

A book review on Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe

Yaqub Al-Qutaiti¹ & Ismail Sheikh Ahmad²

Ph.d student, Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, Oman¹
Professor, Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia², Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Having chosen this book (Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and dissemination in Western Europe), the reviewers ought to display the reasons. To begin with, the two words in the title Islamic and knowledge are related to the course “Islamization of Education” taught at International Islamic University for PHD students. In addition, it is about transmitting the Islamic knowledge and disseminating it in Western

Europe; therefore, it is a novel topic to us. Besides, the book is somehow new as it was published in 2011, so it is worthy to have a review on. Moreover, the book was written by nine well-educated people, and edited by two of them. Consequently, it contains various notions and novel information. Also, the readers will learn what has been written about producing Islamic knowledge in the Western Europe.

PRODUCING ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE

The book is an attempt to answer these important questions :

1. How do Muslims in Europe acquire discursive and practical knowledge of Islam?
2. How are conceptions of Islam beliefs, values and practices transmitted, and how do they change?
3. Who are the authorities on these issues that Muslims listen to?
4. How do new Muslims discourse emerge in response to the European context?

Also, it endeavors to reply to the most essential question **how is Islamic knowledge defined as what Muslims hold to be correct Islamic beliefs and practices?**

The book consists of eight chapters, all of which examine in depth four crucial areas relating to producing and reproducing Islamic knowledge:

- The role of Muslim intellectuals in articulating alternative Muslim discourses.
- Higher Islamic education in Europe, the training of Imams and the other religious functionaries.

The book presents the findings of empirical research in these issues from a range of European countries such as France, Italy, the Netherlands and Great Britain.

Therefore, this book is a great interest to students and scholars of Islamic studies, anthropology and religion.

CHAPTER ONE

Chapter one is written by Martin Van Bruinessen. It is entitled producing Islamic knowledge in Western Europe: discipline, authority and personal quest. The chapter starts with the question: What is Islamic knowledge? The writer answers this question by saying Islamic knowledge is whatever Muslims regard to be correct or proper belief and practice; including non-discursive, embodied forms of knowledge. The writer discusses it is hard to have one unified definition of

Islamic knowledge because Muslims hold various views of what properly Islam is. He claims that some Muslims view some practices as not Islamic such as Sufi ritual, shrine visits and certain healing practices. Martin Van Bruinessen is interested in the process by which Muslims, and especially young Muslims grow up in the West, acquire or themselves produce Islamic knowledge. Then the writer ends the sub-theme by asking some interesting questions which are: How is it

that Muslims in Europe, especially second and third-generation immigrant Muslims, acquire their knowledge of Islam? Whom do they seek out as teachers, counsellors or role models, and on what grounds? What is the impact of their linguistic competence on the type of knowledge demanded or acquired? To what extent does the life-world of young Muslims in Western Europe give rise to new questions, new values, new practices and new interpretations?

Learning Quran and prayers are the most basic forms of Islamic knowledge that the writer stresses on. The writer puts the responsibility of getting this Islamic form of Knowledge on the parents of those children. They should teach them or take them to mosques or Islamic schools to help them get this important Islamic knowledge. The writer postulates that the acquisition of proper dispositions, embodied rather than discursive knowledge is the aim of all Quran courses. He states that “the prophet’s prayer” needs to be followed as a correct Islamic knowledge. Also, the writer asserts that mosque is the most visible Muslim institution and the Imam is the most easily visible Muslim authority in Western Europe. The writer argues that in Europe Imams are gaining much attention, but it all depends on the Imams’ professional work and inspiration. At the end, the writer asserts that the Imam is the nearest source of Islamic knowledge for most Muslims, imparting his knowledge through explicit teaching, preaching personal counselling, answering questions

