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This journal aims to present the Muslim viewpoint on books and issues which concern Islam and Muslims. At a time of near explosion in the growth of interest in these areas, accompanied by a disappointing level and quality of information, this review journal aspires to inform and stimulate lay readers and scholars alike, through detailed critical reviews, brief introductions and select bibliographies on recent and contemporary publications.

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Islam, Muslims and Education: Framing an Interdisciplinary Field of Research, Critical Scholarship and Professional Practice


There has been a notable surge in the number of studies exploring different aspects of the intersection between Islam/Muslims and education in western universities and in the Muslim world. Researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds are increasingly interested in examining educational issues within the context of historical and contemporary Muslim majority and minority societies. However, there is an ongoing, and often confused, debate within western academia over how best to frame the research on these multi-layered, intersecting themes around education, Islam and Muslims. An equally daunting challenge is how to classify and assess the plethora of literature on these themes produced by researchers working within diverse disciplines and academic units/departments spread across the Social Sciences and Humanities. Most of this literature appears to be produced in conventional Islamic Studies centres which are often located in Middle/Near Eastern Studies, Religious Studies and occasionally Theology departments or in the few remaining Orientalist institutes. Some newly-established academic outlets offer a variation of Islamic Studies by focusing, for example, on the study of British Islam/Muslims or European Islam. They mostly adopt an ethnographically-informed sociological, political approach to analyse the presence of ‘Islam and Muslims’ within secular public space including issues around migration, race relations, social integration, religious radicalisation and education policy.

There is a need to develop some generic criteria by which to classify and assess this body of literature. Some of the criteria might include: (a) the discipline, academic unit and institution wherein research is conducted to produce a specific type of knowledge; (b) methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, i.e. empirical, theoretical/scholarly, comparative and intervention/assessment-focused study designs; and (c) the specific research context and topic, i.e. whether the study is examining issues in Muslim minority/majority societies, or in Islamic or mainstream schooling, in further or higher education settings.

Issues of education in diverse Muslim societies have also been studied within the subfields of Comparative/International Education and sometime
in Religious Education that takes place in mainstream faculties and institutes of education. In the context of British academia, it appears that the first academic post established for Islamic Education was at the Institute of Education, University of London in the early 1950s as a specialist lectureship within Comparative Education. The post was created for the Palestinian historian and educationist, Abdul Latif Tibawi (d.1981), who became a refugee in Britain after the Israeli occupation of Palestine in 1948. Tibawi offered some original historical studies on Islamic Education that challenged the rather narrow readings of the educational heritage of Islam by well-known figures, such as George Makdisi. It is tragic that a recent research centre exploring generic education issues in Muslim societies, originally set up with a considerable amount of Muslim philanthropic investment and hope, at the Institute of Education, does not make a reference to the legacy of this important scholar. Although short-lived, the University of Birmingham, with the strong endorsement from UK’s first professorial post-holder in Religious Education, J.M. Hull, also created a specialist lectureship on Islamic Education in 2002 at its then Faculty of Education. More recently, Warwick University, in collaboration with British Muslim communities, became the first major Russell group university to recognise Islamic Education as an academic field of research, teaching and professional development. Within the hybrid British Muslim higher education institutions, Markfield Institute of Higher Education, famous for pioneering the study of Islamic Economics, was also the first to create an academic specialism in Islamic Education. The relatively short history of Islamic Education in the UK, including the establishment of its diverse institutions, leading figures and struggles to be recognised and integrated within British educational system calls out for a proper study.

Through critical review of several recent publications, this paper argues that ‘Islamic Education’ offers an inclusive academic framework for carrying out research on the interface between Islam/Muslims and Education. Islamic Education is a well-established discipline in most of the universities in the Muslim world, often as part of Islamic and Education Studies departments. However, the subject is often narrowly defined as Islamic instruction or nurture. As such, a lack of fresh theoretical perspectives and, most significantly, the absence of an integrated research agenda, have emerged as concerning lacunae impacting negatively on literature on Islamic Education. It is hoped that both Muslim and non-Muslim researchers will go beyond the current binary attitude of either being sympathetic or dismissive of the field and adopt a methodologically rigorous critical study perspective. Considering its crucial role in the educational, intellectual and socio-economic transformation of
diverse Muslim communities across the globe, Islamic Education needs to become an interdisciplinary field of research, scholarly study and professional practice linking traditional Islamic scholarships with contemporary mainstream academia.

