Learned Class ('Ulamā’) and Education

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Abstract
The subject of this chapter comprises two independent and yet mutually intertwined complex debates: the ‘ulamā’ and education. The complexity of the subject derives from the fact that the two themes of this chapter are also connected with several other historical developments that influenced the historicity of both ‘ulamā’ and education. For this reason, it is vital to explore and analyze the historicity of the ‘ulamā’, their changing positions and shifting concerns and priorities as well as the evolving concept of education. In doing so, this chapter discusses the theme of this investigation in relation to (i) Islam, knowledge, and authority; (ii) territorial expansion and the rise of Muslim civilizations and quest for knowledge and education; (iii) the development of institutional and educational structures; (iv) the emergence of the ‘ulamā’ to the level of law-makers and their influence on education and rational sciences; and (v) nationalism and modern approaches to science and education. These themes are by no means exhaustive, but within the limited capacity of this chapter, they present fresh interpretations of the subject matter and open new debates for further research and discussion.

Keywords
Islam · Knowledge and Authority

Contents
Territorial Expansion and the Rise of Muslim Civilizations ........................................ 3
Institutional and Educational Structures and the Role of ‘Ulamā’ ................................... 4
The ‘Ulamā’, Caliphs, and Education ........................................................................ 8

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The concept of ʿilm (knowledge) constitutes the essence of both terms: ‘ulamāʾ (scholars) and taʿlīm (education). Etymologically, the Arabic terms ʿālim (pl. ‘ulamāʾ, literally, scholar, knower, master and learned) and ʿilm (knowledge) are closely connected to each other. The term ʿālim is derived from the three-letter Arabic verb root ‘a-l-m, which means “to know, to have knowledge of, or information about, something.” Conceptually, Muslims in general, and the ‘ulamāʾ in particular, trace their understanding of both knowledge and education to the Qurʾān and the Prophet Muḥammad’s manner of living (sunnah), which is studied through his sayings (ḥadīth). They together not only represent two fundamental sources of knowledge and authority in Islam, but also serve as sources of guidance and inspiration for knowledge and education. Muslims believe that Allāh is the absolute source of knowledge and recognize divine revelation as the beginning of all human knowledge. In sūrah two, al-Baqarah (The Cow), the Qurʾān (II: 31) states that:

And He [Allāh] taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful.

The above verse introduces God as the first teacher and master of Adam. Muslims believe that God taught Adam the meaning and knowledge of all things. They regard the first clause of the above verse, “And He [Allāh] taught Adam all the names”, as an indication of the beginning of transmission of knowledge to humanity. In a philosophical interpretation, Muḥammad Iqbal (d. 1938) states that the above verse demonstrates that the character of human knowledge is conceptual. The fact that man has the faculty of naming things, that is to say, forming concepts of them is capturing them. It is through this process of conceptualization that man approaches the observable aspect of reality (Iqbal 1958: 13). It also means that God has given human being the faculty to empirically observe, understand, and conceptualize the visible aspect of reality. An empirical understanding and examination of the divine creation ultimately serves the advancement and development of various fields of knowledge.

Moreover, the Qurʾān also makes frequent references to the term ʿilm. According to Anees (1991), the root word and derivatives of the term ʿilm appear more than eight hundred times in the Qurʾān. This signifies the importance of knowledge as the second most important concept after tawḥīd (recognition of the oneness of God) (p. 10). Based on these Qurʾānic observations, Muslims believe that the concepts of knowledge and education, i.e., reading, writing, and teaching, are present in the Qurʾān from the very first verses that were revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. These first revelations, Sūrah al-ʿAlaq (The Clot), not only encouraged the Prophet Muḥammad to read God’s creation but also highlighted the concepts of knowledge, teaching, and education as the central themes of the divine revelation:
Read in the name of your Lord who created [everything]! He created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is the most Bounteous! Who taught by the pen. He taught man that which he did not know. (Qur’an, XCVI: 1-5)

The above as well as previously quoted verses depict knowledges as God’s creations. They describe teaching and transmission of knowledge as one of bounteous acts of God. In this way, they also portray God as the “Master of all knowledge.” These two quoted verses suggest that knowledge is a divine gift, and prophets are God’s trusted mediums of transmission of knowledge to humanity. It also means that God reveals Himself to humanity through His gift, that is, knowledge. If God is knowable through knowledge, then acquiring knowledge becomes an act of worship, i.e., an act of understanding God. If, as Muslims believe, the Qur’an contains knowledge of God, then reading and understanding the Qur’an is an act of worshipping, or acquiring knowledge of, God. Thus, the Qur’an equates the acquisition of knowledge to an act of worship; in other words, whoever acquires knowledge indeed worships God thereby.

Similarly, the Prophet’s sayings also make the seeking of knowledge, learning, and education a religious obligation and a core tenet of belief. Historically, the Prophet Muḥammad himself is believed to spearhead Muslim education in speech as well as in action. Makdisi states that it is possible that the Prophet himself taught his disciples in his mosque, ‘Masjid Rasūl Allāh’ (the mosque of the Messenger of Allāh), in Medina (1981: 20), and hence he was the first teacher and transmitter of divine knowledge and wisdom to an emerging community that came to be called and known as the “Muslim community,” or simply the “Muslims.” For details, see Chapter 4 in this volume on the development of the educational traditions and institutions in Islam, where the present author discusses and analyzes the Prophet Muḥammad’s views and actions regarding the promotion of knowledge and education.

**Territorial Expansion and the Rise of Muslim Civilizations**

The expansion of the Arab empire resulted into a dynamic phase of cultural exchange. The Arabs brought their new religion to the occupied lands, where they encountered ancient cultures and civilizations. By the end of the Umayyad Caliphate (41–133/661–750), the Arabs expanded their conquests under the banner of Islam westwards to Spain and eastwards to modern-day Afghanistan (formerly Khurāsān) and Central Asia (Transoxiana), and southwards to India. Territorial expansion had a significant influence on the life of both the Arabs and the non-Arabs for centuries to come. It played a major role in facilitating and promoting trade and commerce across land and sea. Muslims either built upon the existing, or opened new, trade routes. In Africa, commercial activities intensified trade and commerce on Trans-Saharan trade route between West Africa and Mediterranean, which predated Islam. The presence of a Muslim caliphate in Spain (139–422/756–1031) also encouraged trade and opened new routes between North Africa and Spain. Equally, Muslim traders used
the existing trade route, popularly known as, Silk Road in the east and connected China, Central, South, and West Asia with the Arab lands and Europe. These different trades were then connected together via Mecca, which not only attracted Muslims for the annual pilgrimage but also became a hub and attractive destination for trade.

