Ednan Aslan / Margaret Rausch (eds.)

Islamic Education in Secular Societies

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Introduction: Secularisms and Islam in Western and Post-Communist Societies

The two concepts constituting the main focus of this volume, Islamic education and secularism, are understood and approached in a variety of ways depending on the context. The contexts investigated in these articles fall into two broad categories based on geographic location. The first category, the West, encompasses the United States and three countries of Western Europe: Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The second category comprises ten post-communist societies located in two different regions. They include the Eastern European countries or regions of the Balkans, Slovenia, Ukraine, Russia, and the Russian federal subjects of Tatarstan and Dagestan, as well as the Central Asian republics of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. The volume begins with two articles that discuss some important theoretical and conceptual points.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION: HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES

Education, which is promoted by the foundational sources, Qur'an and Hadith, is a central component of Islam. Muslims, in addition to being called upon in the Qur'an to learn from God's abundant signs, are frequently reminded to use their intellects and reason (*'aql*), and rational thought. Not surprisingly, therefore, learning and teaching, as well as scholarly advancement, were considered, from the beginning, to be com-

parable to worship. Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which entails the collaborative pursuit of the most accurate interpretation of God's will as articulated in the Qur'an (*sharī'a*), like other areas of Muslim scholarship, is characterized by a democratic and pluralistic approach. It incorporates a chorus of voices, rather than a hierarchical structure with one authoritative human superior. Just as Sunnis recognize four schools of jurisprudence as acceptable, Shi'ites acknowledge the authenticity of four schools. Scholarly training, which initially took place in mosques, Sufi centers, and scholarly residences, was later revised and moved to specialized structures known as *madrasahs* (colleges), and eventually expanded to encompass both traditional (*naqlī*) and rational (*'aqlī*) sciences. The latter were grounded in knowledge originating from early Greek, Persian, and Hindu scholarship that had been translated into Arabic, studied, synthesized, enhanced, and advanced upon. The new works were later translated into Latin and passed on to European scholars. A tradition of primary education for pre-school aged children also developed. Consisting of the group chanting and memorization of the Qur'an, it mirrored the first stage of scholarly training, thus constituting the initial preparation phase for potential pupils. (Hefner & Zaman, 2006)

Madrasahs, soon after their inception in the 9th century, began to be built in urban but also rural locations throughout the Muslim world. With them, vast local, but also regional and global networks of scholars began to form, as the students, and the scholars who taught them, traveled widely in pursuit of more knowledge and new ideas. Its vastness reflects the fact that learning and teaching were likened to worship, as was the provision of funds for the construction and maintenance of *madrasahs* in the form of endowments established by pious men and women. Built most often adjacent to mosques, they were also housed within complexes of the mausoleums of political and religious figures. Equally frequent was their location in conjunction with Sufi centers, as Sufis, the practitioners of Sufism, Islam's 'mystical' dimension, constituted an important group of participants in the *madrasahs* and scholarly networks that connected them. (Berkey, 1992; Rausch, 2012)

Sufis' contributions to Islamic education exceeded the bounds of the *madrasah* in several ways. In addition to the intensive one-on-one training in core Islamic dispositions and values that Sufi masters offered to their disciples centering on individual and groups supererogatory rituals aimed at attaining an intimate relationship with God, they took on

the role of proliferating knowledge of Islamic doctrine and practice to the masses. To inspire illiterate participants, they created poetry in local languages, poetry chanting rituals and other practices linked to local culture to enhance their piety in conjunction with educational initiatives aimed at reforming society. (Rausch, 2006) While their opponents emphasize the related, but also divergent practices that emerged as means to offer relief from emotional, psychological, and material problems, many Sufis specialized in Islamic jurisprudence, the core field of study in most *madrasahs*, and emphasized it in their teachings. As their rituals and educational practices are gender segregated, Sufis promoted positions of authority, expertise, and leadership for women, within and outside of Sufi institutional structures. (Berkey, 1992; Rausch, 2012)

As some of the contributions to this volume that focus on East European and Central Asian contexts reveal, many of the core values, practices, and structures underpinning Islamic education and its institutions, as well as the participation of Sufis, summarized here, continue to impact the ways Islamic education is reconceived and reconstituted in diverse contexts across the globe today. A further significant impact that is felt in all of the contexts investigated in this volume derives from the many extremist groups that strive to infuse existing Islamic education programs with their approaches or to create their own programs. In addition, these approaches may be imported by returning students who pursue their studies in Muslim majority countries. As the contributions elucidate, the means for addressing these issues, like the ways in which Islamic education is conceived and structured, vary in relation to the approach to secularism found in each contexts.

