

# Quality and Features of Education in the Muslim World

Sayyed Farooq Shah<sup>1,\*</sup>, Safdar Rehman Ghazi<sup>1</sup>, Miraj-ud-Din<sup>2</sup>, Saqib Shahzad<sup>3</sup>, Irfan Ullah<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Education & Research, University of Science & Technology, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Education & Research, Gomal University Dera ismail Khan, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>Institute of Education & Research, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan

Copyright © 2015 Horizon Research Publishing All rights reserved.

**Abstract** The major purpose of this article was to disclose the quality of education in the Muslim world and try to clarify the misperceptions in the West and in the Muslim world about Islamic education. It also tries to highlight the efforts of Islamic scholars in filling the gaps between them. Education in the Muslim world and Islamic education have gained much attention in the past few years due to the perceived link between those issues and concerns for development and security in the Muslim world and beyond. This paper attempts to define Islamic education, provide an in-depth analysis of the educational systems and Islamic education in the Muslim world, using political-historical, socio-cultural, and religious analytical approaches, and identify challenges in improving Islamic education. The paper concludes with a synthesis of approaches and strategies for improving education in Islamic schools of Islamic world.

**Keywords** Islamic Education, Islamic Scholars, Misperceptions, Politicization and Militarization, Approaches

---

## 1. Introduction

### What Is Islamic Education?

The meaning of Islamic education may differ according to who is writing about it and from which angle. Some stress the “TARBIYA,” or character development. Others define it as religious education, with stress on the Quran and other basic Islamic teachings and values. For the sake of this research paper, Islamic education refers to tarbiya and any other topics in particular related to that development.

### Educational Systems and Islamic Education in the Muslim World

#### Political-Historical Review and Socio-Cultural Implications

A political-historical review of major events that have shaped the Muslim world shows how the current state of education was transformed prior, during, and after the advent

of Western colonization during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Muslim communities rediscovered the importance of education when they encountered “Modernity” and Westernization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Euro-colonial expansion. It is during this period that the Muslims had to come to grips with Western military, political, and economic superiority. Consequently, Muslim “backwardness” and modernization became the central issues for Muslim intellectuals of this era. Related to, and resultant of the political events of the past two centuries were socio-cultural developments that shaped all society’s institutions in the Muslim world, including the educational system. Most notable, this publication highlights the significance of the interplay between several value systems—the modern, the traditional, and the religious—in shaping all aspects of life in the Muslim world, including the educational systems. One obvious influence during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century occurred soon after the arrival of the colonialists and the establishment of their institutions. The cultural norms dictating access to resources, power, and status shifted not only towards the attainment of Western-style education, but also to the adjustment of manners and lifestyle to resemble those of Westerners. Under the model of dual educational systems, with the modern general education offering access to status and power, and the Islamic education system becoming more and more limited in what it could offer its graduates, the bulk of ambitious elites and middle-class directed their—and their children’s—education to modern general education institutions, including missionary schools. Islamic education institutions became a symbol of backwardness and became associated with poor and rural populations.

## 2. Islamic Educational Systems

With this political-historical and socio-cultural analysis in the background, this publication provides an overview of the educational systems in the Muslim world, with a focus on how Islamic education institutions are positioned within those systems. In this regard, this publication describes analytically the developments within Islamic educational

systems in five countries (Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey), and the links of those systems to the wider educational systems. Naturally, as a result of the massive changes that occurred in the Muslim world over the past 200 years, the shape and design of Islamic education varies from one country to the other. However, after reviewing the Islamic education system in various countries, it becomes clear that educational institutions in the Muslim world offer varying mixes of Islamic and general education. On one end of the spectrum, in some countries there are institutions that offer exclusively Islamic education. These are usually informal, community-based institutions intended to teach children basic Islamic information and Quranic memorization, in addition to basic Arabic and arithmetic. This is followed by another type of institution that also offers a strong emphasis on Islamic education combined with minimal general education. A third type combines a stronger general education curriculum and usually follows government regulations. A new emerging model combines high quality general education with a strong emphasis on Islamic education. This new trend of schools is usually private with expensive fees and appeals mainly to the growing modern/religious middle and upper classes. The most prevalent type of institution in the entire Muslim world offers mainly a general education curriculum with minimal superficial instructions in religion. These are usually public schools and private schools that follow the general education curriculum strictly. Near the end of the spectrum are schools that offer only general education. Those are rare in the Muslim world, as most of these countries insist on some type of religious education.

### 3. Components of Islamic Education Curriculum

Based on this review of the content of Islamic education, the following topics are usually taught in educational institutions that focus primarily on Islamic education. Such curricula may exist in exclusively Islamic education institutions, or in institutions that offer a strong dose of Islamic education combined with a general education curriculum:

- **Quranic Interpretation (Tafsir):** This subject includes reviews of the classic interpretations of the Quran according to several early scholars such as Ibn Kathir, El-Tabari, and Ibn Taymiyya. In some institutions, the interpretations provided by contemporary scholars such as Sayed Qutb and Mawdudi may also be included.
- **Prophet's Sayings and Practices (Hadith):** This subject addresses the processes used to ensure the authenticity of stories and statements related to the Prophet Mohammed, and review of the collections compiled by earlier scholars such as Bukhari and Muslim.

- **Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh):** This subject includes the methodologies used by various scholars, especially those representing the major four schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam (Shaf'i, Hanafi, Malki, and Hanbali), and their rulings on a variety of subjects, usually cataloged under categories such as prayer, marriage, divorce, charity, and jihad. Islamic Basic Beliefs ('Aqid): This subject focuses on the fundamental Islamic beliefs such as unity of God, existence of angels and Satan, Day of Judgment, heaven, and hell.
- **Arabic Language:** As Arabic is the language of the Quran; almost all educational institutions that focus on Islamic education provide education in the Arabic language. Proficiency in Arabic is usually regarded highly in such institutions.
- **Islamic Rituals:** This subject deals with how Muslims should perform their rituals such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca. Fiqh books include elaborate volumes on those subjects.
- **Islamic History:** This subject focuses primarily on Islamic history from the time of Prophet Mohammed to the present.
- **Islamic Manners and Values:** This subject includes focused education especially for children on proper Islamic manners as preached and practiced in the formative era of Islam; an era regarded by most Islamic scholars as a golden age from which many positive lessons and models may be drawn. In educational institutions that offer primarily a general education curriculum, the subject of religion usually includes elements of Islamic manners and values.

### 4. General Challenges Facing Islamic Education

Despite the current socio-political tensions between the Islamic and Western worlds, there is a largely unquestioned allegiance on the part of many Muslims to the normative modes of thought and action associated with Western modernity. Since the days of gaining limited independence from direct colonialism after World War II, most discussions on education in the Muslim world have been concerned with seeking empowerment in the modernist world system. However, there is a general lack of awareness that modernity and its knowledge system is situated in Western culture and society. Along with the more obvious curricular and methodological issues relating to modern Western education, significant political implications emerge when one considers Western education as an interconnected series of norms and allegiances. To the extent that Islamic education draws upon modern Western models, it is subject to this normative system. But while Western education works to create allegiance to the norms of modernity, Islam has established

its own system of norms and allegiances, and allegiance to the norms of Islamic thought and action provides the basis for a workable social, political, and economic system.

- A Test of Faith
- Avoiding Conflicts of Interest
- Classifying and Prioritizing Knowledge
- Separating Knowledge and Wealth
- Building Upon Islamic Knowledge

### **A Test of Faith**

According to the Islamic understanding of the evolution of religions, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) reestablished original monotheism, the primordial religion of humanity, after it had been repeatedly corrupted by worldly desires and human forgetfulness. The Qur'an challenges those who still cling to these corrupted vestiges of the primordial religion and who dispute the veracity of the renewed pristine message:

[This is the truth from your Lord, so be not of the disputers. But whoever disputes with you in this matter after what has come to you of knowledge, then say, "Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our near people and your near people, then let us be earnest in prayer, and pray for the curse of Allah on the liars."] (Aal `Imran 3:61)

To generations of commentators, this was a test of faith after all rational arguments had been exhausted. But the disputers retreated from this clear challenge, kept and developed their own value system, and, to make a very long story short, the resulting Western system is on the verge of ruling the world today, and it is demanding from Muslims, and other peoples worldwide, allegiance to its system of norms, which by Islamic standards are corrupted.