The development and flourishing of trade routes encouraged the rise of commercial centers, bazaars, markets, and caravanserais (roadside inns) across the Muslim territories. Trade and commercial activities contributed to scholarly and educational activities on the one hand and were soon supported by the development of new scientific disciplines, particularly jurisprudence, on the other. The science of jurisprudence (fiqh), which comprises the two major disciplines of ‘ibādāt (divine worships) and muʿāmilāt (transactions), developed commercial laws and regulations, which fell under the transaction section of jurisprudence. Traders and caravan teams not only carried their commercial goods, but they also carried the religion of Islam and its rulings on worship, religious creeds, and rituals as well as trade, commerce, and matters of civil transaction. Trade and commerce also facilitated encounters between traders and scholars of different faiths and cultures, including Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian. This new dynamism encouraged and facilitated travelers, scholars, scientists, and young inquisitive men to journey across the Muslim territories and exchange their information, knowledge, and learning. As a result, many centers of civilization began to flourish across the Muslim world. The prominent centers included Córdoba in Spain; Kairouan (al-Qayrawān) in Tunisia; Fez in Morocco; Cairo in Egypt; Damascus in Syria; Basra and Baghdad in Iraq; Nishāpūr in Iran; Hirāt, Balkh, and Ghaznī in modern-day Afghanistan; and Bukhārā and Samarqand in modern-day Uzbekistan. Scholars across these centres not only preserved their works of ancient wisdom by translating them into Arabic and Persian/Dari, for instance, but also produced the cutting edge science and scholarship of the time. The emerging fields of knowledge were then actively pursued and developed by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars for at least six centuries from the mid-seventh to the mid-thirteenth centuries of the Islamic era, and stamped their character on what is retrospectively viewed as the Golden Age of Islam.

### Institutional and Educational Structures and the Role of ‘Ulamā’

The mosque (masjid) represents the earliest Muslim institution. It served not only as a place of worship, but also as a space for communal gathering, governance, polity, and education. Historically, the mosque served as the first official place of learning before this activity spread to libraries, bookshops, private houses, and lodges attached to mosques which came to be known as madrasahs. The tradition of mosque functioning as an instructional center for Muslims goes back to the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, when his mosque in Medina served as a place for private and public worship (For a detailed discussion on mosque and its role in the development of knowledge and various disciplines, see chapter “Islamic Education and Development of Educational Traditions and Institutions”). Hence, the
mosque characterized the earliest institution for worship, communal decisions, and education in Islam.

Among the prominent mosques of the medieval time, al-Azhar requires a special attention. The al-Azhar congregational mosque was established and expanded by the Shi‘ah Ismā‘īlī Fātimid Imām-caliph (The Fātimid caliphate was an Ismā‘īlī Shi‘ah caliphate that emerged in North Africa (present-day Tunisia and Algeria) in 296/909, before they conquered Egypt and founded the city al-Qāhirah (present Cairo) in 358–59/969–970, where the al-Azhar mosque and the modern-day al-Azhar university are located.) in 361/972 A.D. in Cairo, Egypt. The case of al-Azhar is intriguing, because it represents a typical case how a congregation mosque (masjid ḍā‘ī’s) in the early Islamic period served as a place of worship, education and scholarship. The case of al-Azhar is also important, because, as Kasa‘i (2008) states, it is the oldest educational institution having survived a thousand years of social, cultural, and political events and is still active. In 1005, al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 386–412/996–1021), the sixth Fātimid caliph-imām, founded Dār al-‘ilm (the House of Knowledge), a center for education and research, in Cairo. It was sometimes erroneously called Dar al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom) – misleadingly insofar as “wisdom” (ḥikmat) was usually understood as the specific Ismā‘īlī esoteric (ta‘wīl or bāṭini) knowledge that was communicated by the imām through dā‘īs to the Ismā‘īlī audience alone. As Heinz Halm explains, al-Ḥākim’s institution did not serve the da‘wa purpose. Rather it provided funding for and promoted nonreligious sciences (Halm 1997, pp. 71–72). The Fātimid caliphs, and their dā‘īs (summoners) and jurists inside and outside Cairo used to hold regular majālis (sing. majlis), in which high ranking officials and dignitaries attended twice a week, every Monday and Thursday (EI 1986: 1032; Madelung 1986: 1033). According to Madelung’s account, majālis appeared to be formal sessions for both Ismā‘īlī and non-Ismā‘īlīs. Since the lecturers for the Ismā‘īlī faithful were known as “wisdom,” their majālis came to be known as “the wisdom sessions” (majālis al-ḥikmah). The Ismā‘īlī dā‘īs also prepared lectures for the general audience, reading them out twice a week on specified days. Each lecture prepared by the chief dā‘ī was submitted to the caliph-imām for approval before it was read to people from different sexes, social, and religious ranks (1986: 1033).

It is also worth noting that the Fātimids and their dā‘īs paid systematic attention to women’s education. They held special “wisdom sessions” for women. This tradition spread all over the Ismā‘īlī communities and reached remote and isolated valleys and villages as far away as modern-day Afghanistan and Central Asia. For example, the Badakhshānī, Hazārah, and Pashā‘ī Ismā‘īlī communities in Afghanistan until recently preserved the traditional religious education sessions for men and women. The primary traditional institutions for conducting either separate or mixed educational sessions for both sexes were known as chillah nishīnī (forty-day session) and jum‘ah nishīnī (Friday session). These sessions were privately held at homes and within community circles, in which families not only shared a common set of Ismā‘īlī beliefs, language, modes of living, culture, tradition but also blood ties.

The curriculum and religious education sessions mainly revolved around the ta‘wīl (hermeneutic interpretation) or the wisdom of the sharī‘ah and general matters
of religion. It ought to be clarified that the Ismā‘īlī chillah nishīnī is different from, as it is not a form of, the traditional forty-day ṣūfī fasting and meditation in absolute seclusion and isolation. In the Ismā‘īlī chillah nishīnī, participants attend educational sessions in order to enlighten their soul and increase their knowledge in various matters of religion. Normally, a religious scholar would lead all forty sessions on nightly basis. Using a rotation system, the religious scholar was holding one session in one family’s home for one night and thus he was incorporating all the families in the community. A typical session would include teaching, dialogue in the form of questions and answers, and discussions between the scholar and the participants as well as between participants. While these sessions normally began after dinner and finished before midnight, participants were free to look after their families and personal life for the rest of the day. The preferred season for these forty sessions was winter, when families were not actively engaged in farming or animal husbandry and were keen to spend the long cold winter nights in increasing their religious knowledge and passing their religious faith down to the next generation.

In contrast to the chillah nishīnī that more suited for rural communities in the winter season, the Friday session (jum‘ah nishīnī) suited the needs of the urban Ismā‘īlī communities whose way of life and income were not based on agriculture or farming production. As with the chillah nishīnī, the Friday session was open to both men and women. These traditional educational sessions and women’s education may have not been unique or limited to the Ismā‘īlī tradition; however, the Ismā‘īlī educational tradition certainly does deserve attention since they fostered the notion of learning for men and women systematically and globally across their communities. These sessions, which used to be part of the broader traditional religious and spiritual enlightenment education, have now been replaced by modern educational programs, both at primary cycle, known as the International Ta‘līm (Education) Programme, and the secondary cycle, known as the Secondary Teacher Education Programme.