CHAPTER TWO

Chapter 2 in this book is written by Stefano Allieve. It is about Muslim voices, European ears: Exploring the gap between the production of Islamic knowledge and its perception. The writer emphasizes that there is no problem with the concept Islam, but the problem is concerned with the people: Muslims. He argues that Islam in the abstract is static, rigid and univocal. Whilst Muslims are dynamic, flexible and they constitute a cacophony of dissident voices. The writer states that two important factors for studying the processes of production and dissemination of Islamic knowledge are neglected. The first factor is Muslim voices do not speak to Muslims ears only. The second factor is that there are forms of knowledge about Islam and Muslims in Western Europe that are not produced by Muslims themselves, but they play an essential part in creating a picture of them as well as in shaping Muslims’ discourse on Islam. The author claims that what Europeans think and write about Islam and Muslims affects the way in which Muslims build their ideas of what a correct Islamic belief and practices are. Besides, it influences the way in which Islamic knowledge is produced. That is why the idea of the production of

and guiding major rituals. However, it is too much exaggerated when we say that the Imams have great influence on the children in Europe. According to Canatan (2001), it is not the Imams who make the difference, but the mosque committees. These committees organize Islamic activities to these young Muslim generations to gain solid, Islamic knowledge.

In the conclusion of the first chapter, the writer states that Islamic knowledge has many forms and it is produced and disseminated in many diverse settings: formal and informal. One of the modes of transmission in Europe is in the forms of Quran courses and various colleges of the higher Islamic learning. He states that not all Islamic knowledge is discursive; however, bodily practices, attitudes and dispositions constitute a significant role of what it is to be a Muslim. He adds that much of early training by parents and Quran courses is an embodied form of Islamic knowledge. At the end, the writer stresses that several prominent Muslim movements, which are active in Western Europe, place a special emphasis on non-discursive forms of Islamic Knowledge and the eclecticism is needed to be followed.

Nearly twenty pages were written on the chapter and the writer has used 70 references to talk about this issue. The oldest reference was in 1989 and the latest ones were published in 2009. The writer has utilized various references from 1989 to 2009 effectively.

Islamic knowledge in Western Europe is always simple.

In addition, the writer distinguishes between three phases (Islam and Europe) where each one is distinct. Then, he mentions (Islam in Europe) where Islam has become in part of the European religious and social landscape. The third phase and process of indigenization of Islam is called (Islam of Europe). Finally, both social behavior and a new intellectualization produced by Muslims created a new process: the construction of a European Islam. The writer starts to mention some characteristics of Islam in Europe such as being minority in a pluralist and secularized context. Therefore, she compares Islam in Europe as the Islam when it began in Mecca by mentioning that the Muslims were the minority. One sub-themes in this chapter entitles seeking knowledge about Islam: different demands. The writer admits that not every Muslim born in Europe is in the process of searching knowledge about Islam. He divides the Muslim populations into three categories. One group do not seek new, different religious knowledge. They are not involved in the active search for, and

production and transmission of religious knowledge. They practise what they have found their parents do. They are called “traditional Muslims” who are involved in the clashes of cultural values and have incomprehension among the European public. Typically they are the people who speak in their original languages, dress, eat and marry differently and who do not like at least some common Western values and practices.

The second group seeks for new knowledge and to add to what they have had. The last group constitutes of these people who are desperately searching for new interpretive tools, thus demanding new religious knowledge and actively promoting and producing it. This segment is the minority. They try to construct their religious identities in different forms, which need a creative attitude. The writer stresses that oral transmission is the most effective mode of transferring and reproducing Islamic knowledge because Imams and ulama give speeches on Friday sermons and festival meetings. Also, they use radios, T.V and internet to spread Knowledge. The writer asserts that there is much media but still it is little knowledge

CHAPTER THREE

Chapter three is entitled “An emerging European Islam: The case of the Minhajul Quran in the Netherlands.” written by M.Amer Morgahi. The writer wants to examine the way of the Minhajul Quran (path of the Quran) in the Netherlands. He also intends to deal with the implications this could have for perceptions of Islam in Europe. To achieve these objectives, he firstly presents a brief description of the Pakistani and Surinamese community in Holland where the MQ operates. He states that the size of the Pakistani community in the Netherlands was about 18,500 in 2006. The Pakistani organizations in the Netherlands are either mosque-based or social welfare organizations. The family is of central essence in the MQ’s approach to the Pakistani community. It attempts to involve the whole family in its *dawa (pray)* or missionary activities such as celebrating the prophet’s birth day and playing special music.