### **Avoiding Conflicts of Interest**

Acting within the Islamic system of norms and allegiances can create conflicts of interest for those whose allegiances are intertwined with the currently dominant Western modernist system. For Muslims, knowledge and guidance derive ultimately from a divine source, not from worldly desires or corrupted texts. To know Islam is to express allegiance to its set of norms, but this allegiance can create a dilemma when those norms become deviant vis-à-vis a corrupted yet dominant set of norms. And this is not just a theoretical presumption because the dominating Western normative system threatens to subvert or destroy what it sees as deviant sets of norms in order to maintain supremacy for its own corrupted set of norms. In the Western system, which is based on falsehood and corruption as understood by the Islamic tradition, allegiance to a divine set of norms may come only at great sacrifice, certainly in terms of life and livelihood, but also in terms of faith and practice of one's religion to the fullest extent of its ascribed potential.

Education is an important site for exploring the interplay between conflicting sets of norms and allegiances. This is especially evident if one views education as a process of becoming, rather than as a body of knowledge with

certificates and degrees or as a preparation for a profession or livelihood. When a person seeks an education, that person is in a sense making a commitment to become someone different than when he or she started. Depending upon how much the educational system differs from one's own system in terms of its norms, this process of becoming can be quite profound. Entering into such an arrangement means that the person who exits the other end will be quite a different person, with various degrees of allegiance to the particular set of norms adhered to and promoted by the system from which they sought their education.

Education is also a two way process. On the surface, a student seeks and obtains some knowledge, training, and certification from a particular educational institution, and a student also contributes to an institutional system in obvious ways, such as through paying tuition and making donations as an alumnus or alumna. But, more subtly, students validate an institution by seeking its form of education over the forms offered by other institutions. Students may also contribute by way of securing awards, patents, or grants for their alma mater, thus bringing heightened prestige for the institution and further validating its normative system. The same can be said of distributing one's works through various Western university-sponsored academic journals and book publishers, or accepting international prizes and awards; they all serve to validate the system from which they emanate. This is important in cross-cultural situations, where students from one cultural background can contribute to the intellectual validity and prestige of educational institutions in the dominant cultural framework, and at the same time marginalize those of their own cultural background.

Education, therefore, takes place within a complex system of intersecting norms and allegiances. First, there is the education of the self. To be a Muslim means to know Islam as a normative system; and to be considered as an educated person in an Islamic system means first and foremost to have allegiance to its norms and to make every effort to exemplify them. Next, there are implications for any particular community of Muslims that may be continuing the norms of Islam along with their local languages and cultural practices. Then there are implications for Muslims worldwide, the Ummah, in terms of making cultural, political, social, and economic connections with other communities, developing over the years into a broad-based Islamic movement.

Finally, there are implications for humanity, involving identifying its problems and hindrances to establishing ethically just societies. Unjust normative systems and their patterns of allegiance feed back into the development of self, community, Ummah, and humanity. In other words, joining a system of norms and allegiances may have potentially profound repercussions for generations to come. This affects not only the practice of one's religion, but also virtually every other aspect of life, ranging from agriculture and architecture to medicine and science. Western civilization maintains a network of allegiances to its normative system of thought and action, and this network operates through education and its accompanying temporal rewards. Any movement toward

liberation, especially one claiming allegiance to divine norms, will have to rethink the purpose of the forms of education it values and pursues.

Like other peoples recently emerging from colonialism, Muslims need to evaluate their own forms of education—including an assessment of community needs—before importing part and parcel an educational system from the West. At best, introducing the Western system is like laying a thin socio-cultural membrane over indigenous societies and norms, creating a sort of cultural schizophrenia. At worst, imposing the Western system of education builds a support mechanism for direct colonization, which has dogged non-Western peoples for several centuries. Ignoring any consideration of these issues cannot be seen as simply remaining “neutral” or “objective.” Rather, in the present climate of dogmatic American triumphalism, ignorance or passivity amounts to self-degradation and tacit support of colonialism, directly or indirectly.

### **Classifying and Prioritizing Knowledge**

The Islamic tradition encourages Muslims to “seek knowledge.” In a series of celebrated hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said, “Seek knowledge even in China,” and “Seek knowledge continuously,” and “Seeking knowledge is incumbent upon all Muslims, men and women.” While Muslims have heeded this call for centuries, recent developments in Western civilization are posing new challenges to seekers of knowledge. Western civilization is rushing headlong into a commodity-driven and individualistic “information age” with little sense of the difference between information and knowledge, and with few criteria other than advertising and desire to make distinctions. In order to avoid drowning in the information whirlpool, some selection criteria seem necessary.

To illustrate just one example, use a large online bookstore or search engine, and type in a key phrase like “child rearing.” Thousands books, articles, and Web sites will immediately appear. In practical terms of time and money, it would be impossible for any seeker to avail himself or herself of what is contained in all of those instantly located sources. Nevertheless, if someone tried to read all those sources, if he or she found some way to not have to do anything else, and just read those sources for the rest of his or her life, perhaps he or she will be “seeking knowledge.” But will he or she then be knowledgeable?

In answering such questions, with respect to the above hadiths on seeking knowledge, a key problem arises in translation of the Arabic word *ilm*, which is rendered above as “knowledge,” and which is also often rendered as “science.” But if *ilm* is knowledge, then in the Hadith, what is the word for “information”? Do the Hadith and other traditional sources that speak of seeking knowledge also apply to seeking information? Does the Islamic tradition possess the resources for making meaningful distinctions? In Muslim intellectual history, there is a more detailed hadith from the Prophet that can shine light on such questions.

Muslim scholars through the ages—ranging from Imam Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) to Mullah Sadra (d. 1640 CE), and, more recently, Imam Khomeini—have commented upon this hadith. The wisdom of this hadith has informed Muslim seekers of knowledge for centuries, although less so among Western-educated technocrats in the modernist and colonialist periods. In the Arabic, the hadith is quite eloquent, a sure sign of its authenticity to historians of the Islamic tradition, and in its English rendition it is as follows:

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) once entered a mosque where there was a group of people surrounding a man. “Who is that?” inquired the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). He was told, “He is a very learned man.” “What is a very learned man?” asked the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). They told him, “He is the most learned of men regarding Arab genealogies, past episodes, the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, and Arabic poetry.” The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, “That is knowledge the ignorance of which is no harm and the possession of which is no benefit.” Then the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) declared, “Verily knowledge consists of these three: the firm sign, the just duty, and the established practice. All else is superfluous.”

#### **(Khomeini)**

Scholars can produce commentaries on this hadith, and they can do speculative research to help determine what is meant by “firm sign, just duty, and established practice,” but in a general sense what the above hadith says is that Muslims ought to classify and prioritize the knowledge they seek. This seems to be in full recognition of the mortality of the human being, who only has a certain amount of time in this world. One can spend a lifetime seeking knowledge, but without some criteria to classify that knowledge and thus give it meaning, this “lifelong learning” could be construed as spending a lifetime seeking knowledge that is superfluous at the expense of knowledge that is more important and meaningful, as implied by the above cited hadith. When modernist as well as fundamentalist Muslims hear this hadith for the first time, many of them will tend to see it in terms of *haram* and *halal*. But the hadith is not really about what is *halal* and *haram* in seeking knowledge; it is more about classifying and prioritizing the time and effort spent on seeking knowledge. To put it as simply as possible, this Prophetic hadith suggests that some knowledge is more important than other knowledge, and that there need to be priorities.

During the periods of modernity and colonialism, Muslims abandoned a key part of their tradition: the ability to classify and prioritize the seeking of knowledge as outlined in the above hadith, and as put into practice by Muslims prior to modernity and colonialism. As a result, the West now decides what is important knowledge and what is not, and this is done according to the beliefs and goals of Western civilization. An elaborate system of certificates and degrees, acting like so many rewards and punishments, has assured that the Western system of knowledge is taken as the universal system. This pious fraud is at the core of the

challenge facing Islamic education today: that despite what labels Muslims may put on it, most education is West-directed.