In this volume, Islamic education is conceived and investigated in its four different manifestations, as a tradition of scholarly training, a mode of academic inquiry at all levels of public and private education, including university, and as a means of transmitting doctrine and practice to adherents usually carried out during childhood by family members, as well as by teachers in religious communities centers or places of worship. In his theoretical exploration of religious education, Samim Akgönül asserts that the latter three serve as instruments of identity transmission, particularly in the case of minorities, since religion is often easier than language to pass on to future generations. Furthermore, he explains that religion is identifiable by belief, behavior, and belonging, and therefore serves as an identity marker in relation to other members of society, but

also to the state. As important elements of public life, the state must guarantee religious practice and education to all religious communities, and protect members of minority and majority religions from forced participation in any form.

In the US and Western Europe, institutions offering all four types of Islamic education have been and continue to be established by immigrants who constitute small minorities. By contrast, in Eastern Europe, large portions of which constituted territories of early Mongol empires, and later the Ottoman Empire, and in Central Asia, much of which was under the control of Mongol dynasties, followed by the Khanate and later the Emirate of Bukhara, Islam was often the majority religion. Many of these territories were under communist rule as part of the Soviet Union, or its satellite states for much of the 20th century, resulting in the elimination of formal or the clandestine perpetuation of informal modes of Islamic education, as well as of worship and ritual practices. As a result, the Islamic educational institutions needed to be reconstituted, or reconceptualized, in keeping with new societal conditions. Today, all of these countries, and federal subjects, are governed by secular states.

SECULARISMS:
RELIGION-STATE RELATIONS
AND ISLAMIC EDUCATION

The term secular, from the Latin word *saeculum*, initially distinguished clergy who withdrew from the world into monasteries from clergy who lived in the world with the laity. The verb secularize, to make worldly, was used after the Protestant Reformation to refer to monastic property, whose religious function was discontinued. It entailed two distinct dynamics: bringing the religious into the world by allowing everyone to become 'monks' and emancipating secular spheres from clerical control. Through intellectual inquiries into rational thought, together with advancements in science, the concept of secularism and its application to politics developed to replace domination by church officials. (Calhoun, Juergenmeyer, & VanAntwerpen, 2011, pp. 8-9)

Secularization is mistakenly viewed as a universal process of human and societal development culminating in secular modernity, when in fact it is a historical process that effects "a remarkable ideological inversion,"

as Talal Asad points out, in that 'the secular' was part of a theological discourse. 'The religious' was constituted by secular political and scientific discourses, while 'religion' became a historical category and universal globalized concept that emerged as a constituent element of Western secular modernity. (Casanova, 2011, p. 61)

In an effort to examine secularism and its relation to democracy, political scientist Alfred Stepan (2011, pp. 117-140) devised the following five models to designate official approaches to the state-religion relationship: separatist, found in France and the US; separatism as dichotomy, found in Turkey; established religion, found in Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Finland, and the UK; positive accommodation, found in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Belgium; and respect all, positive cooperation, principled distance, found in India, Indonesia, and Senegal, with the latter constituting the most successful, all-inclusive democracies.

Furthermore, while the state system established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was modeled on the French approach to religion-state separation known as *laïcité*, unlike the French model, the Turkish republic, through its treatment of practising Muslims and suppression, or elimination, of Islamic institutions, violated all eight guarantees necessary for democracy (Stepan, 2011, pp. 119-120). Noteworthy is that France funds 80% of the budget of Catholic schools, including the salaries of teachers, who are state employees, making tuition minimal (Casanova, 2011, pp. 70-71). In addition, it owns all churches, which it makes available for Sunday services and other activities. French Muslims do not, however, receive the same state support. Furthermore, in France and some other Western European countries, as well as in the US, religion is seen as beneficial to integration efforts, while in other parts of Western Europe, it is viewed as a source of conflict (Foner & Alba, 2008, pp. 371).

Muslim immigrants, as Ednan Aslan elaborates in his article, arrive in Europe with preconceived notions of the challenges that they will face regarding political and social realities. This notions are based on past encounters with colonial powers, on conceptions of secularism from an Islamic perspective articulated by Muslim scholars since the 19th century, and on post-colonial state structures and reform attempts inspired by those scholarly writings. As they seek to integrate themselves into their new home societies and reflect on the role of religion and education in daily life there, their understandings of secular society are changing, aided by rethinking the Qur'an's message.

THE UNITED STATES
AND WESTERN
EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Eileen Daily's article, which offers an example of a minority religion's success story, begins by tracing the arrival of Catholic immigrants from Europe, their struggle for recognition as a minority Christian denomination targeted by prejudice and discrimination, and their efforts to establish schools. She examines the rights afforded to all religions in the US by the relationship between religion and the state codified in the Constitution and other components of the legal edifice that have assisted Catholics in constructing a network of churches, schools, universities, and a variety of institutions enabling them to reach out to the broader community in which they live. She concludes by discussing revisions to teacher training and alternative pedagogical approaches that could be used in private schools and Sunday instruction, both of which would enhance the success of Catholic education in guiding today's youth in dealing with daily life realities in secular society. Daily's article offers insights into the possibilities for growth and development available to all religious communities in the US.