Morgahi mentions some messages and activities of the MQ movement in the Netherlands include:

1. The provision of knowledge of the Quran and the basic Islamic teaching to Muslim children.
2. Tasks for youth such as weekly sessions of *thiker*; *separate thiker* sessions for women, some professional programmes such computer use and public speaking skills.

permeated among people in Europe. She confirms that misconceptions take place among many Europeans about Muslims and Islam because of some irresponsible individuals’ acts such as explosions and savage work against Europeans and the negative media against Muslims. These misconceptions should be corrected and then the true Islamic knowledge is produced and disseminated meaningfully and righteously.

In the conclusion of this chapter, the author expresses that the numberless problems of misperceptions and misunderstanding between Muslims of Europe and the majority (host) societies, Muslims should be aware of the dynamic development of the media and they should use it effectively to spread the correct images of Muslims and Islam knowledge to all European people.

The chapter is written in 16 pages and it has 13 notes. There are forty four references. The latest one is 2007 and the oldest one is dated to 1978. I think the references are not new enough as this book was published in 2011. The language used is clear and well-written.

3. The organization of various religious and secular functions and activities such as *Milad and Aushura*.
Political activities.
Welfare activities such as collection of donations to finance various educational and health projects in Pakistan run by its head-office.

The writer talks about someone called Allama Tahirul Qadir who provides different meanings for various followers of the movement. He believes that Qadri is a religious guide, a reformer, spiritual leader and a hero. He states that his visits are spiritual and organizational momentum of the movement. He adds that Allama Qadri is a reformer to the MQ youth and his significant religious movement. Finally, the writer distinguishes between two terms “*ulama and fuzla* of the movement”. The later (*fuzla*) provide the religious knowledge in an interactive way. The first generation took the mosque as the focus of the religious activities while the Muslim European youth events like *Milad* constitute a significant public sphere for expressing religious commitment.

The chapter was written in 16 pages and the references used are 17. The latest reference is in 2004 which means that the writer does not use up-to-date references since the book was published in 2011. There are 11 notes outlined at the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter 4 is written by Valerie Amiraux. It is entitled “Religious authority, social action and political participation”. It is a case study of the Mosque de la Rue Tanger in Paris. The writer reveals that an Algerian Imam called Larbi Kechat at the Mosque de La rue Tanger has a remarkable experience. He gathers Muslims and non-Muslims and tells them about Islam and how it is peaceful and fits all human beings. This approach helps many non-Muslims know what Islam is and the correct Islamic knowledge. Consequently, many people have become Muslims due to this way of spreading Islamic values, beliefs and practices among the whole existing population. The Rue de Tanger Centre offers more than one activity to its visitors. These activities can be divided into three main ones: cultural (teaching activities, mostly the Quran and Arabic), social (Saturday conferences), and religious (prayer in the mosque, and religious seminars in the centre). The conferences arranged once a month on Saturday afternoons are the core activity, besides the more traditional initiatives such as teaching Arabic and Islam. The participants are not only Paris residents, therefore, translation into Arabic and English is

available as many people attend to learn about Islam. The speakers are usually a mixture of local actors, politicians, experts, intellectuals, academics, journalists and theologians. Kechat takes care that no controversial voice from the Muslim side can be heard. He is cautious to maintain mutual respect among all heterogeneous audience. The writer claims that Kechat has integrated the requirements of his secular environment (France) and that he become a secular religious leader. He adds that Kechat becomes the initiator of an internal process of secularization inside his organization, mostly based on the dissociation of ritual and profane activities. The writer argues that the religious people need to develop new skills and resources to be recognized as patterns for such initiatives in the highly secularized setting like France. By adopting this style, Kechat is viewed as a successful Islamic leader in Paris.

Forty four references are included at the end of this chapter. The latest ones are 2009 and the oldest one is 1977. The case study was written in an interesting, clear way.

