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Introduction

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This volume of the *Harvard Middle East and Islamic Review* features some papers that came out of the speaker series of the Islam in the West Program, which is sponsored by the Center for Middle East Studies and run by Dr. Jocelyne Cesari. The other papers address issues that were raised in the series papers and showcase examples of interdisciplinary work on contemporary studies of Islam and the Middle East.

In his review essay "Islamic Reformation or 'Big Crunch'?," Richard Bulliet puts forth the provocative thesis that Islam is undergoing the kind of proliferation of competing discourses that has been seen only three times before in its 1,400-year history. The first time was immediately after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, when the hadith literature was standardized, the second led to the formation of the leading schools of *fiqh,* and the third resulted in the mainstreaming of the Sufi brotherhoods. Each phase was marked by what Bulliet calls a "big bang" of expansion in the possibilities of what Islam was imagined to be, followed by a "big crunch" that normalized or homogenized it. Bulliet claims, without doing an exhaustive survey of the many and quite varied pronouncements that are now available in print or in the electronic media, that we are now in another "big bang," one that began in the eighteenth century "and has accelerated rapidly in recent decades."

It is in light of this framework that he reviews two recent texts, Khaled Abou El Fadl's *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* and Tariq Ramadan's *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam.* Both try to rethink Muslim doctrine and practice through a dialogue with ideas of non-Muslim origins (specifically European and North American), and they do so in English, although Bulliet is interested mainly in the differences between them that mark the discursive heterogeneity of this historical moment. Will their voices and views prevail? By casting this moment in the continuum of Islamic history, he suggests that we have seen this all before, although when the "big crunch" will

happen (if it hasn't already happened) may depend on the emergence of new authorities that will determine the permissible parameters of argument and disagreement.

What Bulliet points to or suggests without analyzing in detail, Abdelwahab El-Affendi explores more fully—namely, the scope of the field of diverse pronouncements by Muslim Western intellectuals on the theology and practice of their religion. At stake are both diverse views that challenge orthodoxy and also the identities of those who have (as Bulliet hints at the end his essay) the authority to determine the legitimacy and limits of those views. El-Affendi's article, "The People on the Edge: Religious Reform and the Burden of the Western Muslim Intellectual," begins with a critical exploration of the construct "European Islam" or "Islam in the West" as it has been propounded by various scholars and intellectuals. It is seen as both a variant of Islam that emerged historically in Europe and North America as well as a product to be exported back (in a neocolonial move) to the wider Muslim world.

El-Affendi suggests that the emergence of this kind of thinking has to be put in historical perspective, and his article provides a useful overview of certain key trends in Euro-American Islamic thinking in the twentieth century. He identifies three such trends—(1) "the neotraditionalists of Western Islam" (Marmaduke William Pickthall, Muhammad Asad, Seyyid Hussein Nasr, and Maryum Jameelah) who "romanticize" the virtues of a premodern or traditional Islam, (2) "the reformism of radical modernists" (Malik Bennabi, Ali Shariati, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Fazlur Rahman and his associates) who seek to redefine orthodoxy while remaining within its confines, and (3) the "ultraradical modernists" (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Khaled Abou El-Fadl, and various members of the "progressive Muslim" movement including Omid Safi, Amina Wadud, and Muqtader Khan) who seek to push the reformist impulses of radical modernists to far greater limits. We can thus see that the contests going on within Euro-American Islam have a history, although El-Affendi argues that the intensity with which they have been played out and the ways in which they have been received in the non-Western Muslim world are new. El-Affendi's opinion on the latter is not sanguine. The extent to which non-Western Muslim views will have a constructive impact is greatly limited, he argues, by the inability of these often fugitive scholars to gain an influential following in the non-Western Muslim world.

