
Aminah McCloud and her two De Paul University colleagues, Scott Hibbard and Laith Saud, co-edited for students what may be regarded as a fairly wide-ranging introductory textbook that sought ‘to capture the diversity of Islam as it manifests in different regions and countries’ (p. 1); so apart from covering the customary ingredients of Islam, the editors shifted their sights beyond the traditional subjects by, inter alia, reflecting upon topical issues such as ‘Islam and violence’. In McCloud et al’s informed view they embarked upon a project that had to be comprehensive in its scope and one that captured both the past and the present (p. 2). Well, a quick glance at the ‘Brief Contents’ (v–vi) as well as its more detailed ‘Contents’ (vii–xiii) revealed that they successfully squeezed old and new themes into their *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st century* and they thus achieved their objective in a reasonably readable text. Although most of the fifteen chapters were written by the three editors, either as co-authors or as individual authors, they also brought on board four other scholars, namely Babacar Mbengue, Saeed Khan, Maria Louw and John Karam, who penned chapters that fell within their respective areas of specialisation.

McCloud and her co-editors chose to divide their text thematically. In the first section they zoomed in on ‘Islam: Image and Reality.’ Besides having co-authored the Introduction (Ch. 1) in which they spelt out the reasons for co-editing this work and for adopting a thematic approach, they co-penned ‘The Historical Context’ (Ch. 2) that provided a grand but—perhaps understandably so—oversimplified overview of Muslim history from the pre-prophetic period until the presence of European colonialism. The latter chapter, however, offered an important backdrop for Saud’s string of chapters that discussed the concept of *Tawhid* (Ch. 3), Beliefs (Ch. 4) and Political Theology (Ch. 5). Now these three harmonising chapters covered a rich variety of issues that observably dealt with Islam’s primary sources (namely the Qur’an and Hadith), its fundamental beliefs and practices, and its ‘Islamic
Political Theology’. Whilst one commends Saud for having packaged so much into each of these chapters, it was inevitable that his comparative treatment of, inter alia, Sunnī and Shi‘ah thought would cause one to ask questions such as: Why did he neglect to bring al-Māwardi (d. 1058) into his discussion bearing in mind that this scholar made an invaluable contribution to Muslim political thought and is there any reason why Hamid Enayat’s Modern Islamic Political Thought was not consulted and excluded from the list of suggested readings?

Leaving aside these questions and an array of others, it should be stated that Saud’s chapters set the tone for the second section that contained chapters under ‘Islam and the Modern World.’ Hibbard reflected upon ‘Islam and the State’ in two separate but complementary chapters (i.e. Ch. 6 and Ch. 7). In the first of the two Hibbard contextualised the rise of the nation-state and touched upon the notion of the secular (Muslim) state before he offered a critical commentary on Turkey and selected nation-states in North Africa, Southwest Asia and South Asia that experiences various degrees of secularism. However, in the second Hibbard addressed the non-secular ‘traditional state’ that was represented by countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan. Although Hibbard employed the term ‘The Traditionalist State’ to mean an ‘Islamic State’, one is of the view that these two terms should instead have been treated separately; the basic reason is that the two convey different meanings in the contemporary socio-political circumstances and to conflate them in the way he did is somewhat problematic to say the least. In any case, when one turns to McCloud’s chapter it was observed that she decidedly brought ‘Muslims as Minorities in the West (i.e. USA, UK, France and Germany)’ (Ch. 8) into sharp focus; she specifically commented upon three aspects (i.e. religious expression, education and political participation) that gave an insight into how these Muslim communities adapted to distinctly secular environments.

Under the third section which concentrated on ‘Regional Studies,’ McCloud, who wrote about ‘Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia’ (Ch. 12), was joined by the four earlier mentioned specialists; Mbengue covered Africa (Ch. 9), Khan dealt with South Asia (Ch. 10), Louw evaluated Central Asia (Ch. 11), and Karam assessed Latin America and the Carribean (Ch. 13). Though each of these chapters shared invaluable information about the areas/countries, they reflected uneveness in their coverage. One, for example, noted that the question of gender/women in South Asia and Southeast Asia was touched upon by Khan and McCloud respectively but when one scanned Louw and Karam’s chapter no mention was made about the status of women in Central Asia or Latin America. On another point, when reading Mbengue’s essay one gets the impression that Africa is ‘one country’ instead of a
continent that consists of more than fifty nation-states, and when returning to Khan’s chapter it is noted that Sri Lanka’s Muslims were conspicuously absent from it. Apart from these minor concerns, one would like the editors to have included separate essays that scrutinised the position of Muslims in Russia, China and Australasia.

The afore-mentioned section on ‘Regional Studies’ paved the way for the editors to shift their focus to ‘Islam in a Globalized World.’ In this final section McCcloud reflected on the ‘The Ecology of Teaching about Islam…’ (Ch. 14), and Hibbard studied the nature of ‘Terrorism, Islamophobia and the Media’ (Ch. 15); both are important chapters in that they addressed the teaching of Islamic studies within the academia and discussed to what extent the stereotypical images about Islam and Muslims in the aftermath of the tragic 9/11 event proliferated in and beyond the West. Whilst McCcloud examined who teaches and how Islam is being taught, Hibbard investigated the correlation between religion and violence, the context within which transnational militant Muslim groups emerged, and how these eventually gave rise to jaundiced views about Muslims and their religious tradition in the media. But whilst both McCcloud and Hibbard provided sensible insights into these topics and tangibly illustrated the daunting challenges that Muslims have had to and continue to face as the 21st century continues to unfold, one wondered why the editors did not include in a chapter on the popular arts (such as music, dance, grafitti and calligraphy) as recognised expressions of Muslim identity. If a chapter such as this had been penned, then the readers would indeed have got a more global view of Islam and Muslims.

Be that as it may and besides the textbook’s thematic structure that was accompanied by an instructive series of sidebars, it also came with a set of relevant ‘Discussion Questions’ and a helpful list of ‘Suggested Further Reading;’ these are found at the end of each chapter. Finally, despite some of shortcomings/oversights that were mentioned, there is little doubt that the editors prepared a user-friendly companion and well-illustrated textbook for students/readers who wish to have a fair overview of and insight into Islam and its adherents across the globe.

Muhammed Haron