CHAPTER FIVE

This chapter is entitled “The pattern of Islamic reform in Britain: the Deobandis between intra-Muslim sectarianism and engagement with wide society”. It is written by two authors: Jonathan Birt and Philip Lewis. They mention some traditional functions of a Deobandi Imam as follows: to lead the five daily prayer, to teach the children in the supplementary school, to give the Friday address in Arabic and the accompanying sermon in Urdu, to preside over the rites of passage-at-birth, whisper the call to prayer into the child’s ear, solemnize the marriage contract, prepare the dead for burial, prepare amulets for those who fearful of the evil eye and offer advice on the application of Islamic teaching. But this limited understanding of the Imam’s role faced many challenges and created new roles of Imam in the 1990s. These roles can be illustrated by referring to the activities of four Deobandi Imams: one serves as part-time as a prison chaplain; another has developed as a flourishing audi cassette ministry, the

third has trained as a *mufti* and has developed an Islamic magazine as a vehicle for teaching; and the finally the fourth is an Imam who has assumed a range of social parts in the society. The writers explain the two reactions –pragmatism and rejectionism – by reference to the context of minority status in a non-Muslim country. The Deobandi movement is mainly concerned with the moral reform of the Muslim individual. They assert that the Deobandi tradition has been most successful in establishing its seminaries in Britain. They state that British Deobandi graduates are now well-educated to have new career opportunities locally and nationally.

The chapter covers 26 pages of the book and there are some pages written as notes, and these notes are 14 in total. The writer used 35 references and three of them are dated in 2009. The oldest one is in 1963. The chapter is well-written.

CHAPTER SIX

Chapter six is about “Transnational ulama, European fatwas, and Islamic authority”. It is a case study of the European Council for Fatwa and Research written by Alexandre Caeiro. The writer starts his introduction by getting the relationship between the two definitions:

mufti and fatwa. Mufti is the person who issues *fatwa* to tell Muslims what to do when they encounter a new thing or a question about Islam. Then, he begins to tell the readers about the history of Islam in Europe. After that, he talks about the European Council for Fatwa and

Research. The writer mentions five conditions *mufi* must fulfill:

1. Possess the appropriate legal qualifications at university level, or have been committed to the meetings and circle of scholars and subsequently licensed by them ,and have good command of Arabic language.
2. Be of good conduct and committed to the regulations and manners of Islamic sharia.
3. Be a resident of the European content.
4. Be knowledgeable in Islamic jurisprudence as well as being aware of the current social surroundings.
5. Be approved by the majority of the Council's members.

CHAPTER SEVEN

This chapter talks about cyber-fatwas, sermons and media campaign and it is written by Ermete Mariani. It is about two study cases: one is on Amer Khaled and another is about Omar Bakri. Both of whom deal with contemporary modern communication tools such as websites and social media to spread the Islamic knowledge in Europe. The writer commences by giving the reader a brief summary on the two religious Arab men who are from different schools of thought. They are both active on the internet and both chose to live in London. The writer admits that this chapter is based on website analysis and filed research that the researcher conducted in London between the Twin Towers attacks of 11 September 2001 and the London bombing of 7 July 2005. He underlines how much the European technological and sociological context enabled Amer Khaled and Omar Bakri to implement original communication strategies to reach new audience on the Internet, too. The author of this article has worked very hard to collect all data available online from their sites and from other sites in which they participate and own. He sought to reconstruct the development of the design and contents of the sites. He also conducted non-

CHAPTER EIGHT

This is the last chapter in this book and it is entitled 'Guenonian Traditionalism and European Islam.' It is written by Mark Sedgwick. It highlights an intellectual movement, Guenonian Traditionalism. The writer clarifies the meaning of Traditionalism by saying it was one of the earliest European producers of Islamic knowledge, with publications appearing in Paris and Cairo before the First world War. It is a Western philosophical and religious movement that often expresses itself in Islamic terms. Then, the writer elaborates on the term and he tells the readers the European origins of Traditionalism. Then, he attempts to highlight the emergence of Islamic Guenonianism

The writers emphasize that *fatwas* have been a productive tool in the development of Islamic law to solve the recent novel challenges. The chapter has looked at how *ulama* (Islamic scientists) have responded to the current challenges of Muslims migration to Europe through the instrument of Ifta. The writers give the example of a married Muslim woman whose husband is not Muslim and what *Mufiis* said about her case. And we have seen that *fatwa* tried to solve the problems and not to complicate them.