Al-Azhar sessions of legal instructions were openly held for all learners of jurisprudence. These were taught in the al-Azhar Mosque (Halm 1997, pp. 44–46) as well as in other congregation mosques outside Cairo. The dā‘īs as well as the ‘ulamā‘ from both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds made significant contributions to the development and advancement of knowledge and education in both al-Azhar and al-Ḥākim’s House of Knowledge. However, it is al-Azhar that has survived until today, evolving into an organized institution for higher learning. Retrospectively, many modern-day scholars consider it the first and the oldest university in the world (Tibawi 1972: 30; Bilgrami and Ashraf 1985) (Among the oldest mosques and institutions of higher learning, one could also name al-Zaytūnah mosque). The Fāṭimid educational pursuits also inspired the ‘Abbāsids, the Seljuqs (The Seljuqs (Seljuks) belonged to a Turkoman nomadic tribe who lived along the Oxus River and were led by their chief called Seljuq, after whom their dynasty is named. They establish their empire in Western Asia (1037–1194) (Saunders 1978, p. xiv and 145).) and their celebrated vizier Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092) to establish a network of madrasahs in Basra and Mosul in present-day Iraq, Isfahan and Nishāpūr in Iran, and Balkh and Herat in Afghanistan (Dodge 1962, pp. 65–66). Although
these madrasahs were built to train jurists in discursive reasoning so that they might effectively counter the activity of the Ismā‘īlī dā’īs from al-Azhar (Kasa‘i 2008), it was also during this period that madrasah became the cultural center of Muslim civilization (Hillenbrand 1986, pp. 1128) and began to represent the educational and intellectual dimension of Islam.

In the modern period, European colonialism brought new political, military, and educational challenges to the occupied Muslim countries. The initial intellectual encounters between European and Muslim thinkers represented some stereotypical views of some European orientalists and misled more than they attempted to understand the historicity of Muslim education, sciences, and civilizations. One of such early and notable encounters was the case of Ernest Renan (1823–1892), a French orientalist and a historian of religion, who was a loyal supporter of scientific reason and rationalism. In his 29 March 1883 lecture at the Sorbonne in which he spoke of Islam and science, he fiercely attacked both the Arabs and the religion of Islam. Renan viewed religion in general, and Islam in particular, as a set of beliefs that are void of reason and rationalism. Equally, he described believing Muslims, particularly the Arabs, as a group of people who not only lacked the scientific mindset, but also believed in superstition and dogmatism (Renan 1883, pp. 2–3).

Renan’s comments led the leading ‘ulamā’ and Muslim intellectuals of the time, led by Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), to voice their responses. Living under occupation, the Muslim intellectuals had to defend their history, culture, tradition, and religion and the fact that Islam is compatible with modern science. The immediate intellectual response from al-Afghānī was defensive, explanatory, and apologetic by nature. He took it upon himself to defend both the Arabs and Islam. Equally, he aimed at proving that contrary to Renan’s view, Islam was compatible with modern science. In an eloquent lecture, Teaching and Learning and Answer to Renan, delivered in Calcutta on 8 November 1882, al-Afghānī stated that:

The Arabs, ignorant and barbaric as they were in origin, took up what had been abandoned by the civilized nations, rekindled the extinguished sciences, developed them and gave them a brilliance they had never had. Is not this the index and proof of their natural love for sciences? ... The Europeans welcomed Aristotle, who had emigrated and become Arab; they did not think of him at all when he was Greek and their neighbour. Is there not in this another proof, no less evident, of the intellectual superiority of the Arabs and of their natural attachment to philosophy? (al-Afghānī 2002, pp. 108-9).

Despite his eloquent response to Renan, and his praise for religion, particularly its role in delivering man from darkness to the path of civilization, al-Afghānī and Renan agreed that religion and philosophy were irreconcilable. Al-Afghānī asserted that:

Religion imposes on man its faith and its belief, whereas philosophy frees him of it totally or in part. ... It will always be thus. Whenever religion will have the upper hand, it will eliminate philosophy; and the contrary happens when it is philosophy that reigns as sovereign mistress. (ibid.: 110)
It is worth noting that the view of al-Afghānī is not shared by other Muslim intellectuals and reformers. For instance, Muḥammad Iqbal states that both philosophy and religion spring from the same root. The former grasps reality piecemeal, whereas the latter grasps it in its wholeness. In other words, religion fixes its gaze on the eternal, and philosophy focuses on the temporal aspect of Reality (Iqbal 1958, pp. 2–3). However, regardless of how uncomfortable Muslims intellectuals were with their European counterparts, modern European thought inspired a considerable number of Muslim thinkers to speak of educational and intellectual reforms in contemporary Islamic thought.

Muslim reformist movements in Turkey, India, and Afghanistan generally called for the adoption of some aspects of modern European thought and education as the second best alternative to the lost glory of Muslim intellectual dynamism and education. In Turkey, the supporters of the tanzīmât (reforms) and the Young Turks advocated the adoption of modern European intellectual values. The former actively contributed to the translation of works in Turkey (see following section), whereas the latter emerged as an intellectual circle and soon developed into a political opposition group. In India, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817–1898) advocated the adoption of the European model of education. His impact on the Indian Muslim education became formalized through the establishment of the Muslim Anglo-Orient College of Aligarh, known as the Aligarh College, which adopted the British model of education. These new reform movements also found resonance in Afghanistan with al-Afghānī, during his advisory mission in the court of Amīr Shīr ‘Alī (r. 1863–1866 and 1868–1879), and the early twentieth century modernist clique, led by Maḥmūd Ṭarzī (1865–1933) and his son-in-law, the then king of Afghanistan, Amān Allāh (r. 1919–1929) (For further details, see Baiza 2013, pp. 43–51 & 60). These reform movements advocated the integration of European model of education, curriculum, administration, finances, graduation, and teaching and examination methods, which marked a significant departure from the traditional madrasah system.