### **Separating Knowledge and Wealth**

Many modern Muslims who have been cleared by the Western political investment community, and who wield some limited power in their communities, have largely bought into the Western normative worldview. This worldview is based on a utilitarian and economist perspective, which says that the only knowledge worth seeking is the knowledge that is able to generate wealth. The old saying “knowledge is power” has given way to a new saying, that “knowledge is wealth.” But what does the Islamic tradition say about the relationship between knowledge and wealth?

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) once declared to his Companions, “There are two kinds of greedy people who cannot be satisfied: the seeker of knowledge and the seeker of this world. While the seeker of knowledge receives an increase in Allah's pleasures, the seeker of this world delves deeply into tyranny.” (**Mizan al-Hikmah by Muhammadi Rayshahri**)

If we accept, as the Qur'an suggests, that wealth is one of the trappings of this world, then the wisdom of this hadith becomes more apparent, and the Islamic tradition can provide criteria for making distinctions between knowledge and wealth.

The Prophetic recognition cited above—that the greed for knowledge and for this world are both insatiable and that the latter will lead to tyranny—was borne out on several notable occasions in early Islamic history. It is widely accepted among Muslims that the heir to the Prophet's knowledge and wisdom was `Ali ibn Abi Talib, who, in addition to being the fountainhead of most Sufi orders, is also remembered as one of the “rightly guided” political successors of the Prophet for the Sunnis and as the first “infallible” imam for the Shiah. When Imam `Ali became the leader of the Muslims, he faced the emergence of dynastic rule among the Umayyad clan. The imam had first-hand experience with the relationship between knowledge and wealth, and this had become more acute after his death as dynastic rule solidified under the Abbasids. During that period, many of the great Muslim scholars, like Ja`far Sadiq, Abu Hanifah and Ibn Hanbal, languished in prisons because they exhorted the Muslims to knowledge—as defined by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him)—while the dynastic regimes tempted Muslims with wealth and superfluity. Imam `Ali's reign lies at the crossroads of this fateful shift in allegiance among Muslims, and both his deeds and teachings are instructive for our purposes. On one occasion, he is recorded as having said:

Knowledge is better than wealth sevenfold. First, knowledge is the heritage of the prophets, while wealth is the heritage of the pharaohs. Second, wealth decreases by spending, while knowledge multiplies. Third, wealth is in need of protection, while knowledge protects those who have it. Fourth, knowledge enters into the burial cloth, while

wealth stays behind. Fifth, wealth is an occurrence for the believers and disbelievers alike, while knowledge does not occur except to the believers. Sixth, everyone is in need of knowledge in matters of his religion, while no one is in need of the owner of wealth. And seventh, knowledge empowers humankind to pass along the straight path, while wealth blocks it. (**Mizan al-Hikmah by Muhammadi Rayshahri**)

This tradition makes a strong case that knowledge cannot be wealth. In fact, wealth is a sort of dwindling and even corrupting burden, while knowledge is a growing and at times regenerative ease. It also suggests that knowledge and wealth be kept separate. With the Western system increasingly being exposed as the spinner of inequality, greed and destruction in terms of the health of humanity, and with utilitarian and economist views of knowledge being wielded by the same powers, the mental as well as the environmental health of the planet and its inhabitants may depend on the abilities of Muslims and other non-Western peoples to mine their own traditions and try to configure another way, based on deeply-rooted teachings like the ones cited here. This alternative way would have to first recognize the relationships between knowledge, power, and wealth, by forming a critique grounded in Islam, within which may also lie a regenerative vision.

### **Building upon Islamic Knowledge**

Let us conclude with a look at the outcomes of the Western educational system, and compare them to those expected by the Islamic system. In the West, it is possible for someone to complete a rigorous course of study in higher education, but to emerge as emotionally impoverished and morally bankrupt. A school or university graduate within the Western modernist system could receive high honors and yet still be an apostate, disbeliever, atheist, or Satanist. Though such people may be able to function perfectly well as bankers, business executives, and politicians in the West-directed world order, to Muslims such educational outcomes would indicate that either the student has failed miserably, or that the educational system itself is severely dysfunctional. With this in mind, there are two other famous teachings of Imam `Ali that suggest what the outcomes of an Islamic educational experience ought to look like, and what they ought not to look like. When asked by one of his companions about how to recognize a knowledgeable person, or what we might understand as someone who is well educated, the imam replied:

To those who are seekers of knowledge, knowledge has many merits. Its head is humility, its eye is freedom from envy, its ear is understanding, its tongue is truthfulness, its memory is research, its heart is good intention, its intellect is knowledge of things and matters, its hand is compassion, its foot is visiting the learned, its resolution is integrity, its wisdom is piety, its abode is salvation, its helmsman is well-being, its mount is faithfulness, its weapon is softness of speech, its sword is satisfaction, its bow is tolerance, its army is discussion with the learned, its wealth are refined manners, its stock is abstinence from sins, its provision for journey is

virtue, its drinking water is gentleness, its guide is Divine guidance, and its companion is the love of the spiritually elect. (Mizan al-Hikmah by Muhammadi Rayshahri)

Conversely, a teaching of the imam that illustrates the outcome of seeking this world provides clues as to the undesirable educational results for someone who has pursued the wrong course: The people of this world are excessive in eating, laughing, sleeping, and anger. They find little satisfaction and do not apologize to whomever they offend, nor do they accept apologies from whoever has offended them. They are lazy in their obedience but courageous in their disobedience. They are not responsible for their inner desires. They are of little advantage to anyone, yet they are excessive in speaking. They have no need for piety or fear, and yet they show great enthusiasm in consuming. The people of this world are not thankful for their prosperity, nor are they patient in times of distress. They praise themselves about that which they do not deserve, and they speak often about that which they desire. They readily expose other people's negative shortcomings while they often conceal other people's positive attributes, and they are not modest to those whom they meet. (Mizan al-Hikmah by Muhammadi Rayshahri).

In addressing the challenges for Islamic education, those who do not exhibit the attributes of a “seeker of knowledge” as suggested by Imam `Ali's saying above, or who cannot discern knowledge from superfluity as defined in the previously cited Prophetic hadiths, are not likely to be considered as knowledgeable or well-educated people. Similarly, those who exhibit the above noted attributes of the “people of this world” can be understood as having been miseducated.

To those rooted in the worldview of Islam, who accepts its system of norms and allegiances, there is a profound schizophrenia in the West today, which promotes the highest forms of intellectual achievement side by side with the bases and most selfish forms of injustice, frivolity, and greed. Living in such a world, participating in its educational systems, Muslims who are serious about Islamic education face a challenge from the hadiths and teachings cited above, in which specific forms of knowledge can take precedence over others, in which distinctions can be made between seeking knowledge and seeking the life of this world, and in which there is a normative emphasis on creating piety, ethics, humility, and responsibility, all of which must be among the earmarks of a knowledgeable person. An education that neglects this knowledge will be, in the end, defective.

## **5. Specific Challenges to Islamic Education in the Muslim World**

Islamic education faces challenges from within as well as the challenges that the system poses to communities and societies in the Muslim world and beyond.

### **The Position of Islamic Education within the Larger**

### **Educational System**

Based on the discussion of Islamic education within larger educational systems, it becomes clear that students in Islamic education institutions find themselves in dead-end sub-systems. In addition, in many instances the educational system does not recognize Islamic education institutions' degrees or limits their usefulness. On the other hand, general education systems usually limit access to Islamic education in general education schools, which opens the door for seeking knowledge about Islam from sources that may be militant or radical. Finally, as Islamic education has not received much attention compared to general education, the management system faces several challenges.

### **Islamic education processes and pedagogy**

In some religious circles, a belief continues to exist that religious education is The Knowledge (‘ILM). This attitude reflects negatively on efforts to modernize Islamic educational systems. In addition, a common pedagogy used is based on memorization, with less emphasis on individual contributions. Another major prevalent challenge is punishment of students in Islamic education institutions, which is almost a chronic problem in the entire Muslim world. Finally, as a result of ages of stagnation, teaching methods in Islamic education institutions have not seen improvement.

