

Book Reviews

Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia

Anna M. Gade

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Studies of Islam in Southeast Asia have sought to better understand its multifaceted and complex dimensions, although one may make a generalized categorization of Muslim beliefs and practices based on a fundamental difference in ideologies and strategies, such as cultural and political Islam. Anna M. Gade's *Perfection Makes Practice* stresses the cultural aspect of Indonesian Muslim practices by analyzing the practices of reciting and memorizing the Qur'an, as well as the annual competition.

Muslim engagement with the Qur'an has tended to emphasize the cognitive over the psychological dimension. *Perfection Makes Practice* analyzes the role of emotion in these undertakings through a combination of approaches, particularly the history of religions, ethnography, psychology, and anthropology. By investigating Qur'anic practitioners in Makassar, South Sulawesi, during the 1990s, Gade argues that the perfection of the Qur'an as a perceived, learned, and performed text has made and remade the practitioners, as well as other members of the Muslim community, to renew or increase their engagement with the holy text. In this process, she suggests, moods and motivation are crucial to preserving the recited Qur'an and revitalizing the Muslim community.

In chapter 1, Gade begins with a theoretical consideration for her case study. Drawing from concepts that emphasize the importance of feeling and emotion in ritual and religious experience, she develops a conceptualization of this engagement. In chapter 2, Gade explains memorization within the context of the self and social relations. She argues that Qur'anic memorizers have a special relationship with its style and structure, as well as with the social milieu. Although Qur'anic memorization is a normal practice for most Muslims, its practitioners have learned how to memorize and recite beautifully some or all of the Qur'an's verses, a process that requires emotion

management and obedience to ethnic norms (*adab*). According to Gade, being a memorizer (*hafiz*) is a dynamic process that brings social expectations together with the realities of daily and disciplined practice in managing one's affective attention. The task of memorizing is personal, while the contextual role and practice are social. Thus, memorizing the Qur'an is both a private and a public act.

Chapter 3 discusses how the Qur'an is recited with or without understanding within educational and social environments. Gade found two kinds of recitation pedagogies: traditional (the Baghdadi method) and modern (the Iqra method). The former is slower but deeper, whereas the latter is faster but more superficial. What is more crucial for Gade, however, are the affective associations, ambivalences, and emotional textures that enveloped experiences of Qur'anic education. The content of Arabic-language education is less important than the affective dimensions involved in learning to recite. This sentimental identity of learning, she argues, emerged both about and within the systems of ritual practice.

Chapter 4 describes how Indonesian Muslims are to obey an orthopraxy – the right way to recite and to meet such expectations. Aesthetic, melodic recitation, with a musical form of vocalization derived especially from Egypt, has become a condition by which advanced practitioners reach the ideal standard. However, as the author emphasizes, orthopraxy does not mean closing new horizons and changes in experience over time. Perceptions of how things ought to be may be a perception of practice that emerges from within the practice itself, but is not necessarily derived entirely from the representation of an external other. Moreover, Gade contends, changing social and emotional systems that developed recitation styles to the level of orthopraxy (with formalized pedagogies being involved) interacted with structures of religious piety. As she puts it, “emotional systems of pedagogy and performance forged for many Indonesians a subjectivity of Qur'anic practice that took the form of expanding evaluation of potential and escalating expression of pious possibilities” (p. 215).

In the last chapter, she focuses on the annual competition. Gade maintains that several motivations are involved here: having fun, glorifying Islam, participating, winning, and contributing to the national development. However, these dominant discourses did not determine the motivations; rather, it was the effect of a sort of sociological invisible hand (p. 226). For example, it was hoped that the 1997 national competition would increase the community's belief and piety as a resource for the New Order's national development. Although some Muslim groups opposed such competitions on the grounds that they are wasteful and ceremonial in the face of more significant

work (e.g., implementing Qur'anic teachings) or that a woman's voice in public is indecent (*'awrat*), these and other objections seemed to decrease by the mid-1990s when more justifications were offered, such as countering perceived and real westernization and glorifying Islam through *da'wah*.

The author concludes that an energetic movement in Qur'anic practices in South Sulawesi motivated the self and others to follow suit: "... the Indonesian movement of Qur'anic revitalization in the 1990s provides material for reconsidering the idea that dynamism of religious systems may be generated by 'feeling'" (p. 273), although the power of an "envy of goodness" should be equally recognized.

This fine work reasserts the superiority of memorized knowledge and the fixed character of religious knowledge among Muslims. The author might need to look at how Qur'anic practitioners have to solve a possible internal tension between merely memorizing or reciting the Qur'an beautifully and internalizing and implementing its teachings in daily life. The focus on emotion without cognition might obscure the more complete picture of Qur'anic recitation. It might also be helpful to put this tradition within the longer historical period of time, by considering, for example, how today's Qur'anic memorization and recitation may have taken on a pedagogic system and culture different from that of the past. One may wonder if memorizing and reciting the Qur'an in public have changed over time.

Perfection Makes Practice is suggestive in its interdisciplinary approach and argument for the role of emotion and social context in religious practice. For scholars and students of the history of religions, Islamic studies, anthropology, psychology, and education, this is crucial reading.

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