Editorial

The contemporary Muslim world is bedevilled with a high degree of conflict and infighting. The last two decades have seen at least two major wars which were fought primarily between Muslim countries. Internal conflicts between groups based on ethnicity, sectarian divisions and languages are the order of the day within Muslim societies.

Three types of conflicts can be readily identified. There are conflicts based on religious differences in which sects and religious communities that were living in peace for long periods of time have suddenly taken up arms against each other. Mumtaz Ahmad has taken up the case of Pakistan, where sectarian violence between Shīʿas and Sunnīs is tearing the country apart. The other type of conflict is seen in countries which are ruled by Western-inspired elites who are attempting to suppress the democratic aspirations of the masses. M'hand Berkouk has made a very interesting analysis of this situation in the Algerian context, and has shown how the situation has grown from bad to worse, because the ruling elite could not tolerate a peaceful democratic transition of power. Finally, there are countries where ethnic violence is the major cause of conflict. This is illustrated by the Kurdish issue, which is one of the bleeding wounds of the Ummah. Kurds have been used as pawns by big powers as well as regional states. Kurds who existed peacefully among other Muslims of various states, without requiring exclusive political power, now find it difficult to survive anywhere as equal citizens. The analysis of Salah Aziz is particularly interesting because he has also shown the inability of Islamic movements to understand the whole issue of ethnicity outside their national framework.

We do not consider this a special issue on Internal Conflicts in Muslim Societies, although we intend to concentrate on this area and publish more articles on various aspects of such conflicts in the forthcoming issues. We hope that our humble efforts will stimulate other Muslim scholars to deliberate on these issues.

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Editor