### **Efforts of Islamic Scholars**

The challenge to stay current, especially during this time of rapid technological advancements—specifically in the areas of communication, and economic and social globalization—poses new challenges to education in the Muslim world in general and to Islamic education in particular. In addition, the threat of militancy and terrorism in the name of Islam as a response to perceived injustices and radical fundamentalism as a response to cultural changes are troubling. Unfortunately, in the face of those challenges, contemporary Islamic scholars concerned with Islamic education seem to fall short in providing effective guidance to address them. This is because contemporary scholars often use approaches that reflect, to a great extent, a siege mentality and produce ad-hoc approaches to the study of Islamic sources on education.

### **Misperceptions in the West and In the Muslim World about Islamic Education**

In the West, and among elites in the Muslim world, especially after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, media formulated a singular image of Islamic education institutions by focusing on children memorizing the Quran and shouting “jihad”. This resulted in presenting the system as one that is backward, oppressive to children, and used as a seedbed for militancy and extremism. Those negative views of Islamic education institutions misrepresent several aspects. First, the vast majority of these institutions provide more than just mechanical Quranic memorization; they offer a wider range of religious education in addition to modern

education. Second, they serve millions of children; girls and boys in the Muslim world who otherwise could be deprived of any education. Third, these institutions in many countries of the Muslim world provide invaluable social services to the communities by offering shelter and education to orphans. Finally, most of those institutions are moving forward with modernization plans.

### **Politicization and militarization of Islamic education**

It is unfortunate that governments and militants, in the Muslim world and the West, have on several occasions exploited those Islamic education institutions to advance their own political agendas. The trouble with those policies is that, as the whole world has witnessed in the past few years, such indoctrination and utilization of Islamic education institutions as centers for Islamic Jihad International, do not cease to exist once the purpose they were initiated to address is fulfilled. The indoctrination and the militant fraternity live beyond the fulfillment of the immediate purpose. The violent force associated with them continues to affect the entire world in an unprecedented wave of terror.

### **Approaches/Strategies for Improving Education in Islamic Schools**

Based on the information gathered in this research, the following approaches and strategies are provided for improving education in Islamic schools. The information in this section is organized according to three categories: society- government- and institution-related approaches/strategies.

#### **1- Society-related Approaches/Strategies**

##### **1(a) Encourage, rather than hinder, community ownership of Islamic education institutions**

Islamic education institutions in several Muslim countries were the products of successful social entrepreneurship. That is, those institutions have often been initiated and maintained by visionary community leaders whose aims were to provide educational services to their impoverished communities, and to provide shelters to orphans. This spirit must be encouraged, and maintained. It should not be hampered by efforts to supervise the curriculum.

##### **1(b) Promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence**

Islamic education institutions do not exist in a vacuum. They are strongly influenced by political, social, and cultural factors. In this time of massive, easily accessible information technology, the spread of radical Islamic doctrines, via what appears to be legitimate and credible religious sources may negatively influence the worldview of the young generations in the Muslim world in general. This, in turn, may influence Islamic education institutions. Efforts must be made to provide religiously credible and legitimate information about tolerance and peaceful coexistence via various information dissemination venues such as the internet and media.

##### **1(c) Provide equitable education for girls**

Girls' enrollment in Islamic education institutions in most Muslim countries is, surprisingly, high. Research has revealed few impressive examples of Islamic girl education models. This educational system, however, continues to be influenced by traditional patriarchal values, and male-dominated religious interpretations. Those values and attitudes result in treating girls and women as second class in those institutions. Efforts must be made to better accommodate girls. This may be accomplished by increasing the number of women teachers and administrators, as they may be able to influence policies and practices in ways that will make those institutions more attentive to girls' needs. Counter negative perceptions about Islamic education. Negative perceptions about Islamic education institutions are prevalent among large segments of Western societies, and among the elites and middle class in Muslim countries. Correcting misperceptions in Western societies and among Muslim countries' elites and middle class via dissemination of appropriate information will bring wider support to the reforms and modernization efforts proposed in this research.

#### **2-Government-related Approaches/Strategies**

##### **2(a) Support Islamic education, especially in public schools**

The Islamic aspects of identity in the Muslim world continue to influence those societies. Because of the strong presence of Islam as an identity element, people in the Muslim world will continue to seek knowledge about Islam, and will view efforts to reduce Islamic education as an infringement upon a sacred aspect of their existence and identity. It is not recommended in this research to continue with efforts to eliminate or reduce Islamic education, especially in public schools.

##### **2(b) Monitor, not mandate, Islamic curriculum content**

The involvement of governments in the Muslim world, and elsewhere, with Islamic curricula to serve security objectives could lead to uncontrolled negative outcomes. The outcomes of such involvements have been devastating on a wide scale. While state supervision of Islamic curriculum is necessary to guard against the spread of radical and militant views, states in the Muslim world, and elsewhere, must refrain from politicizing this education. Provide careful supervision of Islamic education institutions and curriculum. The examples of the government role with Al-Azhar in Egypt and with Islamic education institutions in Indonesia demonstrate that state supervision prevents the spread of such institutions in unpredictable directions. In this regard it is important to assert that issues related to Islamic identity and education are highly sensitive materials not suitable for free exchange and handling. Monitor curriculum for education quality and negative messages. The peaceful revival of Islam has been expanding into the middle and upper classes of most Muslim societies. While the impression about Islamic education institutions among large segments of these classes remains negative, increasing numbers of people among these classes are seeking Islamic education that is combined with modern education. This is

resulting in the emergence of new models of Islamic/modern educational institutions that cater to those classes. While governments should encourage this trend because it provides an attractive educational venue to members of those classes, governments must also carefully review both the general education and Islamic education curricula to ensure that they meet quality standards, and that the religious curricula does not contain negative, antagonistic messages.

3-Institution-related Approaches/Strategies

3(a) Encourage the infusion of general education into Islamic education institutions

The dual model of education (general education institutions and Islamic education institutions) in several Muslim countries is going through changes in which most Islamic education institutions are incorporating general education curriculum into the Islamic curriculum. In doing so, those institutions are receiving financial support and recognition of their certificates, which increases the choices of their students regarding their future education. The trend towards infusing general education curriculum into Islamic education institutions must be encouraged, and incentives must be developed to attract more exclusive Islamic education institutions to incorporate general education

Curriculum:

3(b) Support/promote new student-centered, action-oriented classroom instruction

The quality of teacher preparation, pedagogical

approaches, and teacher-student relations in Islamic education institutions has been of concern to all involved. The traditional approaches based on memorization are depriving students of creative thinking and addressing new challenges and contemporary issues. Corporal punishment concerns many students in those institutions. At the same time, administrators and teachers in those institutions welcome learning new approaches to education. Encourage efforts to provide teacher training programs and exchange programs to introduce more participatory, less memorization-based, approaches to education and teaching.

3(c) Spread the word about successful new models

The growing interest in studying Islamic education in the Muslim world has led to the discovery of intriguing new models of Islamic education institutions. Several of these models strike an effective balance between providing Islamic education, modern education, and civic education. A compilation of “best practices” among Islamic education institutions in the Muslim world, and the dissemination of the compilation in various formats (for example, in hard copies, CDs and on the internet) may expand these models into more countries, especially if the implementation of these models is connected to some form of incentive. One significant advantage of this process is that those models have been “home grown” within “Islamically-credible” institutions. This will eliminate the concern that these are Western imposed models.

**Table 1.** Summary of Dominant Value Systems in Muslim Societies:

<u><b>Religious Value System</b></u>	<u><b>Traditional Value System</b></u>	<u><b>Modern Value System</b></u>
1-Represents the norms, expectations, and rules derived from religion 2-Affects various aspects of people’s lives, such as choices of mates, dress code, refraining from alcohol and gambling, and rules related to marriage, divorce, and death 3- Also affects the political and social outlook for some	a- Is the set of norms and ethics inherited through history from various sources. b- Influence many aspects of lives, such as rituals related to birth, marriage, and funerals. c- Also provide certain values related to strict family traditions (i.e., patriarchy and limitations on women’s appearance and choices), and even blood retaliation. d- Are not of religious origin, even if people mistake them as such.	1-Consists of the set of values learned through the interaction with the West over the past two centuries 2-Examples of these values fall under three categories: Secular, such as democratic systems; Civic, such as work ethics, and respect for public space; and Westernized, such as individual freedom on the Personal level, music, and pop culture.



