Islamic Educational Institutions: Can the Heritage Be Sustained?*

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Historical Background

By way of background, I shall give a brief summary of Islamic educational institutions. First, according to Shalaby, the institution where the Qur'an, Hadith (sayings and deeds related to the Prophet Muhammad), Arabic grammar, stories of the prophets, reading, and writing were taught is the *maktab* (elementary school).[1] This *maktab* is different from the Dar al-Arqam (see previous article), where the early Muslims received their "quality" of training (educational framework of thinking and practicing). Bashier describes the Dar al-Arqam as "a sort of school out of which the best cadres of nascent Islam graduated."[2] It is my contention that the Dar al-Arqam was more a *majlis* (i.e., a place where discussion, teaching, and learning activities took place).[3] Moreover, according to Makdisi the *maktab* became known as

> the institution of learning where elementary education took place and the studies which led to the level of higher education, such as specialization in law.[4]

For him, the *maktab*[5] was recognized as an elementary school where "*khatt,* calligraphy or writing, . . . [was] taught, as well as the *Koran,* the creed *(i'tiqād)* and poetry."[6] This claim is supported by Tibawi who asserts that "teachers . . . receive[d] pupils in special places possibly a room in a house . . . for instruction . . . known as *[m]aktab* or *[k]uttab,* both derived from the Arabic root 'to write'."[7] This idea of the *maktab* as having been an elementary school is vindicated by the fact that pupils entered the school at ages seven to ten,[8] and were placed under the care

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of the *mu'allim* (the most common term used to designate the teacher of pupils at elementary level).[9] According to Makdisi, studies of the *maktab* led to study in a "*masjid*-college or *madrasa* and to the *halqat* of the *jami'*."[10]

Second, after the arrival of the Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in Madinah, the first mosque in Islam (*Masjid Quba*) was erected. The mosque became the major institution in Islam for the dissemination of Islamic education, and its importance cannot be denied. It was used as a political and cultural center, a court of justice, an educational institution, and above all a place of worship.[11] For this reason, the mosque is considered the "first institution of learning."[12]

Makdisi identifies two types of mosques. The first type is the congregational or *jami'* mosque, which had *halqat* (study circles).[13] According to Shalaby, in a circle "the teacher usually seated himself on a . . . cushion against a wall or pillar . . . [while] the audience formed a circle in front of him."[14] At these *halqat* or what Makdisi refers to as "institution(s) of learning,"[15] various Islamic sciences were taught.[16] The second type of mosque, the every day *masjid,* "existed as colleges in Islam."[17] Such masjids, which belonged mostly to the period A.D. 800 to 900, were used for the teaching and learning of "Islamic sciences and their ancillaries, including grammar, philology and literature . . . before the advent of the *madrasah*."[18]

Third, the *madrasah* developed in 1,000 A.D. and flourished in 1,100 A.D.[19] According to Makdisi, "the *madrasa* was the Muslim institution of learning par excellence . . . a natural development of the *masjid*."[20] In fact, the famous Shafi'i Nizamiyyah Madrasah was founded in 1067.[21]

What was the difference between mosques and schools? The special material features by which schools can be distinguished from mosques are described by Shalaby as follows:

> *Iwan*—an ancient equivalent of the modern lecture-room—was the most conspicuous feature to schools. Next come the residential quarters which appeared in most of the school buildings . . . Moreover the number of the regular students in a school was often limited, and school endowments always mention grants to students.[22]

Makdisi also distinguishes between mosques and schools. For him, the staff of a mosque consisted of an *imam* (leader of the prayers), whereas the staff of a school consisted of at least a *mudarris* (instructor).[23] In fact, according to him, the early *madrasah* developed several variations: the double *madrasah;* the triple *madrasah;* the quadruple *madrasah; madrasah* with a *masjid;* and the *madrasah* with a *jami'*. [24]

Besides the *maktab/kuttab, masjid, madrasah,* there were also other institutions of learning and teaching such as the *khan* (literally, "inn"; to

have been used for private teaching and tutoring),[25] and libraries (known as *bayt al-hikmah, khizanat al-hikmah, dar al-hikmah, dar al-'ilm, dar al-kutub, khizanat al-kutub,* and *bayt al-kutub.*[26]