In Western academia, the focus of this review article, the majority of the research on Islam/Muslims and Education is produced within a generic Islamic Studies field reflecting a variety of specialisms in the Humanities and Social Sciences: predominately history, linguistics, sociology, politics, anthropology and occasionally theology, philosophy and education. In such an academic discourse, sometimes the ‘Islam/Muslims and education intersection’ is conceptualised as Islamic Education but it is predominately treated as a subtheme. In terms of professional practice, Muslim educators in Islamic-ethos schools as well as in traditional and hybrid Islamic higher education institutions often conceive their work as falling under Islamic Studies. In these faith-based Muslim institutions, a confessional approach to Islamic Studies is mostly discernible. This has developed in opposition to what has been perceived to be harmful Orientalist/Colonial framings of the field. However, it is often forgotten that ‘Islamic Studies’ was originally conceived by an Orientalist discourse. ‘Islamic Theology’ or ‘Islamic Education’ seem rarely considered as possibly better, more inclusive, alternatives to describe the academic profile and mission of Muslim higher education institutions.

In the Muslim minority context of Europe, largely in an attempt to contain religious extremism through manufacturing a politically correct version of ‘European Islam’, there are now state sponsored Islamic religious pedagogy and theology departments. However, a lack of Islamic educational awareness constitutes one of the main reasons why a professional and scholarly approach to Islamic Education has not yet emerged in Western Europe. Furthermore, despite the growth of the sector of Islamic schools and Islamic higher education institutions, the education of Muslim teachers remains much-needed as this specialism is extremely under-developed. More significantly, as will be discussed below, most of the discussions within community and official policy circles on the training of Muslim faith leaders, for example, are still dominated by researchers coming from political sciences and generic Islamic Studies. Specialisms on education or pedagogy, let alone Islamic Education, are rarely part of these discussions. Naturally, such initiatives, mainly put forward as quick responses to pressing socio-political issues by policy-makers, rarely came to fruition.

It must be stressed that using a generic social science framework on its own, often utilised to explore educational issues in Muslim communities, poses
similar limitations. Without engaging with the Islamic content and showing competence in the Islamic Sciences, such a broad study framework will seriously fail to properly address the complex educational and pedagogic challenges facing Muslim communities or engage with the traditions of education in Muslim cultural and religious heritage. By definition, Islamic Education is an inter-disciplinary field of empirical research, critical scholarship and professional development where theological/Islamic specialism needs to be integrated with a competent literacy in the humanities and empirical social sciences, including educational and pedagogic sciences.

The terms ‘Islamic Education and Islamic Studies’ are often assumed, erroneously, to be indicating the same meaning. This is not the place for going into details, suffice to note that the difference is easily grasped when the meaning of ‘being educated’ is not reduced to a mere cognitive activity of study, instruction or training. But these are not necessarily mutually-exclusive conceptions either. Indeed, they can complement one another. However, Islamic Education is a more comprehensive conception whereby rigorous ‘study’ needs to be integrated into a deeper sense of ‘being educated Islamically’ within the foundational spiritual, intellectual and cultural heritage of Muslim tradition and the cultural plurality of the modern world. In addition, Islamic Education, as a form of applied Education Studies, implies specialism in developing interventions aimed at improving activities related to teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum and management within different levels of formal and informal Muslim education institutions. Finally, Islamic Education goes beyond the limitations of a narrowly-defined subject of religious education within the secular curriculum though, similarly, they can complement each other.

In such an integrated and holistic approach to Islamic Education, research activity in its empirical, scholarly and applied dimensions aims to generate new knowledge and insights not only to improve the practice of teaching and learning but, most significantly, to facilitate the transformation of the human condition in all its complexity. As I have already argued in more detail in another study, the critical, holistic and transformative Islamic epistemology shaping Islamic Education makes it akin to what Habermas identified as ‘critical-emancipatory’ science in which the knowledge generated serves human freedom through incorporating the ‘analytical-empirical’ knowledge that facilitates our understanding of the natural world and the ‘hermeneutic-historical’ knowledge which helps contextualise the distinctive interpretative traditions shaping our sense of belonging in a specific historical and cultural landscape. Incidentally, a piece of Prophetic wisdom in Muslim tradition stresses the need to prioritise ‘learning knowledge that is beneficial to humanity’.
Books Received

It should be noted that acknowledgement of receipt of these books is no guarantee of review. However, efforts will be made to review them in subsequent issues.


ABI-MERSHED, Osama (ed.), Social Currents in North Africa: Culture and Governance After the Arab Spring. London: C. Hurst & Co. in association with the Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University, Qatar, 2018, 253pp.


AL-SALIMI, Abdulrahman and MADELUNG, Wilferd (eds.), Ibādī Texts for the 2nd/8th Century. Leiden: Brill, 2018, 391pp (Arabic text with an introduction written in English)


ZAYANI, Mohamed (ed.), *Digital Middle East: State and Society in the Information Age*. London: C. Hurst & Co. in collaboration with the Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University, Qatar, 2018, 335pp.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adil Salahi’s writings include the acclaimed Muhammad: Man and Prophet and Pioneers of Islamic Scholarship, and the English translation of the eighteen-volume In the Shade of the Qur’an. His main career has been in radio and print journalism, and for over 30 years he was editor of “Islam in Perspective,” a twice-weekly full-page column in the Arab News, a Saudi daily newspaper.