**Table 2.** Spectrum of Education in the Muslim World:

Mix of general and religious Education	Exclusively Islamic Education	Islamic Education with Minimal General Education	Mixed Islamic And general Education	Mixed Islamic And high Quality General Education	General Education with Minimal Religious Education	Exclusively general Education	High quality General Education with Some Christian Education
level of religious education	strong focus on Islamic education	strong focus on Islamic education	strong focus on Islamic education	strong focus on Islamic education	minimal Islamic education	no Islamic education	no Islamic education; some Christian education
type of educational institution (public/private)	mostly private, low fee, informal schools	mostly private, low fee, schools	mix of public and private, low fee, schools	private, high fee, schools	mostly public schools	mostly public schools	private, high fee, schools ( <i>missionary schools</i> )
type of students	attended mainly by a small percentage of students from underprivileged segments of the society	attended mainly by a small percentage of students from underprivileged segments of the society	attended by a sizeable minority of students mainly from underprivileged segments of the society	attended by an increasing, yet still small, percentage, of middle and upper class students	attended by large percentages of all segments of the society	attended by large percentages of all segments of the society	attended by a very small percentage of students from upper influential class
example countries	Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh	Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nigeria	Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria	Bangladesh, Egypt, turkey, Pakistan	Bangladesh, Egypt, turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria	turkey (until late 1940's), and currently proposed in Egypt	Egypt, Syria, turkey, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nigeria

## 6. The Most Pressing Issues for the Muslim World

According to infoplease.com profile of the world, the estimated distance of world area is 510.072 million sq. km. with 148.94 million sq. km. being land area, while 361.132 million sq. km. is water. 79.9% of the world is water, whereas 29.1% is land. However, in today's technology, distance would not even matter. The world has become much smaller and one can know very much of what is going on around the globe quickly with modern means of communication. With all the technology, science, health, and sophistication that we reached, there are immense problems in the world. Among the most pressing issues are war, violence, diseases, poverty, and human rights violations/repressions. The nations of the world, Western, Muslims and others alike share these problems generally.

### The Western World

The western world made tremendous progresses in terms of tackling these above issues. Overall, the societies of these nations are enjoying stable life at least materialistically. They are in the process of providing security, rights, food and health care for every citizen in their countries. We know for example, in the United States, all these above are the rights of its entire people.

### The Muslim World

The Muslim world faces the challenges of war, poor healthcare, poverty and violations of human rights, illiteracy, lack of progress, dictatorship, lack of political transparency, ethnic conflict, and regional divisions. Illiteracy is a problem in majority of Muslim countries. We know all these problems are interconnected. The lack of literacy leads to lack of progress, and lack of progress leads to lack of development, which leads to dictatorship, which in turn leads to lack of political transparency, which also leads to power struggles that lead to regional divisions and ethnic conflict. Majority of the Muslim world today is characterized by these ailments. This can raise a legitimate question of why the Muslim world is behind its Western counterpart. Is it because of Islam? Unless one knows the history of the world; the true examples of Muslim leaders; the difference between Islam and culture – it is hard to know why the Muslim world is so behind the Western world. Thus, Islamophobes blame Islam as the cause of the backwardness of Muslim nations. But the reality is contrary to that. Islam is a religion of progress, innovation, and development. It is a religion of every generation, time, and location. It is a religion of civilization; it is a way of life. It must be noted that the Islamic Caliphate collapsed in 1924. Naturally, when a civilization collapses, another one rises. When Europeans took the power, unlike the Islamic Caliphate, they created a new imperial power

engaged in slavery and colonization. In fact, the Islamic Caliphate almost eradicated these practices after the Romans and Persians. The European conquerors focused a lot on the Middle East, Africa, and South America. They did not conquer the lands only, but they enslaved the people as well. They divided the same native and homogeneous nations into enclaves and different nations. In the 1950s, there were uprisings for independence against these colonial powers. After heavy struggles, the colonial powers were forced to leave many countries. However, they only left physically but stayed there intellectually and psychologically. In other words, they handed the rule and the government affairs to their chosen representatives or puppet regimes. Thus, the people in many countries never got real independence.

This actually creates a contradictory situation of government against its people and people against their government. People see the government as their number one enemy, while the government sees its own people as enemies. This led the government to not allow any political parties other than the ruling party. Corruption, totalitarian dictatorship and deprivation of basic human rights such as education, freedom of speech, free enterprise, political participation, to name a few became the normal practice of governments. Sadly, the people attack and see the government property as stolen from them. People loot the school and hospital equipments because of the resentment against their government.

Therefore, when the government and its people are not cooperative in running their affairs and there is dishonesty, chaos and lack of development become the norms for these countries. This leads to low human development index, which is measured by three indicators – life expectancy at birth, (long and healthy life), literacy, and income. The majority of Muslim nations fall in the low middle or bottom of the list in all these indicators according to the UN report on Human Development Index. In United Nations report in 2009 on least and most corrupted nations, again majority of Muslim countries fell in the top of the list for corruptions. The UN report on 2006 of the most and least livable countries in the world, again none of the Muslim countries made the list of most livable countries. IslamicGlory.com reported the following statistics, even though the reality on the ground may be different than what the statistics show, nevertheless, there are immense co-relations between these statistics and conditions of Muslim countries.

In the entire Muslim World (57 Muslim Countries), there are around 500 universities. On the other hand, there are 5,758 universities in the USA alone, and 8,407 universities in India. In a research done by the UNDP in 2004, not one university in the entire Muslim world was featured in the top 500 ranking universities of the world. Literacy in the western world, predominantly Christian, is 90%, whereas the literacy of the Muslim world is 40%. Furthermore, 98% of these predominantly Western countries completed at least primary education, whereas only 50% of Muslim countries completed primary education. Similarly, 40% of western countries attended university, whereas only 2% of Muslim

countries attended university. The Muslim majority countries have 230 scientists in every one million people, whereas, USA alone has 5,000 scientists in every one million. Muslim countries spend on research 0.2% of their GDP, whereas, Western countries spend 5% of their GDP on research. There is a huge gap on the number of sick people to the number of doctors. For example, in Indonesia, there are about 10,000 patients for every one doctor, whereas, in Spain, there are about 500 sick people for every one doctor. In 1995, the average yearly income per citizen in Pakistan was \$300, whereas in Britain it is more than \$ 12,000. Registered patent in 1995 in Egypt is 77, whereas it is 7,652 in Israel.

The majority of the responsibility for this lack of human development in Muslim countries is to be blamed on Muslims themselves. After all, these are their countries and their affairs. However, what is shocking is the hypocrisy and double standard of the United States Policy towards these courtiers. Even though, the conditions of majority of Muslim countries are the same, we will take Egypt as an example because of the recent Revolution. President Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt for about 30 years before he was forced out by popular uprising in February, 2011. During those 30 years, America had five Presidents. We know Hosni Mubarak was a repressive, authoritarian dictator, who killed, tortured, imprisoned, and exiled thousands of his own people, while he kept millions of others in sub-humane conditions. The Egyptian people rose up to Mubarak's regime after many years of humiliation. In this uprising for basic life, hundreds were killed while thousands were injured. American ABC television reported that Mubarak's family may have up to 70 billion dollars and his assets were scattered around the world – from New York, Los Angeles, California, Dubai, Landon and Paris. Five Million Egyptians live in the dead city in inadequate houses. The average Egyptians work for \$400 a month and if Mubarak's 70 billion dollars were divided among 80 million Egyptians, each will get \$843. The United States reiterated numerous times that Hosni Mubarak is a key ally of stability in the region. This shows the United States deception on the claim for democracy and pro-human rights. In reality, American politicians work behind the scenes on ways to keep Mubarak until they find replacement for another 30 years. On the other hand, they dishonestly put on the headlines the message of fear of the Muslim Brotherhood participating in the political process. What if the Egyptian people chose the Muslim Brotherhood in fair election? Isn't the Muslim Brotherhood part of the fabric of Egyptian society? In the worst scenario, is the Muslim Brotherhood farther than the Tea Party in the US elections? This indicates that the US administration is enjoying the suffering of millions of Egyptians who live on a \$1 a day in sub-poverty levels; thousands of Egyptians to be illiterate; hundreds of Egyptians to die from preventable diseases; millions more to be unemployed; and thousands of human activists, innocent citizens, political figures to be tortured, abused, exiled and their basic human rights denied.