In light of the material differences that existed between the *maktab,* mosque, and *madrasah,* the question might be asked whether these institutions only differed from each other with regard to their empirically observable features, i.e, perceivable material qualities. The answer is no, evident from the historical evolution as given above. By implication, what makes institutions different from each other cannot just be explained in terms of "empirically observable factors,"[27] i.e., their perceivable material elements, but rather

> they [institutions] are [what they are] at any time of their existence because of the *quality of thought* (rationale) of their members.[28]

In essence, institutions *differ* in "the way the members themselves conceive it,"[29] i.e., they differ in terms of their rationales. Nor Wan Daud posits that the "conceptual and intellectual foundations, developed by good and able scholars, are among the most important aspects of higher educational institutions."[30] What this also means is that one could apparently have the same material elements, but their underlying rationales may differ. Whatever the similarities between them in terms of material elements (patterns), institutions differ with respect to the underlying rationales that shape them. Having shown how institutions differ in terms of different rationales which constitute the practices at these institutions, my next move is to explicate *how* practices are linked to institutions. Why is this a necessary move to consider? Bearing in mind that institutions are the "social bearers" of practices, my reason for making this move is clearly focused on institutions.

Thus far, I have shown how rationales are linked to practices and institutions. Consequently, there has to be a link between practices and institutions. Taylor aptly points out that institutions are the "stable configuration(s) of shared activity [or practices]," i.e., "certain patterns of dos and don'ts." This link between practices and institutions is also identified by Griffiths. He asserts that

> we cannot think whatever we like, and we cannot do whatever we like, and in consequence these are limits on what institutions are possible, and surprises about what institutions become actual. The limits of possibility are set by the (cultural and not merely logical) limits of thought, and by the (physical, cultural, social, economic, etc.) limits of practice.[31]

My emphasis is on what Griffiths refers to as "physical limits of practice" and the "cultural limits of thought." If I refine what I think Griffiths means by institutions, then it follows that one's understanding of an insti-

tution ought to be constituted in terms of "physical limits of *practice*," i.e., the perceivable material elements or patterns that are exclusive to an institution. For example, the reading of the Qur'an and the studying of Islamic knowledge are patterns or social practices enforced in a *maktab*, i.e., a particular institution. Also, one's understanding of an institution is shaped by the "cultural limits of *thought*," i.e., the underlying rationale which distinguishes one institution from another. For example, a *maktab* is different from a *madrasah* for the reason that the "thought" or rationale which shapes a *maktab* differs from that which shapes a *madrasah*. Thus, one cannot think or do whatever one wants to get an understanding of institutions. The meanings of institutions are shaped by their practices and rationales.

In essence, institutions and their practices are shaped by a particular rationale. This crucial point is noted by Taylor, who claims that

> all the institutions and practices by which we live are constituted by certain distinctions and hence a language which is thus essential to them.[32]

To sum up, I have shown how rationales shape socially established practices and institutions. Finally, particular practices are exclusive to particular institutions, for the reason that both practices and institutions are determined by their rationales.

Now that I have established the links between rationales, practices, and institutions, I shall attempt to show some of the ways in which *adab*—the rationale of Islamic education—manifested itself historically in the early *maktab*, mosque, and *madrasah*. In this way, I hope to illustrate how the practices in an institution are shaped by their rationale, as well as the reasons why institutions can be sustained.