In her article on Islamic education in the US, Margaret Rausch traces the transformation of secularism from the strict religion-state separation codified in the US Constitution to the contemporary dominance of religion at multiple levels of politics, deriving from the rise of white Protestant supremacist attitudes in the late 19th century, and its past and current impact on foreign and domestic policy, particularly regarding the mistreatment of and discrimination against Muslims. She offers a brief history of Muslim immigration and Islamic education, including the importation of African slaves, the creation of the Nation of Islam and its Islamic school network, and the 20th-century waves of Muslim immigrants who settled and supplemented that network with their own Islamic schools. Situating them within the broader spectrum of private religious schools in the US, she highlights the complex process of their founding, characteristic features of their curriculum, and the above average standardized test scores and other achievements of their students.

In his article on Germany, Martin Rothgangel offers statistics on the Evangelical and Catholic communities and explains the legal status and

pedagogical role of religious education in public schools. Religious education constitutes a compulsory subject in the public school curriculum, but the possibility of opting out of it is secured by law. While Catholic, Jewish, and recently Islamic religious education are also available, Rothgangel focuses on the Evangelical tradition. According to the Evangelical Church, religious education centers on explaining the question of God and is therefore not to be equated with morality or philisophy, but also as a means to promote tolerance. His article serves an insightful backdrop for examining Islamic education in Germany.

Aysun Yasar's article provides background on the origin and growth of the Muslim immigrant community in Germany. She describes efforts by Muslim groups to meet the legal requirements for establishing official associations necessary for offering Islamic education in public schools, which have reached fruition in only two cases. Meanwhile, pilot projects that serve this function have been established in multiple locations. In addition, university programs to train teachers who offer Islamic education in public schools have been set up, and imams who serve in Germany's growing number of mosques have recently been offered specialized training. While viewing the developments as a sign of acceptance, some Muslims in Germany feel that their contributions to discussions are being ignored and that the state intends to create a 'German' version of Islam. Similar potentialities and challenges are found elsewhere in Western Europe, including the Netherlands.

In his article on the Netherlands, Johan Meuleman discusses the growth of Muslim community since the mid-20th century, primarily due to immigration, which from the1970s has increasingly consisted of families with children, creating the need for Islamic educational institutions. He describes the history and current complexity of the legal and structural relationship between religious communities and the state and among themselves, and the partially successful efforts by the Muslim community to establish denominational schools, theological training in higher education institutions, and religious education in public schools, with some state funding. The challenges that the community has encountered stem from its own deficiencies and the expanding secularization of Dutch society, as well as from political adversity. Overcoming these challenges and carving out a positive way forward, in Meuleman's view, requires that Islamic education embrace the realistic needs of today's youth, for whom Islam serves primarily as an identity marker. The Muslim community

must therefore develop self-sufficient, integrated institutions with high standards.

Jenny Berglund presents Sweden as a welfare state that finances private religious schools, covers university tuition, and supports some activities of religious organizations. Lutheran Protestantism is defined as the national church, although the separation of religion and state has been in place since 2000. She discusses the religious education curriculum in public schools and textbook presentations of Islam. Like Christians and Jews, Muslims, who have been migrating to Sweden from various regions since the 1940s, are now establishing religious organizations and schools. She describes the details and challenges of this process, and explains that, while some universities offer BA and MA degrees in Islamic studies, training for Islamic school teachers and mosque imams is not available. She concludes with a discussion of problems facing Swedes and Muslims in adjusting to new modes of interaction, which Islamic education and education about Islam has the potential to facilitate.

POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

In contrast to the US and Western European countries, where current approaches to secularism emerged within centuries-long processes, many countries of post-communist Eastern Europe and Central Asia are still coming to terms with the religion-state relationship. While defining the status, role, and parameters of Islamic education is still ongoing in both contexts, the process in post-communist countries is further complicated by leftover attitudes toward religion, past Islamic educational traditions, and ethnic and political power struggles. As in the West, post-communist societies face the threat of extremists and the challenge of Muslim doctrinal diversity.

Muhamed Ali's article describes Turkey's support for the development of Islamic education in the Balkans, the former 'hinterlands' of the Ottoman Empire, and some results of that support. The current regime, headed by Prime Minister Erdoǵan, has initiated a new approach to the status of religion, which explains this new dimension of foreign policy regarding the Balkans. While welcomed by the Balkan countries, and despite considerable success, some of the projects, undertaken by non-