What the American government does not understand is that the Muslim world will never be the same again. First,

technology has made communication more effective. For example, the Egyptian people tried to revolt many times in the past, but they did not get the means for the outside world to hear. But at this time Al-Jazeera, Facebook, Twitter, and Google to name a few – made it possible to organize the movement for change. Second, the Muslim world has a large number of young people, with technological skills. So, they will never accept to live in sub-human conditions while their Western counterparts enjoy freedom. Third, the USA's credibility in the Muslim world is really at stake for its unethical preemptive wars and renditions. Thus, the US needs to re-evaluate its policy towards these countries. The puppet regimes in the Middle East are getting old, and they are despised by their people. Replacements which the West and Israel are trying to find will not be accepted by young Muslim generations. They will only accept representative government that comes to power through free and fair elections.

## 7. Summary and Conclusions

This Article has emphasized that understanding issues surrounding Islamic education must take into consideration various social, cultural, and political-historical factors. The state of Islamic education is tied to a great extent to local and international developments. Islamic education, like other institutions in the Muslim world, has struggled with challenges of development and modernization. In addition to “typical” development and modernization challenges, Islamic education institutions have suffered from political manipulation, exploitation and extremism. Recent world affairs obviously set those institutions in the line of media fire as they have been accused of breeding terrorism. This publication has also provided a glimpse of hope that Islamic education institutions are not immune to positive change and modernization. Despite the many negative aspects related to that education, several Islamic education institutions have demonstrated the willingness and ability to adjust to the needs of today's world. Nonetheless, addressing the challenges facing Islamic education will require much more than the good will and action of those responsible for them; it will require the support and action of states, the media, and various members of civil society. More profoundly, the success of efforts to address challenges facing Islamic education will require attitudinal changes on the part of those responsible for that education, and those who continue to view it with fear and suspicion. Such transformation is possible as long as its significance and necessity are recognized.

a)-What lessons are to be learned, finally, from these varied portraits of Islamic education around the world? The first and most obvious is that modern Islamic education is neither timelessly traditional nor medieval, but an evolving institution visibly marked by the world-transforming forces of our age: religious reform, the ascent of the West, nationalism, the developmentalist state, and mass education,

among others. Of these forces, the most initially decisive were the various inter-state rivalries and programs of colonial and postcolonial state-building that swept the Muslim world from the nineteenth century on. The scale of the Western challenge became apparent only gradually, of course, and its precise form varied over time and space. In the nineteenth century, rulers in still-independent countries like Egypt, Qajar Iran, and the Ottoman Empire were convinced that schooling was the “secret wisdom” behind the Europeans' military and technological advantage. All that was required to acquire this wisdom, the rulers believed, was a program of restricted education targeted at children of the elite. Send the princes' children to Paris, open an army academy, bring in a few Prussian advisors—measures like these would suffice to fend off the Westerners clamoring at the gate.

b)-These “defensive military reforms” (Ringer 2001, 7) were initially conducted at a safe distance from the ‘ulama and madrasas. As in Muhammad ‘Ali's Egypt and the Ottoman court of Abdülhamid II, a few ‘ulama might be made accessories to state educational programs. But the larger madrasa system was spared, for fear that a greater meddling might provoke unrest. Attacks by conservative ‘ulama on Western-style schools in Anatolia and Iran provided regular reminders of some scholars' reservations about Western learning. Rulers in Cairo, Istanbul, and Tehran were also concerned that the new schooling might spread subversive Western ideas. The state kept new schools in quarantine, then, at a safe distance from the ‘ulama and masses.

c)-The rulers' tack, however, was not entirely strategic. It also reflected a distinctive legacy of knowledge, a legacy which has influenced the development of Muslim culture and politics to this day. Notwithstanding high-flying rhetoric to the contrary, the knowledge that guided the everyday practice of state politics was primarily based, not on the ‘ulama's shari‘a, but on arts of governance refined over the course of many decades of state administration, as well as through contacts with non-Muslim subjects and non-Muslim neighbors like the Byzantines (Brown 2000, 57). Guided by this level-headed legacy, sultans and their viziers had few of the ‘ulama's reservations about appropriating foreign technologies of knowledge. Modern Western education was to be but one more weapon in the arsenal of governance.

d)-As far as most ‘ulama were concerned, the rulers' adoption of foreign forms of knowledge and education was acceptable as long as it did not trespass into ‘ulama affairs. The separationist principle that lay behind this attitude reminds us that Muslim societies had long since developed a practical separation of knowledge and powers between rulers and ‘ulama. The ‘ulama were reluctant or unable to acknowledge the separation in explicit principle, since it contradicted the prophetic ideal of political and religious authority as a seamless whole (Brown 2000, 54, 56–7; Zaman 2002, 84, 87). But the separation was no less real. ‘Ulama used it to defend their tradition of knowledge from abuse at the hands of rulers. Rulers took advantage of the

separation to support creative initiatives in science, the arts, and state administration.

e)-The princes' arts of governance, moreover, were not the only nonjuridical stream of knowledge flowing through the Muslim world. As Marshall Hodgson observed a generation ago, Muslim civilization had early on developed a vibrant tradition of belletristic literature (*adab*) and empirical and speculative philosophy (*falsafa*), in addition to the 'ulama's science of law and its allied traditions of knowledge (Hodgson 1974, 1, 238–9). In the first centuries of the Muslim Middle Ages, the *falsafa* tradition of philosophy and historical empiricism served as the intellectual platform for a remarkable Muslim engagement with Greek philosophy and natural science. This, too, was the scaffolding upon which the great Arab historian, Ibn Khaldun, erected his magisterial "introduction" to the history of the world, the *Muqaddimah* (c. 1375), with its undogmatic commitment to historical realism.

f)-For a variety of reasons, however, in the late Middle Ages the *falsafa* tradition was marginalized from the commanding heights of literate Islamic culture, including most of the Muslim world's madrasas. The marginalization took place in part because the methods and concerns of philosophy and history seemed at variance with the jurisprudence that had become the linchpin of 'ulama learning. In several Muslim countries, independent scholars continued for a while to make impressive progress in the fields of medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. Indeed, in northern India and several other countries, jurists provided private lessons in philosophy and the natural sciences in addition to instruction in the law (Sabra 1994; Huff 2003, 87). Elsewhere, however, the marginalization of *falsafa* and science in madrasas and Muslim scholarship was sufficient as to leave religious elites with few resources with which to critically engage Western science and natural philosophy when these reappeared on the Muslim stage in the nineteenth century. The focus of the Islamic traditions of knowledge had long since come to lie elsewhere, in a more normatively self-referential tradition.

g)-The relative atrophy of history, natural philosophy, and empirical science in 'ulama learning, then, is another reason Muslim rulers felt obliged to look elsewhere than madrasas as they scrambled to devise a response to the Western imperial challenge. Inevitably their tactics proved insufficient because the speed and scale of the Western advance were so great. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Europeans had dismantled all or part of the Muslim state edifice in the Maghrib, India, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. Where the Europeans eviscerated Muslim rule, the 'ulama response was often to retreat from formal politics into new programs of religious education. The 'ulama's strategy was "civil societal" rather than state-centric, in the sense that it aimed to strengthen popular piety rather than struggle directly for the restoration of a Muslim state. These educational efforts built on movements for Islamic renewal that had appeared in the Muslim world in the eighteenth century (Levtzion and Voll 1987; Haykel

2003). Now, however, the renewal project was given special urgency by the awful scale of the European advance.