The ‘Ulamā’, Caliphs, and Education

It was in the early ‘Abbāsid Caliphate (1261–1517) that the Sunnī ‘ulamā’ emerged as a strong, independent political force and weakened the caliph’s authority. The caliphs, who hitherto inherited the Prophet’s religious and political authority, were forced to hand their religious authority to the ‘ulamā’. This change allowed the ‘ulamā’ not only to gain independence, but also to declare themselves the heirs of the Prophet Muḥammad’s religious authority. As a result, they laid the foundation for a distinct identity for themselves. However, the ‘ulamā’ did not detach themselves from the center of political power. Rather, for various religious, social, financial, and political reasons, they sought closer affinity to the caliphs. This led to the bifurcation of authority: the ‘ulamā’ assumed the role of lawmakers, whereas the caliphs and their governments took the executive power.
This unpredictable change began when an elite class of ‘ulamā’, who had emerged in Basra and Baghdad in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries, sought their religious independence from the caliphs. This class of ‘ulamā’ emerged because the Umayyads and some of the early ‘Abbāsid caliphs failed to observe the Qur’ānic ideal of a just social order. The ‘ulamā’ became increasingly critical of the ‘Abbāsid caliphs, particularly al-Mahdī (d. 173/785) and his son Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd (d. 197/809), who replaced the simple lifestyles of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Khulāṣa ‘Rāshidūn) with a highly aristocratic lifestyle, luxurious habits, extravagant spending on poets and women, and the alienation of citizens from the state. In response, the ‘ulamā’ sought to assert their religious autonomy from the caliphs. They gradually developed their status as that of the heirs of the Prophet’s religious authority and appropriated the title warāthat al-anbīyā (heirs of the Prophets) for themselves and sought authority based on their claim to be successors to the Prophet (Takim 2006: 11–12). Since the reign of the ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 236/848), caliphal authority had been reduced to the level of the protectors of the divine law (sharīʿah), to be distinguished from the legal norms (fiqh). It meant that the caliph did not have the power and authority to interpret or implement divine law (Arkoun 2006: 207), whereas the ulamā’ became the law-makers. This shift presented a significant change in the role and position of the ‘ulamā’, Islamic polity, the future of knowledge and education across the Muslim world.

Contrary to the division of authority in the Sunnī tradition, the Shi‘ah school perceived both religious and political leadership the domain of the ‘ulamā’. Among other means to achieve this was through the interpretation of the Qur’ānic texts, for instance, in IV: 59, to “Obey Allāh, obey the Apostle and those in authority from among you.” In the eyes of the Shi‘ah ‘ulamā’, “those in authority” are religious leaders (‘ulamā’) who are considered as the righteous heirs of the Prophet. Nevertheless, Allāh does not exercise political authority; rather, a lordship over the universe. He is “not directly involved in mundane political events nor in the explicit source of political authority” (Arjmand 2004: 69). However, there are also different interpretations within the Shi‘a school. The Shi‘a Iṣmā‘īlis, for instance, believe that the Qur’ānic reference to “those in authority” exclusively refers to the office of imamate. They further argue that a present living imam from the progeny of the Prophet, through his daughter Fāṭima and son-in-law ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, is the only rightful heir of the Prophet’s authority.

The rise of ‘ulamā’ to the rank of law-makers had serious implications for education. It changed the inclusive spirit of education and gradually removed the rational or natural sciences from the curriculum of higher education. The conservative ‘ulamā’ began to use knowledge as a source of political legitimacy and supremacy. By claiming to be the successors and heirs of the Prophet’s religious authority, they also appropriated to themselves the role of bearers of “correct” knowledge. Rivalry was not limited to the level of rational/natural and religious/transmitted sciences, but it also influenced the position of ‘ulamā’ within the category of transmitted sciences. As a typical example, the Qur’ānic commentators and interpreters regarded tafsīr (the science of Qur’ānic exegesis) as the foundation
of religion and the highest discipline in the class of transmitted sciences (Saleh 2004, p. 78). They viewed their work as the “queen” of all sciences purely because it dealt with knowledge of the Qur’ān and hadīth. On the contrary, juristconsults viewed their field as the most noble and the queen of all scholarly works because they dealt with the Qur’ān, the hadīth, as well as the sharī‘ah, believing that they alone were capable of showing people “the correct path.” Such self-centered competition, as Saleh states, permeated the spirit of the 5th/11th century when different competing schools were struggling for dominance (ibid.: 78–9).

The traditionalist ‘ulamā’s monopoly of knowledge led to the marginalization and suppression of mysticism, philosophy, and other branches of knowledge on the one hand and a narrow interpretation of the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s traditions on the other. This change happened as a result of a continuous tension between traditionalists or the people of hadīth and the rationalists, spearheaded by the Mu‘atizilite rationalist school. One of the major debates that escalated this tension to a full-scale war came to be known in history as miḥnah (inquisition). The inquisition revolved around the notion of the createdness and uncreatedness of the Qur’ān. The matter soon became a doctrinal position and a major point of contention between rationalists and traditionalists, each side arguing and promoting their own doctrines. The Mu‘atizilites argued that the Qur’ān is God’s created words (muḥdath) and so it is subject to human reasoning and rational inquiry. By contrast, the traditionalists held a view that the Qur’ān is eternal (qadīm) and hence uncreated and cannot become subject to human rational inquiry. The ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Ma’mūn (r. 193-8/809-13), who favored the Mu‘atizilite rationalist view, ordered the inquisition in 218/833, through which he attempted to somewhat formalize the Mu‘atizilite position which would then become the official doctrine of the caliphate. In opposition to the Mu‘atizilite’s doctrine and al-Ma’mūn’s position, the people of hadīth (ahl al-hadīth), headed by Aḥmad ibn Ḵanbal, rejected the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur’ān. In his Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma‘ādin al-Jawāhir, al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956) notes that after al-Ma’mūn’s death, his brother (al-Mu‘taṣim, r. 218–27/833-42) and nephew (al-Wāthiq, r. 842-47) continued his path until al-Mutawakkil ascended to the caliphate and put an end to al-Ma’mūn’s legacy. Al-Mutawakkil (r. 232-47/847-61) forbade argumentative debates (jidāl) and discussions (münzirah), and ordered emulation (taqlīd) instead (al-Mas‘ūdī 2005, Vol. 5: 253–54). From Makdisi’s point of view, the years between the caliphates of al-Ma’mūn and al-Mutawakkil were years of prolonged debate and terror. Al-Mutawakkil brought the matter to an end, and by his era the Mu‘atizilites were politically fully exhausted and unable to recover (1981: 7). However, it would perhaps be naive to believe that it was the issue of the createdness and the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān alone that initiated the inquisition and a political struggle between the Mu‘atizilites and the Ḥanbalītes that lasted for nearly half a century. It was more a matter of personal and doctrinal prestige and survival for both schools than a mere dispute over the createdness versus the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān. The Mu‘atizilites represented supporters of rationalism in Islam, whereas the people of hadīth, primarily the Ḥanbalītes, represented all traditionalist and conservative groups. The issue of the createdness of the Qur’ān became an excuse and a doctrinal symbol over which the
two camps fought for their survival. Eventually, the traditionalists, with the support of al-Mutawakkil, won the struggle and established a new political, theological, and educational trend.