What is *adab?* Drawing on the ideas of Al-Attas, *adab* is

> the discipline that assures the *recognition* and acknowledgment of one's proper place in relation to one's physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials . . . . (It) involves *action to discipline* the mind and soul; it is acquisition of the good qualities and attributes of mind and soul; it is to perform the correct as against the erroneous action; of right or *proper* as against wrong; it is the preserving from disgrace.[33]

Al-Attas's explanation of *adab* constitutes salient features akin to the focus of my paper. According to him, "recognition" implies actions *(a'māl)* on the part of humankind.[34] And, for the reason that *a'māl* are creative and orderly human practices—referred to as "purposive human actions"[35] constituted by truth and justice[36]—*adab* can be considered as a notion which engenders creativity, order, truth, and justice. The issue about order is evinced by Al-Attas himself, who defines "proper place,"

i.e., "orderliness" as "true" place denoted by the term *haqq*.[37] In turn, he describes the "actualization" of truth as that "which reflects the condition of justice."[38] For him,

> justice means a harmonious condition or state of affairs whereby everything is in its right and proper place ["orderliness"]—such as the cosmos; or similarly, a state of equilibrium, whether it refers to things or living beings . . . [in particular] the harmonious and rightly-balanced relationship between man and his self, . . . others . . . and society.[39]

In addition, the "harmonious" nature and "equilibrium" associated with what Al-Attas refers to as the "state of affairs" of things or living beings, depict the creativity ingrained in their functioning. Hence, *adab* engenders creative and orderly practices or *a'māl*.

Order and Flexibility in Institutions

I shall now look at the way order and creativity (as flexibility)—constituent features of *adab*—manifested themselves in Islamic practices in the *maktab*, mosque, and *madrasah* between A.D. 750 and 900, considered by Nakosteen as the period of educational creativity.[40] First, Tibawi purports that Islamic learning in the early *maktab* was "concerned with the [D]ivine [R]evelation, its *understanding* and its propagation by teaching and preaching."[41] In fact, the necessity for understanding the Qur'an on the part of the first Muslims was a divine injunction which constituted their practices. During the height of opposition to Islam in the Makkan phase, *ayah* 30:29 was revealed, exhorting the Muslims to understand the Qur'an:

> (Here is) a Book which We have sent down unto thee, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its Signs, and that Men of understanding may receive admonition.[42]

Second, with regards to Islamic education in the early mosques (during the post-Prophetic period), Tibawi claims the following:

> [In] the "circles" of learned men, usually held in mosques . . . discourse, question and answer were the received method.[43]

Shalaby also points out that in these mosques, critical interpretation—what he refers to as "exegesis"—of the Qur'an and Sunnah became the order of the day.[44]

Third, as has been mentioned earlier, the institution of al-Nizamiyyah in Baghdad (Iraq) emerged as an important *madrasah* in the Islamic empire. Subsequently, many other *madarris* (pl. of *madrasah*) were established by its founder Nizam al-Mulk. Shalaby, drawing on Al-

Subki, claims that Nizam al-Mulk had a school built in each town of Iraq and Khurasan.[45] Moreover, it is claimed that the Nizamiyyah *madaris* "were always of high standard as they were staffed by the best scholars of the time."[46] One of the most reputable teachers at al-Madrasah al-Nizamiyyah in Baghdad during the fifth century, was Al-Ghazzali.[47] For this reason, I shall look at some of the educational views of Al-Ghazzali in order to uncover the rationale which shaped Islamic education in the first *madrasah* in Islam. For Al-Ghazzali, divine guidance and intuitive experience allow scope for "rational thinking, logical deduction and empirical observation."[48] This means that the learning of Qur'anic guidance does not occur separately from an understanding thereof. For al-Ghazzali, a learner had to be encouraged "to use his own sense and judgment and not merely to imitate his teacher."[49] It was in accordance with such a rationale that Islamic education was taught at the first *madrasah.*

In addition, according to Makdisi the method of learning in the early institutions included memorization, repetition, understanding, *mudhakkara* (reasoning, understanding, contemplation, etc.), and notebook writing.[50] He claims that memorization, for instance, was not meant to be *only* "unreasoning rote learning . . . (but) was reinforced with intelligence and understanding."[51] He mentions the names of several early scholars (as teachers in institutions) such as Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad bin Hanbal who achieved extraordinary feats in their memorization and understanding of thousands of traditions.[52] Other names include