h)-The new religio-educational imperative was felt at the grassroots of Muslim society as well as at its intellectual peaks. In nineteenth-century Java (Dhofier 1999) and early twentieth-century Mali (Brenner 2001, and below), colonialism ushered in a relative social peace. The peace brought new means of production, transportation, and commerce, all of which facilitated the growth and dispersion of the native population. Muslim preachers and teachers soon joined the great population flow. Where they took up residence in a newly opened territory, the teachers typically established, not institutions of higher learning, but modest Qur'anic schools, often of a vaguely Sufi persuasion. Not infrequently these were oriented to segments of the population previously known as only nominally Islamic. The schools became a major force in the great wave of Islamization that swept the Muslim world's peripheries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

i)-As the essays in this collection make clear, however, the project of religious and educational renewal was not just a grassroots affair. In India and Java, Muslims created new networks and voluntary associations for the purposes of higher religious education, much of it of a Salafi-reformist rather than Sufi bent. As with the Muhammadiyah movement in early twentieth-century Indonesia (Alfian 1989), these associations modeled their administration on the voluntary associations Europeans had brought to Muslim lands. Some reformist educators also introduced subjects like mathematics and history into their curriculum. But not all educators embraced these innovations. Some, like India's Deobandis, warmed to European models of administration but stayed cool about nonreligious learning. After independence, and at the urging of the government, Pakistan's Deobandis opened their schools to general education. However, they still found it hard to see nonreligious instruction as anything but "a separate segment of education which students are expected to deal with as a prelude to their real vocation" (Zaman 2002, 83).

j)-However much Muslim rulers might have hoped that the new education might remain an affair of the few, then, modern events conspired to make it a surging societal interest. In Qajar Iran, "in the period 1851–71 an increasing number of parents sent their sons abroad to Europe to study at their own expense" (Ringer 2001, 89). In Morocco in the 1930s, "Islamic institutions became the least attractive option open to . . . Muslims in colonial society," because French-run government schools "siphoned off the children of Morocco's elite" (Eickelman 1985, 163). Parental demand rather than top-down supply was the driver for this great educational transformation. Muslim parents could not be swayed from their goal of giving their children practical skills as well as a vivid sense of their faith. Although the pattern varies from country to country, most parents show a similar preference today.

k)-At first, then, the reform of Islamic education was given momentum by the decline of Muslim political power.

In colonial settings, Islamic schools were functionalized to sustain Muslim values and 'ulama social standing even in the absence of a Muslim-led state. After the Second World War, national independence seemed at first to offer Muslim educators an opportunity to relax their guard. But postcolonial nation-building only ushered in new struggles to control the commanding heights of public ethics and culture. This was no more forcefully the case than on the question of where Islam should figure in new programs of mass education.

l)-In most Muslim countries, nationalist parties and state-making dominated the political scene through the 1960s. The nationalization of Egypt's al-Azhar in 1961, with its requirement that henceforth the university's shaykh be appointed by the president rather than the 'ulama, was symptomatic of the trend. Out of sight of the governing gaze, however, parts of the public cultural scene were quietly heading in a different direction. In all but a few countries by the 1980s, the majority of people, and the majority of women, were functionally literate (Brown 2000, 125-7; cf. Findley 1989, 141). Secondary and higher education had grown as well. State schools socialized their young charges into "the canons of . . . a secularizing, modernizing, and centralizing nationalism" that replaced the hierarchical mores of the old generation with an "ever present egalitarian populist rhetoric" (Brown 2000, 132).

m)-Aided by a galloping urbanization, these programs succeeded in alienating educated youth from the settled parochialisms of their elders. But nation-building proved less capable of tethering the younger generation's allegiance to the ruling elite's political aims. In the 1970s and 1980s, Muslim societies were swept by resurgence of personal piety and public observance. Attendance at Friday mosque services swelled; there was a boom in the market for inexpensive booklets and magazines on Islam; women donned head coverings (hijab) and men sported facial hair.

n)-Eventually these developments converged to create a powerful challenge to a heretofore hegemonic nationalism. Rulers responded with concessions to Muslim social and educational interests. But these, too, had unintended effects. In Egypt, regime efforts to co-opt al-Azhar scholars increased the 'ulama's involvement in politics (Wickham 2002; Zeghal 1996, and below). In Pakistan, the "ulama were made use of . . . without any concomitant success in the regulation of their activities" (Zaman 2002, 151). The politicization of Pakistani madrasas reached new heights during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, as a result of, among other things, a decade-long flood of armaments purchased with Saudi and American funds. It was this functionalization of Pakistani madrasas by domestic and international actors, rather than some fatal proclivity in madrasa education itself, that lay behind the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s. As these examples show, the primary question today as regards Islamic education is not whether it should be drawn up into broader political projects (functionalized), but whose projects they should be and how they should engage the plurality of people, powers, and ideas

that marks our age.

o)-A second line of reflection that emerges in the following chapters concerns the internal dynamics of Islamic education rather than its functionalization. The rise of modern Islamic education brought about a shift in the distribution and style of Islamic knowledge. The earlier pattern of informality and, in Louis Brenner's phrase, "initiativ transmission" gave way to classrooms, fixed curricula, examinations, and professional teachers. In these relatively depersonalized settings, many believers came to view their faith as "a subject which must be 'explained' and 'understood'" (Eickelman 1992, 650) on the basis of formal doctrinal canons. The transmission of Islamic knowledge had been abstracted from intimate teacher-student relationships, with their habits of dress, bearing, and deference, and repositioned in classrooms and quick-read textbooks (see Berkey, this volume; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, 38; Starrett 1998, 9).

p)-For state officials intent on managing religious education, the benefits of objectifying Islam seemed obvious. Religious knowledge could be packed into curricular modules and disseminated in mass educational programs. In so doing, it was hoped, the political message of that knowledge could also be stabilized and made regime-friendly. But marketing mass religious education in this way encouraged other actors to think of religion in a similarly disembedded, formulaic, and political manner. It was not long, therefore, before other, nonstate actors began to create modular Islams of their own. The result was that the religious marketplace became more pluralized and competitive. Of course there have always been different carriers of religious knowledge in the Muslim world. But the plurality and contest of meanings acquired a new intensity in the 1970s and 1980s, as debates over Islamic knowledge moved from elite circles into a restless and mobile mass society. There is no evidence to suggest that the agonistic pluralism of Muslim politics and learning is about to diminish any time soon.

q)-These events bring us to a third and final conclusion as regards the cultures and politics of contemporary Islamic education. Some Western analysts have seen the ferment surrounding religious schooling as proof that the modern Muslim world dances to a different drummer from that of the West, East Asia, and Latin America. Muslim civilization does indeed have distinctive institutional complexes and ethnocultural concerns. But all civilizations differ in these regards; modernity is multiple, not singular (Eisenstadt 2000). What claims as to the exceptionalism of Islamic education overlook, however, is that mass education of a moralistic sort has been a hallmark of nation-making and societal reform since the late nineteenth century's "Age of Education" (Zeldin 1977). "A moral agenda of one sort or another lay at the heart of state educational projects unfolding in disparate parts of the late nineteenth-century globe" (Fortna 2000, 35). Charles Taylor has aptly described the "atomist prejudices" (Taylor 1989, 166) that dominate modern Western political philosophy and popular Western

discourses (cf. Asad 2003; Mahmood 2005). Notwithstanding liberal philosophers' penchant for ontological individualism and secularization theorists' "master narrative of long-term religious change" (Cox 2003, 201), however, ethicoreligious issues have surged back into public debate even in Western societies, not least of all in the form of our culture wars (cf. Casanova 1994; Hunter 1991; Rosenblum 2000).

r)-In one basic respect, of course, public-ethical ferment in the Muslim world differs from that of the historical West. Islam has no church, and modern debates over religious education and the public sphere have not had to cut their way through the question of what role a church hierarchy should play in moral education. Ever since the great recentering of 'ulama knowledge in the Muslim Middle Ages, however, Muslims have accorded a rather considerable authority to the 'ulama and their understandings of the shari'a. Official religious discourses have tended to assume that the shari'a is the fount from which public ethical instruction should flow.

s)-Rather than smothering debate, this discursive fact has guaranteed that argument over public ethics often centers on the meaning of the shari'a and who has the right to define its terms. Just as religious nonconformists challenged the West's churches in early modern times, today new Islamic intellectuals challenge the 'ulama's monopoly over the interpretation of Islam (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, 13, 44; Meeker 1991). Many call "for a reinterpretation of the underlying principles, or essence, of religious law" (Ringer 2001, 245), rather than an unempirical textualism. Faced with conservative 'ulama's shows of force, however, many reformists have retreated to a position similar to that of Iran's reformists at the end of the nineteenth century: their clear-eyed critiques give way to "a deliberately vague reform platform" (ibid.), as if they realize they have little chance of beating 'ulama at the public ethical game. Of course, some among the 'ulama support efforts at pluralist reform. As Zaman illustrates in the epilogue to this book, scholars like Baqir al-Sadr in Iraq and Motahhari in Iran have long called for reforms to Islamic ethics and education. But even these scholars face a dilemma similar to that of reform-minded 'ulama elsewhere. They realize that to question the authority of classical 'ulama learning is to risk being "marginalized in the structures of authority sustained by reverence for such texts" (Zaman 2002, 73).