It was not only the Mu‘atazilites but also the rational school and liberal thought in Islam in general that suffered from the inquisition. Consequently, the sphere of rational thought has significantly become limited in what has become a Sunnī caliphate. Although Makdisi’s account suggests that al-Mutawakkil brought the matter to an end, the debate still continued and the Mu‘atazilite trend was still not wiped out. Al-Mutawakkil banned the pursuit of rational sciences and public debates (munẓirah). Instead, he persecuted the Mu‘atazilites and followers of the Shi‘ah interpretation of Islam. Undoubtedly, it was a very hard blow for the Mu‘atazilite school, which could not meaningfully recover. However, the struggle lasted for more than a century until the Mu‘atazilite and rationalist groups were totally silenced by the ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Qādir bi Allāh (r. 380-422/991-1031), who completely banned the pursuit of rational sciences. The Ḥanbalite ‘ulamā’ championed al-Qādir’s move and exclusively favored the transmitted sciences, namely the study of the Qur’ān, sunnah and hadīth, to the exclusion of all forms of rational sciences.

Al-Qādir escalated the matter further by launching a new project, claiming to restore Sunnī Islam. He staged a full-scale war against the rationalists, and Shi‘ah Muslims, particularly the Fātimid Ismā‘īlīs. His well-known al-‘ītqād al-Qādirī (the Qādirite Creed) testifies to the depth of his fear and the strength of his opposition to the schools of rational thought and the Fātimid Ismā‘īlīs. He took these initiatives under the slogan of restoring the Sunnī creed of Islam, which had arguably been challenged and overshadowed by the Mu‘atazilite rational arguments during al-Ma‘mūn’s rule. In attempting to restore the Sunnī creed, in 408/1017 he called upon the Ḥanafites and Mu‘atazilites to publically denounce Mu‘atazilism. At the same time, he forbade public discussion (munẓirah) and the teaching of Mu‘atazilite and Shi‘ah interpretations of Islam, which he termed as rāfidi, throughout the ‘Abbāsid territories. A year later, he wrote three epistles, which collectively came be to known as the Qādirite Creed and which were read out in his palace (Dār al-Khilāfah), and in all small and congregational mosques. In his al-Muntaẓīm fi Tā‘rikh al-Mulūk wa al-Imām, Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) states that al-Qādir’s decree declared that:

> the word of God is uncreated (kalām Allāh Ta‘āla ghayr makhliqa) ... and anyone who maintains that it is created is an infidel (kāfir) and so the shedding of his blood is permissible (ḥalāl al-dam) ... and this is the view of the People of Ahl al-Sunnah and al-Jamā‘ah. (ibn al-Jawzī 1992: 280–281)

This decree was a direct reference to the great inquisition that happened during al-Ma‘mūn’s time. As previously discussed, the Mu‘atazilites believed that the Qur’ān was God’s creation (muḥdath), and so is subject to rational inquiry, whereas the Ḥanbalite group condemned the Mu‘atazilites and declared that the Qur’ān is eternal (qadīm) and uncreated, and so cannot be made subject to human rational
inquiry. Thus, the restoration of Sunnism required the triumph of the traditionalist, particularly the people of ḥadīth, led by the Ḥanbalite ‘ulamā’, and the suppression and elimination of the Muʿatāzilite rational school of thought as well as the sciences of kalām (theology), philosophy and the Shi‘ah creeds. Moreover, the Mālikī and Shāfi‘ī schools of jurisprudence contributed to the caliph’s restoration of Sunnism. Al-Baqillānī (d. 403/1013), from the Mālikite school, al-Māwardi, (d. 450/1058) and al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) from the Shāfi‘ite school, and al-Qādir Abū Ya‘lā al-Farrā‘ (d. 560/1165) from the Ḥanbalite school, were the prominent ‘ulamā’ who supported and defended the caliph’s project. In Khurāsān, Sultān Maḥmūd of Ghaznī (r. 388-92/998-1002) and his jurists supported the caliph’s restoration of Sunnism. The Ghaznawids (366-581/977-1186) intensively persecuted Shī‘ahs, primarily the Ismā‘īlīs, in Khurāsān.

It would, however, be naive to believe that all the Sunnīs, especially the Ḥanbalite, ‘ulamā’ firmly stood behind the caliph’s decree and against the Muʿatāzilite rational school of thought. To give an example, the famous and prolific Ḥanbalite scholar and writer ibn ʿAqīl (d. 513/1119-20) used to study rational theology (kalām) secretly with two renowned Muʿatāzilite masters, Abū Ḥalf ibn al-Walīd and Abū al-Qāsim bin al-Tabbān. It is safe to argue that Ibn ʿAqīl never left the field of rational inquiry, which became evident when some of his secret writings in praise of Muʿatāzilites and Mānsūr al-Hallāj were discovered and brought to the leading Ḥanbalite jurist, Sharīf Abū Jaʿfar, who then condemned and threatened Ibn ʿAqīl with death. Consequently, as Ibn Rabab (d. 795/1393) wrote in his al-Dhayl ʿAlā Ṭabqaqāt al-Ḥanābīlah, Ibn ʿAqīl went in hiding for four years (461-65/1069-73). Eventually, he came out and wrote a letter of confession, by which he sought forgiveness and repented from his “heresy” (Ibn Rabab 2005, Vol. I: 322–24, 348), i.e., praising the Muʿatāzilite rationalist approach and spirituality of Mānsūr al-Hallāj, both of which clearly went against the Qādirite creed and the view of ahl al-ḥadīth and their traditionalist and textualist approaches to the Qurʾān and the sunnah. Apparently, he repented to save his life, rather than rejecting Muʿatāzilite rational school in any meaningful manner.

Another prominent example is the case of Ibn al-Jawzī. Ibn Rabab informs us that this prominent Ḥanbalite scholar was influenced by Ibn ʿAqīl (ibid.: Vol. II: 487) and his rationalist tendency. Ibn Rabab’s account suggests that Ibn al-Jawzī must have also had some secret sympathy towards rationalist movements, specifically for the Muʿatāzilite school. Similar divisions of opinion must have also existed among the two other Sunnī schools of jurisprudence, namely the Mālikite and Shāfi‘īte, which firmly supported caliph al-Qādir’s decree and the Ḥanbalite anti-rationalist stance. However, those scholars who opposed the caliph’s project must have practiced taqiyyah (dissimulation of one’s true faith and opinion) out of fear of persecution.