Chapter six has 35 references, too and it is written in 17 pages. There are 32 notes outlined at the end of the chapter. The latest reference is 2009 and the oldest one is 1992. Using examples adds liveliness to the content.

directive interviews with the authors and attended their lectures and work sessions with the evaluating their Islamic, social and political knowledge. He interviewed the two case studies people. Finally, he analyzed the messages of the two authors, in particular their internet and publications: Arabic and their translations. Then, the writer talks about Khaled's and Bakri's work on producing and permeating Islamic knowledge and *Fatwas*' in Britain and Western Europe using the Internet and other communicative means.

At the end of the chapter, the writer asserts that the internet by itself is not sufficient to maintain a strategy of global communication, but it works well as additional means of communication, alongside with the more traditional forms such as lectures, sermons, TV, radios, books, DVDs, CDs and videotapes. Face-to-face meetings are essential to produce and disseminate the Islamic knowledge, too.

Chapter seven has 21 pages and the writer has used 37 references and 81 notes at the end of it. The newest reference used is 2009 and the oldest dated back to 1984. It is noticed that the writer has worked very hard to produce this chapter.

and Traditionalist Islam. He also sheds light on Muslim and Euro-Muslim forms of Islamic traditionalism. The author stresses that the phenomenon may not be completely new because the intellectual movements were already trans-regional.

This chapter is based on a paper, "The Renaissance Returns to Europe by Way of Tehran: Traditionalism and the Localization of Islam." The chapter covers 14 pages and it has 40 references. The most recent one is 2009 and the oldest one dated back to 1897 and it is the oldest references in the whole book. There are 47 notes at the end of this chapter explaining some aspects of the chapter ideas.

THE LAYOUT OF THE BOOK

The book is well-written and easy to be understood. Each chapter is written by one writer except chapter five which is written by two writers. Besides, two famous editors have revised its contents. All writers are well-educated have worked as lecturers at various universities. At the end of each chapter, there are notes

on the chapter, explaining many vague points. References of each chapter are listed at the end of each chapter. The cover and the printings are modern and elegant. The book is printed by Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

CONCLUSION

The book has many advantages and it is valuable additional asset to the Islamic books. To begin with, it is rich of useful information on the Islamic knowledge and how it has been produced, transmitted and disseminated in Western Europe. Also, there are nine writers, who have profound background and education, produced it in a meaningful way. In addition, nearly 329 references in total are used to build up the eight chapters, 70 of these references are used in the first chapter. Besides, all chapters are well-written, but in our opinion, the most informative two are the first two chapters. Moreover, chapter four which talks about the Algerian *Imam* is very distinguishing because this *Imam* can find a mild way to transmit Islamic knowledge to non-Muslims as well as Muslims. Also, chapter seven encourages Muslims to use Internet to

produce and disseminate Islamic knowledge to the world.

Although the book has many merits that outnumber the shortcomings, it has some pitfalls. For example, the book was published in 2011 and I could not find a reference which is dated to 2010 or 2011. The newest used references are produced in 2009. Also, although many bits of information are known or common by Muslims, some writers have written them in details. Also, some information is repeated in more than one chapter. For instance, the roles of *Imam* in Islam and some known *Fatwas*.

All in all, tremendous efforts were exerted to produce such a read-worthy book and all thanks go to the writers, the editors and other people behind the scene.

THE REVIEWED BOOK

Bruinessen, M., Allieve, S., Amiraux, V., Birt, J., Lewis, P., Caeiro, A., Marinai, E., Sedgwick, M. Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and dissemination in

Western Europe. (2011). Edited by Bruinessen, M and Allieve, S, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

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