T)-Here then is a dilemma, arguably the dilemma, at the heart of Islamic education today. Is the purpose of Islamic education to teach fidelity to a fixed and finished canon? Or should religious education offer a high-minded but general religious ethics that looks outward on creation and encourages a plurality of methods for fathoming and engaging its wonder? For a Western public shocked by images of terrorist violence and convinced that madrasas may be a big part of the problem, the suggestion that the fault line in Islamic education lies astride this question of scholastic unitarianism versus epistemological pluralism may appear ludicrous. In Muslim educational practice, however, there is no more decisive a contest.

u)-Notwithstanding two centuries of secularist forecasts to the contrary, religion and public ethics continue to matter, and matter deeply, in our modern world (Rosenblum 2000; Sandel 1996). In Muslim countries, the search for a workable public ethics has often come to focus on the meaning and functions of Islam, and the methods for their educational inculcation. Inasmuch as this is so, arguments over religious education will almost certainly remain subjects of contention in Muslim countries for years to come. We should not allow these disputes to become one more excuse for attributing a putative exceptionalism to Muslim civilization. We in the West would be truer to our own moral history were we to recognize that our schools and politics, too, bear the imprint of struggles over how children and citizens should ethicalize and behave. Current debates over Islamic education, then, do not represent Muslim civilization's regression to some premodern past. They are a civilizationally specific response to the challenges of pluralism, knowledge, and ethics faced by all citizens in the late-modern world.

---

## REFERENCES

- [1] Abdikadir Ibrahim Islamic Civic Society of America February 22, 2011.
- [2] Abdul Rahman al-Naqib, *Al-Tarbiya al-Islamia: Risala and Maseera*. (Dar el-Fikr el-Arabi: Cairo, 1990), 10-13
- [3] Abdallah Mohammed el-Zaid (1984). *El- Ta'lim fi al-Mamlake el-Arabia el-Saudia: Anmouzg Mukhtalif*, 113-123
- [4] Challenges Facing Islamic Education Yusef Progler 18 May, 2005.
- [5] Esposito, J. *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*. (New York: Oxford University Press: 2002); Kepel,
- [6] Mohammed Fadel el-Gamali, *Nahwa Tagdid al-Benaa al-Tarbawi fi al-Alam al-Islami*. (Al-Dar el-Tunesia lel-Nashr: Tunisian University, 1984), 139-147.
- [7] G. Jihad: *The Trail of Political Islam*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002)
- [8] Lewis, B. *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*. (New York: Modern Library, 2003).
- [9] Tariq Rahman, *The Madrassa and State of Pakistan: Religion, Poverty and Potential for Violence in Pakistan*, During the Creative Associates Madrasah research study in Bangladesh in April/May 2004, madrasah teachers and students often praised their educational system for its focus on "Deen wa Dunia," which translates to "the here and hereafter."
- [10] USAID Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination, *Strengthening Education in the Muslim World. Country Profiles and Analysis. Issue Paper Number 2*. (USAID: Washington, D.C., 2004).
- [11] Masud, T. and Masud, C. (2002). *The Clay Bird. Milestone Film and Video: New Jersey*. Rahman, T. *The Madrassa and State of Pakistan: Religion, Poverty and Potential for*

Violence in Pakistan, <http://www.himalmag.com/2004/February/essay.htm>. Accessed in July, 2004.

- [12] Abbasi, R.Y. (n.d.) Educational Links Between Muslim Countries, <http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/maxpages/faculty/gmbonham/2000-Fall-IRProjects/website/Group?ICN/Copy%20of%20ICNweb/Conflict%20Resolution%20P.htm>. Accessed in July, 2004.
- [13] Al-Jazeera.Net 2004. Religious Education Faces New Threat, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/592A5456-1C3E-46A5-A50B-00B8EC9FC831.htm>. Accessed in July, 2004
- [14] Baqi, Al K. A. Revamping Islamic Schools Takes Central Stage in Nigeria, Islam Online, [www.islam-online.net/English/News/2004-06/60/article03.shtml](http://www.islam-online.net/English/News/2004-06/60/article03.shtml). Accessed in June, 2004.
- [15] Columbia University 1995. Turkish Educational System, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/tsa/tr-info/edu.system.html>. Accessed in July, 2004.
- [16] Global Health Council. [http://atlas.globalhealth.org/indicator\\_detail.cfm?Country=ID&IndicatorID=100](http://atlas.globalhealth.org/indicator_detail.cfm?Country=ID&IndicatorID=100). Accessed in July, 2004.
- [17] Education Reform and Islam in Indonesia, [http://www.asiafoundation.org/pdf/indo\\_EducationReform\\_Islam.pdf](http://www.asiafoundation.org/pdf/indo_EducationReform_Islam.pdf). Accessed in June, 2004
- [18] Islamtoday.net, [http://www.islamtoday.net/questions/show\\_question\\_content.cfm?id=38465](http://www.islamtoday.net/questions/show_question_content.cfm?id=38465). Accessed in July, 2004.
- [19] Liverpool, L.S.O; Eseyin, E.G.; and Opara, E.I. 1996. Modelling for Resource Allocation to Departments and Faculties in African Universities, Association of African Universities, [www.aau.org/studyprogram/pdffiles/liverpool.pdf](http://www.aau.org/studyprogram/pdffiles/liverpool.pdf). Accessed in July, 2004.
- [20] Lemu, A. A Holistic Approach to Teaching Islam to Children: A Case Study in Northern Nigeria, Islamic Education Trust, and [www.iarf.net/REBooklet/Nigeria.htm](http://www.iarf.net/REBooklet/Nigeria.htm). Accessed in July, 2004. Ministry of Education of Turkey [http://www.meb.gov.tr/Stats/apk2002ing/apage29\\_48.html](http://www.meb.gov.tr/Stats/apk2002ing/apage29_48.html). Accessed in July, 2004.
- [21] Rahman, T. The Madrassa and State of Pakistan: Religion, Poverty and Potential for Violence in Pakistan, <http://www.himalmag.com/2004/February/essay.htm>. Accessed in July, 2004
- [22] The United States Department of State 2002. Office of Religious Freedom Report, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2002/13608.htm>. Accessed in July, 2004.
- [23] Tilde, A. Enrolment and Falling Standards of Education, [www.amanaonline.com/Articles/art\\_472.htm](http://www.amanaonline.com/Articles/art_472.htm). Accessed in July, 2004.
- [24] UNDP 1998/99 Egyptian Development Report, [www.undp.org.eg/publications/hdr98/chap2.pdf](http://www.undp.org.eg/publications/hdr98/chap2.pdf). Accessed in July, 2004.
- [25] UNESCO EFA Country Reports 2000. Turkey: Report, [http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/turkey/rapport\\_1.html](http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/turkey/rapport_1.html). Accessed in July, 2004.
- [26] UNICEF 2004. The Official Summary of the State of the World's Children, <http://www.unicef.org/sowc02/>. Accessed in July, 2004.