The Ḥanafite scholars certainly differed from the Ḥanbalites ‘ulamā’ as the former viewed qiyās (deductive analogy or analogical reasoning), which is based on raʿy (rationally gained judgment), as one of the four juridical principles of jurisprudence (usūl al-fiqh). There are contradictory reports about Abū Ḥanīfah himself and his view as to whether the Qurʾān is created or not. In his Taʾrīkh Baghdadī aw Mādiʿat al-İslām, al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī narrates both views that refer
to Abū Ḥanīfah’s belief that the Qurʾān is the word of God and uncreated (al-Qurʾān kalām Allāh ghayr makhlaḥIQ) and that it is created (al-Qurʾān makhlaḥIQ) (al-Khaṭṭīb al-Baghdādī 1997: 375). Overall, it appears that al-Khaṭṭīb al-Baghdādī tries to demonstrate that Abū Ḥanīfah believed in the createdness of the Qurʾān. He narrates the name of Mālikite and Shāfī’ite jurists, the people of ḥadīth, including Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and his companions, who collectively were in agreement that Abū Ḥanīfah was on the wrong path (kuluhum ittafaqu ’alā taḍlīl Abī Ḥanīfah) (ibid.: 382–3). Whatever the truth may be about Abū Ḥanīfah’s opinion on this particular debate, what matters here is to note that (i) the mihna itself was a politically motivated debate; (ii) groups were formed for the sake of marginalizing opponents and rival groups rather than explaining the subject matter itself, and (iii) opinions were divided as the intellectual milieu of the time still enjoyed a degree of intellectual autonomy and scholars of religion were free to express their opinions rather than having to follow one another blindly. However, in general, the fate of Ibn ‘Aqīl and the risk of being identified with the Muʿatīzī school of thought alarmed all moderate ‘ulamāʾ to the point of concealing their true opinions. The examples discussed demonstrate that there was a significant division among the Sunnī ‘ulamāʾ, even among the Muʿatīzīs, and the rejection of rationalism had not yet been fully crystallized. However, as discussed below, the Qādirite Creed and the Ḥanbalite scholars’ opposition to rationalist schools have significantly damaged the state and quality of education in general, and in the Sunnī world in particular.

The Qādirite Creed and the ‘Abbāsid anti-rationalist and anti-Ismāʿīlī stance restricted the work and activities of Ismāʿīlī scholars and dāʾīs outside the territory of the Fāṭimid caliphate, but it had no conceptual impact on the Ismāʿīlī educational and intellectual traditions of learning. The Fāṭimid imāms and their dāʾīs continued with their educational and research programs in both fields of rational and natural as well as the traditional or revealed sciences. The Fāṭimid grand dāʾīs, poets, philosophers, and theologians of al-Mustansir bi Allāh’s time (r. 427-87/1036-94), namely Muʿayyad fī al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078) in Cairo and Nāṣir Khusraw (d. 480/1088) in Khurāsān, and the later Nīzařī Ismāʿīlī scholars in Alamūt in Persia, particularly the prominent philosopher and scientist, Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), unwaveringly promoted and produced valuable works in both rational and religious sciences. Moreover, Avicenna ( Ibn Sīnā, d. 428/1037) refused to serve Sulṭān Maḥmūd of Ghaznī and remained focused on his scholarly work in philosophy and medicine. Moreover, the great mathematician, physicist, astronomer, and Indologist of the time, Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 439/1048), produced iconic works in natural sciences in Ghaznī.

Al-Qādir’s creed and his antirationalist position, however, left long-term negative consequences on the Sunnī educational institutions and traditions of learning. The complete ban on rational thought and public debates had a negative influence within the Sunnī Islam on all forms of science, including the transmitted sciences. For example, in the field of jurisprudence, taqlīd (emulation) began to replace genuine ijtiḥād (scholarly independent reasoning to resolve legal problems). It is true that ijtiḥād as a form of personal reasoning never died, but ijtiḥād as a form of genuine thinking, or grand ijtiḥād, disappeared. In Sunnī Islam, for instance, jurists are still
only allowed to reason and conduct their *ijtihād* or personal critical thinking within their respective school of jurisprudence, or at best within the four Sunnī schools of *fiqh*. They are not allowed to question or reform the credibility of the four grand jurists, namely, Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, Shāfi‘ī, and Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, even though the Sunnī jurists are aware of the fact that certain matters within each of these schools of *fiqh* are questionable and simply unacceptable. It is *taqlīd* that has prevailed since the declaration of the Qādirite Creed, which is due to the belief that grand jurists of the yore knew everything in the best possible way, and there is no need for rethinking what they have already thought out for the community of believers.

These developments then caused substantial damage to all aspect of education, from curriculum design, production of textbooks to methods of teaching and learning. While the ‘*ulamā*’ had still not firmly established their role as the sole law-makers and “heirs of the Prophet’s religious authority,” they still had a flexible and broader perception of knowledge which tolerated the principles of human reasoning and rational judgment, such as *ra’y*, *qiyās*, *ijmā’* (consensus), and *ijtihād*. These principles were mainly applied to situations for which an established “procedure,” or “norm” did not exist (Bravmann 1972: 184, 188). However, the situation gradually changed, as the ‘*ulamā*’ established a firm position within the caliphate, and consequently narrowed down the space for the exercise of rationally gained judgment. The concept of *ʿilm* became strictly associated with the knowledge of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, whereas *ra’y* was associated with a lack of knowledge. Therefore, the latter had to be controlled rather than exercised as part of knowledge (Speight 1988: 66). Consequently, it left negative impact on education, as the new religious policy discouraged the teaching of rational sciences. Instead, a new trend of commentary upon commentary upon commentary has replaced the spirit of genuine advancement of knowledge. Thus, the rise of the conservative ‘*ulamā*’ to the unprecedented level of law-makers, particularly after the Qādirite creed, began to influence negatively both the notions of knowledge and education across the Muslim countries, as the conception of knowledge came to constitute a narrowly uncritical study of religion and the religious sciences.

It is also fair to acknowledge the influence of external factors, such as war and tyrannical rules on the deterioration of Muslim education and thought. For instance, Genghis Khan’s rule and his Mongol army’s onslaught have often been pinpointed as one of the primary factors causing the decline of Muslim education and thought. It is true that the Mongols destroyed many centers of civilizations across the Muslim world, including Baghdad in 656/1258, which deprived Sunnī Muslims from spiritual and material support. Equally, the fall of the Nīẓārī Ismā‘īlī state in Alamūt in 654/1256 put an end to scholarly activities in one of the important centers of research and scholarship. Undoubtedly, the Mongols inflicted major blows to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Retrospectively, however, one could also arguably state that under the Mongols, who lacked religious dogmatism, research activities in rational and natural sciences, namely mathematics and astronomy continued. Therefore, it could be argued that the Mongols are not the primary cause of the decline of Muslim science and education. Rather it was the internal factors, namely the pre-Mongol
conservative ‘ulamā’, who supported al-Qādir’s antirationalist stance and the religio-political project of the restoration of the Sunnī creed that caused the most serious and primary decay in Muslim education and thought.

