

The Editor, IAST Newsletter

I would like to draw the Academy members' attention to an incident, which in itself might be of minor importance, but reveals some significant threats to our academic freedom, as we deal with sensitive current issues in tourism, in the prevailing social and political environment on the world.

About a year ago, Jafar Jafari and Noel Scott invited me to contribute to a book on *Tourism in the Muslim World*, with a chapter on Muslim tourism in Thailand. I accepted, but not being an expert Muslim tourism, I invited Prof. Mark Neal, who had considerable experience in teaching and research in Muslim countries, to join me as co-author. We conducted a case study of the Muslim tourist quarter of Bangkok, which presently constitutes the major center of Middle Eastern tourism in Thailand, and with which I am familiar with since my studies in that area of Bangkok in the 1980s. The tourists belonged mainly to two contrasting types: male sex tourists and medical tourists, accompanied by family members. The chapter includes some detailed descriptions of the pattern of Arab-related prostitution, which reaches back to the beginnings of Arab tourism to Bangkok, but underwent some adaptations in recent times. The Editors have sent the paper to referees, who made some comments, which we considered in the revised version. There was no further reaction by the Editors for a couple of months. However, recently I received the following letter from the Editors:

Dear Professor Eric Cohen

I regret to inform you that your chapter, *A MUSLIM TOURIST ENCLAVE IN BANGKOK*, will not be appearing in *Tourism in the Muslim World*. This is not a criticism of the contribution itself, this difficult editorial decision is based on advice from other experts in the field about the possibility of offending some Muslim readers of the book. In particular, if there were protests about your treatment of a sensitive topic, the other contributors might well feel that they could be subjected to unwelcome and unmerited criticism. I do recommend that you submit your paper to one of the leading tourism journals whose broader subject range and readership might be a more suitable vehicle for your analysis of a very important aspect of tourism.

Sincerely  
Noel Scott  
Jafar Jafari

The problematic point to which I wish to draw the attention of the Academy's members, is the Editors' principal reason for the rejection of the chapter, namely that, in the view of some "experts," it might offend Muslim *readers* of the book (not the *subjects* of our research). The exclusion of our chapter represents a clear case of self-censoring under Islamist pressure, which cannot but lead, by silencing uncomfortable reports, to a biased presentation of Muslim tourism in the world. To my mind, this is an utterly unacceptable procedure, and an infringement of our professional ethics, with potentially far-reaching implications for academic freedom. If readers'

sensitivities were to become a criterion of editorial selection, it would be impossible to report on sensitive issues in the tourism, as in any other, field. One has to note also that the Editors and their “experts” clearly prioritize the sensitivities of Muslim readers over those of others, as e.g. potential Thai readers, in whose country the described activities are taking place.

I consider this issue of vital importance for the unhindered, fair and un-censured study of any topic of academic interest in the tourism field. The protection of our academic freedom is to my mind a fundamental task of the Academy. I am therefore asking the President to put this issue up for discussion at the next meeting of the Academy.

Yours,  
Erik Cohen