"Feeling at Home: Some Reflections on Muslims in Europe" by Bhikhu Parekh is based on considerable scholarship and is a thoughtful,

sensitive, and remarkably even-handed opinion and public-policy piece from a moderate individual of considerable prominence and influence. Compared to the previous two essays, this one is more concerned with the pronouncements and deeds of nonintellectual, nonelite Muslims. The essay traces the emergence of a cultural and political Muslim self-consciousness in Europe since the late 1970s, its forms and expression from "militant Muslims" to fully "secular" ones, and varied European responses to them. Parekh attempts to counter a perception that is shared by many in European governments and media—that the culture and politics of Muslims necessarily pose a threat to the West. Although he admits that "militant Muslims" pose a security risk in Europe, he notes that they gain a hearing among Muslim youth largely because of the deplorable socioeconomic conditions that they face and their governments' questionable policies in the Middle East. He suggests that public policy should be directed toward "reclaiming Muslim youth" and points out that many Muslims are willing to engage European society and politics peacefully and nonviolently.

When it comes to the diverse reactions of Europeans to the expressions of Muslim identity, Parekh's most perceptive remarks are on the reactions of European liberals to Islam and their perceptions of it as a threat to a "secular" Europe. But he does not let Muslims off the hook either, criticizing many of them for their narrow and static views of religious pluralism and multiculturalism. If Europeans need to become more familiar with the range and diversity of Islam within their midst, then European Muslims need to learn to be more creative and open-minded in their responses to the multicultural societies in which they live.

There have been three lightening rods of Muslim protest in the West in the last twenty years—the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), the French government's ban on the wearing of head scarves in public schools (2004), and a Danish newspaper's publication of twelve cartoons that featured the Prophet Muhammad (2005). Political scientist Jytte Klausen turns her attention to the twelve cartoons in her article "The Danish Cartoons and Modern Iconoclasm in the Cosmopolitan Muslim Diaspora." The article provides a thorough overview of the affair, charting the responses to it by Muslims in Denmark and abroad, non-Muslim Danes, and other Europeans. At the heart of the article is an examination of the tradition of Muslim iconography regarding the Prophet Muhammad that shows how Muslims represented him in the past, regardless of what some have maintained, although this representation was neither a simple nor straightforward matter. A brief section

on the representations of the Prophet in the Western imagination reveals that, with few exceptions, they have been malign. It might be argued that the cartoons are part of this very old and unfortunately ongoing Islamophobia.

Also helpful is the discussion of the European legal system and its blasphemy laws. Many European countries have these laws on their books, including Denmark, but blasphemy cases are rarely successfully prosecuted in the courts. The Danish national court ruled that the cartoons were not criminally offensive, even though it recognized that they were so in the eyes of many Muslims. According to the court, the images were caricatures and therefore had a different ontological status than verbal statements of vilification or denigration. As such, the Muslim community had to tolerate this type of criticism in the name of "free speech." Whatever one might think of this legal opinion, it does not alter the fact that very many Muslims were infuriated by the publication of the caricatures and by their perception of hypocrisy in the legal and political establishment's response to the cartoons.

What made this mobilization of the wider public, especially the middle class, possible? Klausen concludes that it became an international event because of the rapid circulation of images that the Internet makes possible. This hypothesis reminds us of the central role that the electronic media play in the propagation of these public firestorms across borders—and the importance of studying them.

Ze'ev Maghen's "'That Nature Which Contemns Its Origin': A Controversial Teachers' Examination Sheds Light on Transformations in Iranian Islam" is related to the cartoon controversy that Klausen addresses. Maghen is not concerned with the Danish cartoons and the worldwide controversy that surrounded them, although the cartoons were clearly part of the larger context for an Iranian national uproar in early 2007 over questions about the Prophet that appeared on the country's annual teachers' examination. These questions were found to be offensive by a wide range of people in Iran and were condemned as "insolent" and "impertinent." Maghen looks at what exactly in the content or form of the questions might have sparked the controversy and how it might be explained. All of the objectionable questions had to do with the Prophet, especially representations of his body, which were deemed to be too "carnal." As the author demonstrates, however, the test questions drew on authoritative texts in the sira and hadith literatures for their representations of the Prophet. Why, therefore, were the questions' representations of the Prophet's body objectionable? Maghen's complex explanation follows the transformations in representations of the

Prophet's body—from the early period, through medieval times, and up to the post-Khomeni regime—and looks at differences in Shi'a and Sunni representations that are interesting and worth pondering.

