

Preface Editorial Board

Over the past decades, the field of Islamic Religious Education has differentiated in remarkable ways around the world. While Islamic Religious Education is a relatively new phenomenon in Western contexts – such as Europe and the United States – emerging against the backdrop of migration-induced pluralization, deeply rooted and historically evolved educational traditions can be observed in predominantly Muslim societies. This special issue responds to the need to examine Islamic educational processes comparatively within their diverse historical, national, societal, and political contexts. It focuses on both the institutional formats of Islamic Religious Education and their didactic configurations.

In Muslim-majority societies, the history of Islamic educational institutions dates back to the early period of Islam. *Mosques*, *kuttāb* schools, and later *madāris* constituted the backbone of Islamic Religious Education over centuries. In these contexts, education was closely linked to the four concepts of *ta'lim* (teaching), *ta'allum* (learning), *ta'dīb* (upbringing), and *adab* (cultural and intellectual refinement). The educational traditions were shaped by a comprehensive notion of religious-moral character formation.

The incursion of colonial structures in the 19th century brought about profound ruptures in many Muslim-majority societies: traditional institutions were marginalized or replaced by secular education systems. These developments, coupled with the rise of fundamentalist movements such as Salafism – which advocates a literal adherence to the Qur'an and Sunna and explicitly rejects historically evolved traditions of interpretation – compelled Islamic educational institutions to engage in self-reflection and reorganization, processes that continue to this day. As a result, diverse formats of Islamic Religious Education emerged, drawing on both traditional bodies of knowledge and modern pedagogical approaches.

In Muslim-minority contexts like in Europe and North America, Islamic Religious Education faces a distinct set of challenges. Besides justifying such education in an at the same time secular and cultural Christian environment, the relevant subject has to be integrated into the national education system, a curriculum has to be developed, teachers have to be qualified, etc. Unlike the situation in Muslim-majority contexts, in minority contexts establishing Islamic Religious Education is not only about professionalization but also about recognition and inculturation. Furthermore, the national culture within the various European and North American nations adds to the complexity of establishing Islamic Religious Education. In the Nordic countries of Europe, for example, there is a publicly recognized state church, while in Germany there is a separation of church and state, which is carried out in cooperative manner.

The aim of this special issue is to inform about basic features of these global developments in Islamic Religious Education from a regionally comparative perspective. The collected contributions offer insights into different contexts and paradigms of Islamic educational work and provide a well-founded overview of historical development, institutional anchoring, curricular orientations, and didactic challenges. In doing so, this issue contributes to a global mapping of Islamic educational landscapes – serving as a resource for both scholars and educational practitioners. Therefore, the contributions are organized into three geographical sections.

The first section explores various models of Islamic religious education in the European context,

highlighting the close interplay between migration histories, legal frameworks, and religious-cultural imprints. The example of Bosnia and Herzegovina presents a largely established model within a Muslim-majority context within Europe, shaped by close cooperation with the Islamic Community. The contribution on Turkey analyzes state-regulated religious education in public schools, characterized by tensions between religious normativity, state control, and pedagogical reform. In Germany, the focus is on the legally and institutionally complex development of a denominational Islamic Religious Education, which has been institutionally established despite numerous challenges. The Nordic countries present a contrasting picture: while Sweden and Denmark address Islamic content within non-confessional religious studies, Finland is the only country with a state-recognized, confessional Islamic Religious Education structure including teacher education.

The second section focuses on regions in Asia and Middle East where Islamic Religious Education is historically deeply rooted yet significantly shaped by colonialism, reform movements, and postcolonial reconfigurations. The article on Indonesia illustrates the country's diverse Islamic education landscape – from traditional *pesantren* and *madrasahs* to modern, state-recognized Islamic schools. It emphasizes how the interplay between state education policy, Muslim authority, and a pluralist society keeps the system in flux. The article on the Indian subcontinent portrays the complex interaction between colonial educational reforms, national identity discourses, and the social role of *madāris* – particularly in terms of socioeconomic mobility and the formation of religious authority. The authors reconstruct a multifaceted picture of continuity and change. A historical contribution on biography and charismatic authority in traditionalist reform movements in colonial India demonstrates how educational reform functioned as a strategy of religious self-assertion and mobilization. Another article traces over a thousand years of Islamic educational history in Russia – from the *maktabs* and *madrasahs* of the Bulghar empire to the colonial repressions of the Tsarist regime, through the Soviet era and into the present-day state-recognized training formats for Muslim clergy. Another contribution examines the educational practices within a *Shi'i ḥawza* seminar in Lebanon. The ethnographic study demonstrates how religious instruction in this context is not understood as dogmatic transmission, but rather as a dialogical process in which doubt, intra-Islamic diversity, and political contexts are actively negotiated.

The third section focuses on Islamic Religious Education in marginalized settings – in the diasporic society of North America and in the postcolonial, Muslim-majority region of northern Nigeria. In northern Nigeria, the focus is on the traditional *tsangaya* system, which, despite ongoing public criticism concerning discipline, living conditions, or educational content, remains a central site of religious and moral upbringing for many families. The contribution shows how deeply these institutions are embedded in social structures while also facing increasing pressure from state reform initiatives and international security discourses. In the North American context, it becomes clear how Islamic educational institutions – such as weekend and full-time schools – establish and evolve within a secular, religiously plural environment. Here, Islamic education serves not only as a site of religious socialization but also as a space for identity formation, social resilience, and the negotiation of belonging, difference, and civic participation.

The contributions in this volume demonstrate that Islamic religious education worldwide is embedded in dynamic processes of negotiation – between tradition and reform, between local contextual conditions and transnational influences, and between theological continuity and pedagogical innovation. Despite significant regional differences, structural commonalities emerge: in all contexts, questions of institutional recognition, didactic design, the relationship between religion and the state, and the positioning of Islamic education within the framework of societal diversity are central.

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