. imperial hypocrisy is its belief in its own secular identity. After all, separation

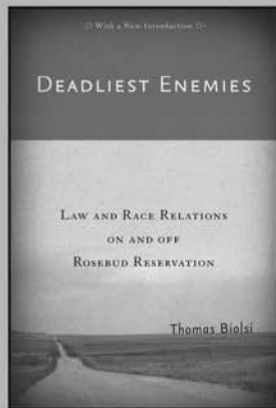
of church and state is part of our governance model. But the facts of our daily lives defy that. We are, in fact, wholly immersed in religious identity, more so than perhaps any other nation on the planet—as Douglas Johnston, founder of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, points out (NPR, WUIS, 2/4/07). There is the constant dichotomizing discourse within this country, wherein the mind of the people seems not to acknowledge the realities of our own daily existence. The work of such organizations as the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, founded ten years ago, has proven that speaking to Muslim nations from within the context of their own religious texts and laws is much more fruitful. And is it any wonder? Don't we all behave differently when our values and beliefs are acknowledged rather than trampled on? *The Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* is one of the vehicles that will make it possible to expand on such positive dialogues, for it will make manifest the contradictions that have remained unacknowledged for so long.

While a student at Osgoode Hall Law School at York University, Mokhtari had worked on a number of human and women's rights projects in the Middle East. Her firsthand experience and her training as a legal scholar made her acutely aware of the lack of forums wherein the legal, political, and social circumstances she was witnessing could be addressed and discussed in a climate of intellectual respect. *The Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* arose out of a need to create a forum for open dialogue regarding the "question of human rights as it relates to the Muslim World." She has gathered together an editorial board consisting of legal and Islamic scholars of impressive stature: Mashood Baderin, professor of law, Brunel University in West London; Dr

Lynn Welchman, senior lecturer in Islamic and Middle Eastern law, School of Oriental & African Studies at the University of London as well as Chair of the Centre of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law at the London Middle East Institute; and Mahmood Monshipouri, professor of political science at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut. The combined publication and scholarship of these editors spans the areas of human rights and Islamic law, family law, women's rights, democratization and human rights, Western policies in the Middle East, and more. The advisory board and associate editors represent legal, Islamic, and political science scholars from the best universities in North America; many of them originate from the Middle East.

This journal lives out the ethic of its mission by promoting its ideals of open dialogue in the very platform it chooses for publication. Published by the Berkeley Electronic Press, a quasi-open publishing project dedicated to challenging the dominant models of publishing that have aborted the scholarly process and seized ownership of ideas through a strictly profit-motivated industry. Any individual can request and obtain free guest access for 30 days, thus making it easy to examine the journal's contents. Requests for journal articles are granted at a minimal cost, and each time an article is requested, the institutional library of the requester is informed that a request has been made. Subscription cost of the journal is designed to recover the expenses of publication. Equally compelling and reflective of the integrity of the journal's mission is the fact that *MWJHR* is available at no cost to anyone or any institution situated in the World Bank's tier of low-income nations. 🌐

Cultural Conflicts



With a new introduction.
 "A unique and valuable contribution to the literature. Essential reading."
 —*Ethnohistory*
 \$20.00 paper · 280 pages



How America's image of the Philippines reflects the U.S. inability to see its own imperialism.
 \$20.00 paper · \$60.00 cloth · 256 pages
 Critical American Studies Series



Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race offers a bold new approach to racial difference conceived through rave tourism.
 \$20.00 paper · \$60.00 cloth · 288 pages



University of Minnesota Press • www.upress.umn.edu • 800-621-2736