- Abu al-Hasan at-Tamimi (d. 918)—a jurisconsult who defended Shafi'i fiqh, "then a new method going beyond the techniques of rote memory associated with [H]adith to that of analysis and understanding"[53];
- Abu Amr bin al-Ala, for whom "the first rule of learning is silence; the second, good questioning; the third, good listening; the fourth, good memorizing; and the fifth, propagating the knowledge acquired among those seeking it;"[54] and
- al-Tabari (d. 923), who is reported to have "made a strong plea for acquisition of religious knowledge and its understanding *(tafaqquh),* and censured those of his fellows who limited themselves to transcribing or note-taking without troubling with studying and understanding what they had written."[55]

What is clear about the Islamic education in the early *maktab,* mosque, and *madrasah,* is that learning was orderly and creative. The order of Islamic learning involved the learning of facts of Qur'anic guidance and the Sunnah (life experiences of the Prophet Muhammad). However, this process did not occur independently from the learning of skills such as understanding the facts. Makdisi aptly accentuates the crucial role memorization played in the early days of Islam:

> Memorization involved great quantities of materials, their *understanding,* and their retention through frequent repetition at close intervals of time. When limited to mere transmission, memorization was simply the attribute of the common man among the men of learning, e.g., the *[H]adith* scholars, the lexicographers. Above this rudimentary level . . . [t]he road to *creativity* (i.e., flexibility) called for progression from authoritative reception and transmission, *riwaya,* to *understanding* the materials transmitted, *diraya,* and finally, with personal effort pushed to its limit, *ijtihad,* to creating one's personal ideas, in one's own words, in an elegant style, expressed with eloquence.[56]

Hence, Islamic education as a practice in the early institutions not only involved the acquisition of hard facts (i.e., order) but also skills (i.e., creativity) in terms of which learners knew how to act meaningfully. The fact that they had understanding prompted them to do certain skillful things, such as to think logically and rationally, to observe, and to interpret—all a matter of, in the words of Ryle "learning how to do."[57] Furthermore, following Rorty's distinction between "socialization" and "individuation,"[58] it can be claimed that the order of Islamic teaching involved initiating (socializing) learners into Islamic understanding by encouraging them to memorize and learn basic Islamic precepts. But, simultaneously the creativity of Islamic education involved a process whereby learners were encouraged to challenge and question, referred to by Rorty as "stimulating [their] imagination"[59] (individuation). In light of Rorty's distinction, for learners to have been socialized into received ideas hinged on an understanding that teachers knew *how* to have done it, i.e., they did not only know content, but also knew *how* to impart it. They possessed the *skills* to do so. In essence, the order in the early institutions was constituted by socialization and the creativity was constituted by individuation, i.e., knowing content and having skills. It is in this regard that Nakosteen posits that since the beginning of the 9th century Islamic educational institutions accommodated the most creative minds among Muslim scholars. (Their education lasting for a period of three and a half years.)[60]

The question now arises: How do order and flexibility link up with an articulation of truth and justice? First, I have already referred to an articulation of truth as that practice which *conforms* to the requirements of what is "right." And, considering that Islamic education is a practice which also involves socialization (i.e., the initiation of Muslims into the revealed or "right" knowledge/facts), an articulation of truth implies that Muslims have to conform to the revealed knowledge of Allah—the primary source of Islamic education. Second, I have used Al-Attas's definition of justice, which puts "everything" in its "right and proper place." By implication, the practice of articulating justice is constituted by what

is "proper," i.e., appropriate to the circumstances or changing conditions. In this way, to articulate justice means to take into consideration what is the most suitable or appropriate for a particular context. Implicit in such an articulation of justice is the notion of flexibility. In other words, an articulation of justice implies that one has to create scope for flexibility in making Islamic education (through individuation, i.e., challenging and questioning) "proper" for changing circumstances. In essence, order and creativity (concepts rooted in a notion of *adab)* constituted the practices in the early Islamic educational institutions.