Running throughout these articles is the perception of Islamic doctrine and practice as a global phenomenon, but the question of how to understand that globality is directly asked in Karen Leonard's piece, "Transnational and Cosmopolitan Forms of Islam in the West." Leonard uses a narrow definition of *transnationalism* "that emphasizes an ethnic or parochial form of religious belief and practice that is extended from and sustained with reference to the homeland. Transnationalism thus contrasts with cosmopolitanism, which features religious engagements and interactions that are more open to reconfigurations in new contexts." These definitions contrast with what used to be called *internationalism,* or the political and economic treaties that depended on creating agreements with or dominance over individual nations. Transnationalism, as the term suggests, identifies movements of people, ideas, and capital that occur across national borders. Although Leonard uncouples interaction and reconfiguration from transnationalism and includes them in cosmopolitanism, many theorists place those activities within the concept of *hybridity,* or new forms that combine features of different transnational contexts.

Readers may thus find reasons to quarrel with Leonard's definitions and conceptualizations, but the article attempts in novel and suggestive terms to frame materials that are examined by Bulliet and El-Affendi. Her argument is that Islamic sects such as the Ahmadiyya and the Nizari Ismailis are transnational in two senses: they have carried to many societies (including Western societies) beliefs and practices that have changed little from their origins, and at the same time they have been highly adaptive to the educational and economic circumstances of their new settings. According to this claim, at certain historical moments these two sects (especially the Nizari Ismailis) were more willing or able to engage with coreligionists in forming new concepts and practices, which Leonard terms *cosmopolitanism.* But the argument asserts that the latter is far more distinctive of Islamic religious movements today than in the past and has led to the emergence in Europe and North America of regional or national variants (such as American Muslims and French Muslims) that are supposedly quite new. But for the cosmopolitan framework to be convincing, certain processes today would need to foster and speed up the engagement of coreligionists with each other and encourage the reconfiguration of their ideas and practices. These

are the kinds of processes that Klausen, for example, hints at in her article when she notes the influence of the Internet.

The wider definition of *transnationalism* is precisely what anthropologist Lucia Volk brings to her analysis of upper-middle-class, Beirut high-school students in her article "Crossing the East-West Divide: Lebanese Returnee Youth Confront 'Eastern' Sectarianism and 'Western' Vice." The article is a departure from the volume's main theme in that it is not about Islam except insofar as it figures in sectarian differences within Lebanese society. Another interesting shift is that instead of the usual focus on immigrants to the West, she studies Western returnees to Lebanon, reminding us that transnationalism (or Leonard's cosmopolitanism) is a two-way street.

Volk's essay refreshingly challenges one of the assumptions that runs throughout the previous articles, which is that people today, especially Muslims and non-Muslims responding to them, are caught up in stereotypes of us versus them. Such objectification of the other leads to oppositional thinking (as in Samuel Huntington's thesis of the clash of civilizations) and the bad things that come with it (such as intolerance, hatred, and violence). Volk accepts such stereotyping as inevitable if also unfortunate, and she presents various sets of moral values that are organized in oppositional terms and are used by immigrant children in their communications with each other. Here's the twist: children may have to work with the stereotypes that are given to them, but they are not always obliged to support them. In fact, Volk shows in several beautifully observed ethnographic vignettes that children caricature these stereotypes in parodies of all sorts, that they enjoy doing this, and that by joining in this play they are able to experience a kind of sociality that overrides and subtly undermines us-versus-them distinctions. Scholars of religion might learn from this analysis, for closer attention to everyday discourse might reveal more parodies of stereotypes in Muslim and non-Muslim interactions than we have been able or willing to recognize.

The volume concludes with "Building Societies: America's Middle Eastern Projects," a review essay by Michael G. Freedman, who recently graduated with an A.M. degree in Middle East studies from Harvard University. Freedman looks at current works on the Middle East that are of general interest to scholars and policy makers. Reviews of this kind will be published in future volumes not only to review individual works but to identify certain key questions or themes that appear across them and seem to form a field of inquiry.