In the modern period, a chain of conservative ‘ulamā’, namely Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in Saudi Arabia, Shāh Wāfī Allāh (d. 1762) in India, and the Salafī and Deobandi revivalist movements (from the mid nineteenth century onwards) in Egypt and India, respectively, have revived the pre-Mongol antirationalist stance. Partly being influenced by ibn Taymiyyah’s (d. 728/1328) views, (For ibn Taymiyyah’s view against Shi‘ah Islam, see his Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah fī Naqḍ Kalām al-Shī‘ah al-Qādiriyyah. In this book, ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) focuses on refuting the Shi‘ah doctrine. The book itself is a refutation of his Shi‘ah Ithnā‘Asharī contemporary, Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. ‘Alī b. Maṭahhar Ḥillī (726/1326), the author of Minhāj al-Karāmah fī Ma‘rifat al-Imāmah.) these figures and movements even went as far as condemning Ṣūfī and Shi‘ah communities. By the nineteenth century, when the European colonial powers occupied most of the Muslim lands, critical scholarship had almost vanished from Muslim education and thought, while a tradition of emulation and uncritical commentary and meta-commentary became the basis of teaching. While the conservative ‘ulamā’ no longer had the necessary critical tools and nor did they have the spirit and vision to reform and revive a true spirit of education and scholarship, having become politically oriented under the banner of liberating occupied Muslim lands and reviving what they considered the authentic historical spirit of Islam. This political orientation further complicated the state of Muslim education. Consequently, they adopted a regressive and inward-looking approach and argued that the ancient ‘ulamā’ knew every source of knowledge and developed the best practices and answers to all problems of their own time as well as those, which may occur in the future. Therefore, their tradition and legacies have to be emulated rather than reformed, let alone modified by European scientific and technological achievements, educational approaches, and models. As a result, ultra-conservative ‘ulamā’ in Egypt rejected al-Afghānī’s and his associates’ call for the integration of modern European thought in the al-Azhar curriculum. In contrast, they not only advocated the tradition of emulation, but they also supported an imaginary revival of the manner of living of the first generation of Muslims. Similarly, the Deobandis opposed Sir Syed Ahmed Khan’s call for reform and adoption of the European model of education as the second best alternative, particularly in the absence of a creative and dynamic “Islamic” model. This trend further intensified in the post-colonial period of the 1950s and 1960s, as discussed in the following section.

It was within this nineteenth- and then twentieth-century milieu that the reformist movements, which called for the return to the generation of the “forefathers” (sing: salaf), emerged in Egypt and came to be known as the Salafī movement. Deobandi teachings found a strong reception among the Sunnī Muslim communities and madrasahs in India, modern-day Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, for instance, the Deobandi- and Wahhābī-influenced ‘ulamā’ opposed political and educational reforms in the 1910s and 1920s, particularly the development of modern education for boys and girls. The tension between modernists and conservative
‘ulamā’ reached new heights during the Soviet occupation of the country (1979-1989), which also escalated the cold war rivalry between the United States of America and the former Soviet Union. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan soon led to a series of proxy wars between the two cold war rivals as well as regional powers, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran, and India and Pakistan. It was within this context of proxy wars that a global call for jihād, which came to be interpreted as armed struggle, while ignoring other definitions and interpretations of the term, began to dominate and radicalize the educational programs, curriculum, textbooks, and teacher education in tens of thousands of madrasahs in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan even brought academic institutions into the frontline. The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) in the United States led the technical and educational project of developing a new war or jihād curriculum for young children, schools, and madrasahs in Pakistan and in Mujāhidīn-controlled areas in Afghanistan. This new trend of jihād education was unanimously supported by the absolute majority of Sunnī ‘ulamā’ in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the Arab and Sunnī world. Consequently, madrasah education in this part of the world has totally been transformed into places for radicalizing and militarizing young children and students who were expected to join jihād and continue the fight. It is, therefore, not surprising to see young children, who joined these jihād madrasahs in the mid-1980s, becoming extremely radicalized and Ṭalibānized by the mid-1990s (For more discussion on jihād, madrasah education and the Ṭalibān, and the involvement of foreign players, in Afghanistan, see (Baiza 2013: 147–58, 163–85) and (Baiza 2014: 77–80)). The current madrasah educational reforms in Pakistan and Afghanistan are unlikely to address the ongoing challenge of radicalism, let alone the millennium-long blight of antirationalism. Equally, the ‘ulamā’ in these countries as well as in Middle Eastern countries lack the necessary intellectual competence, philosophical vision, and modern pedagogical tools to address the plight of Muslim education. Amid these challenges, advances in medicine, information and communication technology, and new sociological discourses pose new questions and challenges to traditional ethics and to the understanding of faith and social relationship across societies. The ‘ulamā’ lag far behind these debates.

### Nationalism, Islam, and Science

The European notion of nationalism reached Muslim countries during the colonial period and intensified in the postcolonial era. Most Muslim countries-in-making developed their local brand of nationalism which combined ethnic, religious, and linguistic discourses. For instance, Arab, the Turkish, Iranian, and Afghan nationalism went hand-in-hand with Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Pashto. The purification of language became a top nationalist agenda in the decades between the 1920s and the 1950s. The Arabs began a program of Arabization, i.e. replacing the colonial languages of Spanish, French, and English. The Turks pursued the promotion of pure Turkish by purging their Ottoman Turkish of Arabic and Persian loan-words. Equally, the Iranians began to de-Arabize Persian. In Afghanistan, the Pashtun
governments made every effort to de-Persianize Pashto and to eliminate the Persian/Dari language, cultural and intellectual heritages (For more detail, see Baiza 2013: 114–24). Similar nationalist trends also influenced postpartition India. Postcolonial India adopted Hindi and Pakistan adopted Urdu as their national languages with their associated scripts and the gap between them is increasing as Hindi progressively replaces Persian and Arabic words with Sanskrit-derived words. However, language nationalism could not guarantee a complete purification of these languages and nor could it completely ignore the colonial languages. For instance, French continues to be used in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia and is an important language in Lebanon. Similarly, English occupies an important position, particularly in the field of higher education, science, telecommunications, and technology in India and Pakistan, Egypt, and Jordan. Equally, since their independence in 1991, the former Soviet Union’s Central Asian republics appreciate the usefulness of Russian and the Cyrillic script. Thus nationalism in its ethnic, linguist, or religious forms does not necessarily guarantee advancement in education, science, and technology.