Variety in Institutions

I have already mentioned that in the early *maktab,* Islamic education not only involved the learning of the Qur'an and *ahadith,* but also, as claimed by Hitti, "reading, penmanship . . . Arabic grammar, stories about the Prophets—particularly hadiths (*ahadith*) related to Muhammad—the elementary principles of arithmetic, and poems."[61] In addition, in the early mosques of Madinah and Basra, "literary circles" were conducted, Arabic poetry was taught, as well as theology, "[e]xegesis, traditions, jurisprudence and astronomy . . . [and] even medicine."[62] In fact, the Caliph Umar is reported to have devised a curriculum for mosque circles which, besides the teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith also included "swimming, horsemanship, famous proverbs and good poetry."[63]

Furthermore, for Al-Ghazzali the *madrasah* curriculum may comprise "many branches"[64] of Islamic learning. His own Islamic education included learning the Qur'an and Hadith listening to stories about saints, memorizing mystical love poems, jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy.[65] He makes a clear distinction between revealed sciences—which include a study of divine unity, prophethood, eschatology, linguistics, Qur'anic interpretation, Hadith, jurisprudence, religious rights, transactions, and family law—and "nonrevealed" sciences—such as arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, logic, medicine, meteorology, mineralogy, alchemy, ontology, God's essence, relation to the universe, prophecy and sainthood, dreams, and theurgy.[66] Hence, the early educational institutions recognized the learning of a variety of sciences. In the words of Nor Wan Daud, "[a] Muslim scholar is a man [or woman] who is not a specialist in any one branch of knowledge but is universal in his outlook and is authoritative in several branches of related knowledge."[67] Moreover, in his description of the golden age (A.D. 750 to 1150) of Islamic cultural-educational discourse, Nakosteen asserts that creative Islamic scholars

> did not permit theology and dogma to limit their scholarship. They searched into every branch of human knowledge, be it philology,

> history, historiography, law, sociology, literature, ethics, philosophy, theology, medicine, mathematics, logic, jurisprudence, art, architecture or ceramics.[68]

The question now arises: Why was Islamic education in the early *maktab,* mosque, and *madrasah* in keeping with *adab?* I have expounded already on the role of the teacher as one who socialized and individualized pupils into Islamic education. In addition, Islamic education practices in the early institutions also involved, to use Ryle's phrase, "learning to be."[69] For Ryle, "learning to be" involves "to be honorable," "to be self-controlled," and "to be considerate."[70] This is precisely what the early Muslim teacher did. Bashier claims that the early Muslims who received their "training" in the *maktab* "strove to apply the Qur'anic guidance to their every-day affairs."[71] Regarding the notion "to be" in relation to teachers in mosque circles, Shalaby, who draws on Ibn Abd Rabbih, narrates a conversation between a companion of the Prophet and the teacher of his sons:

> The first thing to start with in educating my sons is to improve your own manners. My sons will be deeply influenced by you and will favor what you *do* and abhor what you avoid.[72]

This suggests that the role of teachers in the early mosques was shaped by a notion of "to be," i.e., to live their skills. Likewise, regarding the rationale which shaped the position of teachers in the early *madrasah,* Al-Ghazzali states the following:

> [I]f anyone wishes to acquire for his mind the virtue of generosity *(al-jud),* he should take pains to engage in some action that is generous, such as giving away some particular thing that he possesses. And he should not cease to be interested in this giving until he has fully entered into the spirit of it and has actually *become* generous.[73]

Hence, the role of the teacher in "teaching" Islamic education in the *madrasah* was about teaching "to be," i.e., a matter of having *adab.* Shalaby, drawing on Al-Ghazzali, aptly describes the role of the Muslim teacher in the early *madrasah* as one who supported "his precepts by practice" and who taught "by his reputation,"[74] a matter of teaching "to be." In this regard, Hussain and Ashraf aptly describe the position of the *madrasah* teacher as follows:

> He was expected to treat his charges not as so many sheep or cattle which needed to be herded, or disciplined, but as impressionable human beings whose characters were to be moulded and who were to be initiated by him into the moral code which society cherished. For this reason in Islam the teacher was required not only to be a

