Two meaty studies of Sufi matters by Teren Sevea and Wardah Alkatiri, one review article on *uṣūl al-fiqh* by Ahmed Salem, and eight book reviews constitute this issue of *Comparative Islamic Studies*. The contents recall *CIS* issue 9.1 (2013 [2015]), the first I was assigned as new editor of the journal. It consisted of four articles. First, a collection of three edited by Clinton Bennett and pertaining to his project on the socio-political implications of Sufism. Together, these articles made the case that Sufis seek to transcend boundaries within the Muslim community and between Muslims and “others”: an advantageous approach, it was implied, compared with “legalistic” and “literalist” thinkers who are more concerned with maintaining boundaries. The fourth and separate article treated jurisprudence (*fiqh*) on the topic *zakāt*, including rulings on its use to fund treatment for HIV-AIDS patients. Jurists’ guidelines on this matter have become increasingly objective and humanitarian and less judgemental and stigmatising in ethos. Legal scholars are thus not confined to any particular ethics even though they operate with the fixed sources and methods of *fiqh*; a well-known fact. In response to these four articles, I suggested as field of further enquiry comparisons of how people use the Islamic sources, disciplines, schools, and theoretical paradigms to address and solve what they perceive as important societal challenges, in historical and contemporary contexts.

Several articles and issues in *CIS* have since addressed such matters. Here, the two Sufism articles focus on modern imperialism, environmental impacts, and epistemic strategies for resistance. First out is Teren Sevea’s historical study of the ʿAlid descendant Sayyid Nuh b. Muhd al-Habshi (ca.1788–1866), a “divinely possessed” (*majzūb*) Sufi saint and “miraculous
blessings-worker” (*keramat*) of the port city Singapore under colonial rule. Through the portrayal of Sayyid Nuh’s breath-taking actions in defence of the sea-farers, port-workers, and delinquents of his district against colonial and other overlords, Sevea opens up a panoramic vision of the region which includes also the modern South-Asian Islamic schools, movements, and “reform-Sufism.” Ontology and epistemology play a two-fold part in this scenario. On the one hand, the modern rational and positivist science-paradigms which were propagated by colonial authorities and Orientalist scholars, were also embraced by Muslim reformers, including the “reform-Sufis.” For them, these paradigms served to critique the *keramat*-type of Sufis, like Sayyid Nuh, who traditionally were seen as the representatives of Islam in the region. Intriguingly, Orientalists contributed to the same critique by defining the classical Persian Sufism of divine love and unity as the authentic Sufism, and reducing the *keramat* to crude illusionists and seducers of “the masses.” On the other hand—and here is Sevea’s key point—positivism has shaped the hagiographic sources’ depictions of Sayyid Nuh and other *keramat*. Their actions are consistently described as empirically observable and real in the factual, not imaginary or “spiritual,” sense, and as having had actual effects: saving friends and defeating foes. This is illustrated also in accounts of Sayyid Nuh’s funeral, attended by throngs of mourners, including four British colonial servants who had converted to Islam and came to pay their respects. Consequently, Sevea proposes “positivist history of Sufism,” i.e. studies of whether people have acted upon belief in the reality of *keramat*, and whether such actions have had significant impacts in society. A concrete example might be the way in which people’s current efforts to protect Sayyid Nuh’s shrine has at least dented urban development of ever-expanding, densely trafficked highways.

The second Sufism study is Wardah Alkatiri’s normative address of Muslims’ role in the global environmental crises. Pledging philosophical allegiance to the Iranian-American scholar Seyyed Hossain Nasr’s mystical ontology, Alkatiri argues that Muslims can only live sustainable lives if they mystically experience and enact the Qur’anic and Prophetic doctrine of *tawḥīd*, according to which the One God and Creator has entrusted humans to serve as His vice-gerents (*khalīfa*) in creation and ensure the welfare of all His creatures. The problem, as Alkatiri defines it, is that Muslims may follow Sharia and profess *tawḥīd*, but they do not live it. Instead, and not least due to the influences of “reform-thought,” Muslims have embraced the modern, all-colonising scientific worldview fore-
grounded by Christianity and matured with Darwin’s theory of evolution and its development by Social Darwinists, positivists, and race-theorists. Consequently, even believing and practicing Muslims have abandoned their duty as God’s vice-gerents for the self-interested, species-and-race-fixated ethos “survival of the fittest,” which both encourages limitless human exploitation of nature at the expense of non-human species, and maintains western imperialism. What Muslims ought to do, therefore, is to experience the ontology of tawḥīd and their ethical responsibility as God’s vice-gerents by following the Sufi path to mystical unity. In this way, Alkatiri illustrates another key argument in her multi-layered article, that research should be informed by ethics at all levels of enquiry. This stance is reflected also in her account of one near-death, two deaths, and a funeral, that of the American-British scientist George Price.

The third article initiates CIS’s aim to review research published in non-English languages. Here, Ahmed Salem reviews his teacher al-ʿAlwānī’s book on ʿusūl al-fiqh, The Problem of Dealing with the Prophet’s Sunnah (2014), in Arabic original Ishkāliyyat al-taʿāmul ma’a al-sunnah al-nabawiyyah. Al-ʿAlwānī’s (d. 2016) research focused on “reform,” as reflected also in his roles as president over the American branch of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and the Fiqh Council of North America, and founder of the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS). Notably, al-ʿAlwānī approached “reform” from a historical perspective, arguing that contemporary reform thinkers should study and learn from their predecessors, including in the first centuries. His major contribution was to demonstrate that the Qurʾan according to its own divine message is the only constitutive source of Islamic law. However, given that the Qurʾan also appoints “sunna” and the authority of the Messenger as complementary to and identical with the divine guidance and rulings, it follows that the Prophetic legal sunna must both align with and be as binding as the Qurʾan. Importantly, al-ʿAlwānī also distinguished between sunna as the broader concept of the Prophet’s exemplary conduct, and ḥadīth as the textual record of specific statements and acts, not all of which are legal. Drawing on Ḥanafī jurisprudence and engaging a range of legal scholars and “reformers,” he then argued that legal ḥadīth are authenticated both through their alignment with the Qurʾan and their transmission chains. Consequently, ḥadīth with sound transmissions but which contradict the Qurʾan are not binding, though part of the textual record. The conclusion is that the Qurʾan and the Prophet’s sunna are inseparable, identical in substance, and equally binding.
These three articles suggest several lines of further enquiry for comparative Islamic studies. Taking Sevea’s “positivist history”—approach as cue, it would be very interesting to see more studies by and of scholars affiliated with the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and al-ʿAlwānī’s Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS), and whether their research has had any practical implications in national and international contexts. Given Alkatiri’s and Salem’s contributions here, a relevant topic would be *fiqh* for environmental protection and climate change-related regulation and legislation. Closely related concerns are social justice, economics, land-management, and workers’ and peasants’ rights, as well as animals’ rights and welfare. Such matters can also be explored with reference to Sufism. However, comparative studies should also be broadened by including the traditional Sunnī and Shīʿī schools of law, the modern organisations and movements, such as the Muslim Brothers, Jamāʿat-i Islāmī, as well as Salafī scholars, and the modern South-Asian schools of Deoband, Barelwi, and Nadwat-ul-ʿulamā'. Then there is the topic touched upon in Sevea’s and Alkatiri’s studies, namely the ways in which deaths, funerals, and tombs are perceived as saying something about a person’s life and impact, and about the social and ethical significance of “genealogy.” This matter, so central to yet often contentious in all religions, deserves to be explored through in-depth studies.

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