Nationalism has also produced a number of new approaches to the debate of Islam, science and education. The one which is relevant to the subject of this chapter is the “Islamization” of knowledge and education. The idea of “Islamizing” knowledge is an offshoot of the postcolonial nationalist discourse, rooted in religious nationalism. The discourse of the “Islamization of knowledge” sprang from a series of world conferences on Muslim education held between 1977 and 1996. The First World Conference on Muslim Education was held in Mecca between 31 March and 8 April 1977, whereas the sixth and latest one was held in 1996 at the Islamic College in Cape Town, South Africa. The proponents of this idea believe that Islamization of knowledge can lead Muslim countries to revive a new phase of Muslim civilization. However, an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon reveals that it is primarily an apologetic and reactionary approach towards Western advances in science and technology (Yahia Baiza 2014: 92). For instance, Syed Muhammad al-Naquib al-Attas, one of the leading figures of the Islamization of knowledge, categorically rejects contemporary Western civilization. He argues that it has “brought about chaos in man’s life instead of, and rather than, peace and justice.” He also refers to the knowledge produced by Western civilization as a producer of “confusion and skepticism” (Al-Attas 1979: 9–21) instead of certainty. The primacy of human reason and thought, instead of the divine revelation, as the principal foundation of Western civilization, knowledge and education is the key reason why al-Attas and other proponents of the Islamization of knowledge are opposed to Western civilization. Even though the supporters of the Islamization of knowledge argue that the primary idea behind this approach is to rescue knowledge, education, and science from its present secular context, by way of combining Western sciences with the divine revelation in Islam together, the idea itself is controversial. Without entering into further debate, it suffices to state that the idea of the Islamization of knowledge, being based on an antagonistic approach to contemporary Western civilization (i) is unphilosophical and intrinsically harmful to the very idea of “knowledge” itself, (ii) theologizes knowledge by creating a false division between
what is “Islamic” and what is “non-Islamic” science, which can only lead to educational and intellectual crises and confusion instead of peace and certainty, and (iii) reiterates the view of conservative ‘ulamā’, particularly from the time of the Qādirite creed onwards, when they categorized knowledge as Muslim (transmitted) or non-Muslim (rational and natural) sciences, in a new context. Therefore, it is no wonder that similar politically motivated theories, such as that of Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996), have found an audience and currency in modern Western political and even intellectual circles. The promotion of ideas of clash of civilizations obviously springs from and leads to ignorance on both sides. It is therefore of paramount importance to correct such misunderstandings through a reformed educational program that could promote a civilizational approach to education, knowledge, and society.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter presented an analytical overview of the historicity of the ‘ulamā’ and education. It has highlighted the decisive role played by the ‘ulamā’ in the advancement as well as the decline of knowledge and education across all Muslim countries. The rise of the ‘ulamā’ to a self-declared position as the “heirs of the Prophet’s religious authority” created confusion and regression in the field of education. The situation further deteriorated when the Mu’atazilite rational school was politically defeated and eventually banned by the ‘Abbāsid caliphs, namely al-Mutawakkil and al-Qādir. The outcome of this antirationalist process has been devastating for education and intellectual thought for all, and particularly for Sunnī Muslims. Historically, the ramifications of al-Qādir’s decree were that anyone who maintains that the Qur’ān is created is an infidel and fāsiq (great sinner) and the shedding of his blood is permissible, and this created widespread fear in the hearts and minds of scholars who were thereby constrained to suppress rational and scientific inquiries.

The chapter also acknowledged the impact of the onslaught of the Mongols and their destruction of many centers of Muslim, and non-Muslim, civilization. However, it also highlighted that the Mongols could not be accounted as the primary factor for the decline of Muslim education. In the modern period, the chain of religious figures and reform movements that revived the pre-Mongol anti-rationalist stance across Arab and non-Arab Sunnī countries. This new trend has been further radicalized by the conservative ‘ulamā’ as well as by modern scholars during and after the European colonial period. Consequently, a spirit of super-egoism, combined with a regressive and inward looking trend, has not only changed the image and role of the ‘ulamā’ from that of humble, creative, and liberal thinkers, teachers, and educators to one of sacred and untouchable religious figures, but it also progressively narrowed the conception of knowledge and education to the point that madrasahs in the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries became places of religious extremism, radicalism, militarism, and military activity.

The ultimate question is not about who holds the correct knowledge, but that of who will ultimately survive the struggle between religious radicalism and a revival
of rationalism. Historically speaking, the conservative ‘ulamā’ and their associates have had an upper hand. It is this chapter’s conclusion that the conservative ‘ulamā’, with their antirationalist stance, particularly in the Sunnī context, who have dominated the Muslim world and education thus far, have reached the end of their history. Here, Francis Fukuyama’s expression *The End of History* (1989) means that there is nothing in the existing conservative and politically motivated class of ‘ulamā’ that could meaningfully transform knowledge, education and scholarship, or people’s life. The latest trend of the Islamization of knowledge demonstrates that the thus far dominant majority group in the Muslim world is unable to create any meaningful change in the field of knowledge and education. Their categorical rejection of Western civilization is extremely counterproductive to the very struggle for the revival of knowledge and education in the Muslim world. Their ideas represent a recycled version of the Qādirite Creed’s political milieu, when the Mu’atāzilite rational school of thought was eliminated, public intellectual debates (munāẓirahs) were forbidden, the Shi’ās were persecuted, and the rational, philosophical, and natural sciences were removed from the madrasah curriculum.

While it is easy to imagine the end of the era of conservative ‘ulamā’, the more difficult and practical question is how a new era of a genuine educational and intellectual pursuit shall replace it. It is by now at least clear that the regressive trends promoted by the Wahhābī, Salafi, and Deobandi movements have so far been unable to provide the right answer to the plight of Muslim education. The new generation of Muslims urgently demands a fresh, progressive, and future-looking orientation of their faith and education. This demand is the very basic need of young Muslims at the age of rapid technological and scientific advancements, which bring people from different faiths and cultures together and make them more interdependent.

Muslim intellectuals, religious, and political leaders cannot deny the current educational and intellectual crisis that permeates across the Muslim countries. The very first task of Muslim scholars and students is to abandon the regressive and inward looking trends that began as a reactionary response to the superiority of colonial powers. The second important task of all Muslim intellectuals is to understand the historicity of dogmatism that permeated the Sunnī Muslim world since the defeat of Mu’atāzilism and the era of the Qādirite Creed.

Thirdly, Muslim educationists have no choice other than to understand and learn from the intellectual side of the European cultural and scientific achievements, with an objective of how to reformulate and reconstruct their contemporary thought and education systems. The adoption of nationalism, parliament, political parties, and election system, which have attracted Muslim political leaders more than the intellectual side of Europe, is not enough. The political side of Europe was not necessarily a positive experience in Europe itself. It became another source of disaster for Muslims when their political leaders mixed the adopted political systems with corruption, tribalism, and promotion of the interests of the ruling group on the expense of the ruled ones.

Finally, Muslim intellectuals have to form intellectual platforms on which they could come together and discuss the future of knowledge and education without reference to religion, region, ethnicity, and language. Knowledge does not recognize
anything other than itself. Knowledge cannot be given, and nor it can be limited to, any form of regional, religious, ethnic, and linguistic identity. It is always people who have to identify themselves with knowledge and not vice versa. Muslims will continue to fail in their struggle for the revival of their spirit of knowledge and scholarship, if they continue to look for a Muslim education or Islamization of education.

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