> man of learning but also to be a person of virtue, a pious man whose conduct by itself could have an impact upon the minds of the young. It was not only *what* he taught that mattered; *what he did,* the way he conducted himself, his deportment in class and outside, were all expected to conform to an ideal which his pupils could unhesitatingly accept.[75]

Thus, from the aforementioned, it is clear that the early teacher also served as a model to his pupils. Nakosteen notes that students and scholars flocked to Muslim centers of learning where they were socialized and initiated into "the master scholar's body of knowledge."[76] It is my contention that this model practice of the teacher was entrenched in a particular self-understanding—one which expresses and defends, in the words of Nor Wan Daud, "what is *true* (linked to *adab), just* and humane" [my emphases].[77] Therefore, Bashier refers to the first teachers as people who have achieved "a degree of excellence," a spiritual and moral "inward force," and a "dynamic spirit" which transformed their practices in accordance with an Islamic order.[78] Even the teachers of the early mosque circles are referred to as people with "moral and intellectual qualities"[79] imbued with "self-respect, modesty and sincerity."[80] Moreover, a teacher in the first *madrasah,* Al-Ghazzali, who is regarded as an "outstanding jurist, theologian,"[81] is described as having himself attained "the highest level of spiritual realization."[82] By implication, these early Muslim leaders and teachers developed dispositions and practices in accordance with the notion of *adab.*

The question now arises: How would educational institutions be affected if *adab* is lacking in the practices of people? My contention is that Islamic educational practices and institutions would become impoverished, more specifically, *rigid,* because a lack of *adab* would give rise to a distorted rationale—to use Taylor's notion, one in which "the original rationale may be lost."[83] Al-Attas aptly claims that Islamic education without *hikmah* (wisdom) and order leads to "confusion and hence to injustice."[84] He defines injustice as the opposite of justice; injustice is

> the putting [of] a thing in a place not its own; it is to misplace a thing; it is to *misuse* or to wrong; it is to exceed or fall short of the mean or limit; it is to suffer loss; it is *deviation from the right course;* it is *disbelief of what is true,* or lying about what is true knowing it to be true . . . to *repudiate the truth.*[85]

It is this view of "confusion," which means to "misuse," to deviate from the right course, to distort the truth, which is tantamount to rigidity, that is referred to by Rahman as the repudiation of "more reasonable views."[86] What this means is that a distortion of *adab* (incorporating creativity, order, truth, and justice) leads to rigidity, what Al-Attas refers to

as "disorder" or "corruption of [the concept of] knowledge"[87]—the "manifestation of the occurrence of injustice."[88] It is toward such a study that I now focus my attention.

Why Do Practices and Institutions Become Impoverished?

Drawing on the ideas of Al-Attas, I posit that the impoverishment of institutions is caused by the following conditions:

1. Confusion and error in knowledge. This leads to the next condition;
2. Loss of *adab* in the Community [institutions]. Conditions 1 and 2 lead to the last condition;
3. The rise of leaders who are not qualified for leadership of the Muslim community; who do not possess the high moral, intellectual, and spiritual standards required for Islamic leadership; who perpetuate condition 1 above, and ensure the continued control of affairs of the community[89] by leaders like them who dominate in all fields.[90]

Thus, following Al-Attas, a lack of *adab* leads to "confusion and error in knowledge." He argues that *confusion* means "the altering of the meaning of something," in this case Islamic education, "to meanings not intended by Muslims during the earliest periods of Islam."[91] This condition of "confusion in knowledge" is considered by Nakosteen as synonymous with the decline of Muslim scholarship and creativity as a result of a lack of independent research between A.D. 1050 and 1200.[92] Thus, what is crucial concerning the loss or lack of *adab* is that the "quality of thoughts"—quality of rationales—shaping educational institutions are adversely affected to the extent that their (institutions) impoverishment is imminent. In other words, a loss or lack of *adab* in rationales which shape institutions creates the conditions for an "unsustainability" of such institutions. For Al-Attas,

> loss of *adab* means the loss of the capacity for discernment of the right and proper places of things . . . and in the inability to recognize and acknowledge right leadership in all spheres of life.[93]

In brief, a loss or lack of *adab* in underlying rationales creates the conditions, in this case, for impoverishing "institutions" (stable configurations). The important role *adab* ought to play in rationales (as articulations of institutions) is supported by Kovesi, who claims that certain concepts are formed from "the moral point of view."[94]

In addition, if educational institutions are impoverished, practices are also affected, for the reason that institutions are the social bearers of practices. In the words of MacIntyre,

> no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions . . . [for] the ideals and the *creativity* of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institutions, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice are always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution.[95]

Here, "vulnerable" points to another way in which practices are impoverished, i.e., the external goods—those forces that shape and drive a practice—which institutions pursue undermine the internal goods of the practice itself. In another way, without *adab*—the acknowledgment and recognition of creative order, truth and justice, "practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions."[96] In my view, with a loss or lack of *adab* (internal good), Islamic educational institutions are destined to become impoverished and "unsustainable" institutions—mere monuments of "external" religious adornment and places where "learning" and "teaching" practices are unable to foster creative order, truth, and justice. To conclude this argument, a lack of *adab* in rationales of concepts can give rise to impoverished institutions and practices, which, in the words of Dewey, "work almost automatically to give . . . [an impoverished] education which the most careful schooling cannot offset."[97]

But, what is it about "confusion—the altering of the meaning of something—and error in knowledge" (i.e., rigidity) that makes it a problem? Rigidity constitutes *ẓulm,* which means to deviate from what is "proper."[98] In other words, rigidity is averse to truth (*haqq*). Moreover, one who practices *ẓulm* (i.e., a *ẓālim)* claims "absolute understanding."[99] The Qur'an, in (28:50) clearly emphasizes the point that Allah does not guide the *zālimīn,* i.e., the people of *zulm.*[100] What follows from this is that creativity, more specifically flexibility in thinking and understanding, is stifled. This is a problem in the sense that rigidity is incompatible with *adab,* that notion which establishes room for different and contrasting understandings, for the reason that different people see things differently as "new" information becomes available at different intervals in time and as new interpretations illuminate particular practices. This idea of flexibility in understanding finds support in a hadith recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari,* in which the Prophet is reported to have said:

> A person who receives a piece of knowledge indirectly may comprehend it better than he who has heard it directly from its source.[101]

Moreover, bearing in mind that the primary sources of Islamic education is the Qur'an and Hadith any attempt to teach them with a permanent, "lifeless rigidity" would be to ignore the specific historical order in which specifically the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.[102] This leads to an impoverished understanding, for the rea-

son that if one does not understand the "historical order" in which the eternally valid guidance of the Qur'an was revealed, then one would not be in a position to make informed interpretations of the Qur'anic text.

In summary, practices and the institutions in which they manifest themselves are shaped by the way their members conceive of them—referring to rationales. I have noted that institutions are inextricably linked to the "quality of thought" of the members—meaning that the nature of institutions also depends on what understanding its members have of them. Finally, I have argued that institutions need to be shaped by *adab* (incorporating creativity, order, truth, and justice) to ensure the moral justification of institutions and the practices sustained by them. I have developed Al-Attas's view that a lack of *adab* leads to "confusion and error in knowledge," what I referred to as rigidity. I have briefly shown that rigidity is incompatible with *adab,* because it manifests itself in *zulm*. In this way, then, I have argued that Islamic educational institutions which are not nurtured and guided by *adab* would, unlike the past, become unsustainable.

Notes

1. A. Shalaby, *History of Muslim Education* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kashshaf Publishers, 1954), p. 17.
2. Z. Bashier, *The Meccan Crucible* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978), p. 143.
3. G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), p. 11.
4. Ibid., p. 19.
5. Makdisi (*The Rise of Colleges,* p. 19) also distinguishes between *maktab* and *kuttab*. The *kuttab* accomodated pupils after they have reached the age of ten, i.e., after having attended the *maktab*.
6. Ibid.
7. A.L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education—Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems* (London: Luzac and Company Ltd., 1976), p. 26.
8. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West,* p. 19.
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