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Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education

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Abstract: This paper examines two sets of interrelated issues informing contemporary discussions on Islam and education that take place within both Muslim majority and minority contexts. The first set of issues concerns the academic conceptualisation of the study of education within diverse historical and contemporary Islamic cultural, intellectual, political, theological and spiritual traditions. After a critical examination of the current literature, the paper suggests that ‘Islamic Education Studies’ offers a distinctive academic framing that incorporates an interdisciplinary empirical and scholarly inquiry strategy capable of generating a body of knowledge and understanding guiding the professional practice and policy development in the field. Lack of conceptual clarity in various current depictions of the field, including ‘Muslim Education’, ‘Islamic Pedagogy’, ‘Islamic Nurture’ and ‘Islamic Religious Pedagogy’, is outlined and the frequent confusion of Islamic Education with Islamic Studies is critiqued. The field of Islamic Education Studies has theological and educational foundations and integrates interdisciplinary methodological designs in Social Sciences and Humanities. The second part of the inquiry draws attention to the lack of new theoretical insights and critical perspectives in Islamic Education. The pedagogic practice in diverse Muslim formal and informal educational settings does not show much variation and mostly is engaged with re-inscribing the existing power relations shaping the society. The juxtaposition of inherited Islamic and borrowed or enforced Western secular educational cultures appears to be largely forming mutually exclusive, antagonistic and often rigid ‘foreclosed’ minds within contemporary Muslim societies. The impact of the educational culture and educational institutions on the formation of resentful Islamic religiosities and the reproduction of authoritarian leadership within the wider mainstream Muslim communities have not been adequately explored. The study stresses the need to have a paradigm shift in addressing this widely acknowledged educational crisis. The formation of a transformative educational culture remains the key to being able to facilitate reflective and critical Muslim religiosities, and positive socio-economic and political change in Muslim majority and minority societies. This inquiry explores a significant aspect of this crisis by re-examining the degree to which Islamic and Western, liberal, secular conceptions and values of education remain irreconcilably divergent or open to a convergent dialogue of exchange, reciprocity and complementarity. The originality of the paper lies in offering a critical rethinking of Islamic Education through mapping the main relevant literature and identifying and engaging with the central theoretical issues while suggesting a new academic framing of the field and its interdisciplinary research agenda.

Keywords: Islamic education; critical Islamic pedagogy; values in higher education; comparative education; Islamic higher education; educational reform; religiosities; foreclosure; transformative educational culture; European Islam

1. Introduction

Despite a plethora of recent publications on Islamic Education, Islamic Schooling and Muslims in Education, the attempts to define the field remain unsystematic and often lack conceptual depth and clarity. This can be attributed to three fundamental methodological shortcomings: first, the inadequate theoretical reflections on the meaning of education, which gravely hinders the task of ‘thinking about Islam educationally and education Islamically’; second, the absence of a rigorous ‘educational hermeneutics’ with which to discern the central educational and pedagogic vocabulary in Muslim core sources and narratives of education embedded within the Muslim religious, spiritual and intellectual heritage; third, lack of empirical research in exploring the pedagogic practice and developing evidence-based policies in the field. There is a large gap in the existing literature addressing these crucial issues.

Since the first World Conference on Muslim Education in 1977, there have been many attempts to define education in Islam. However, most of these initial efforts were conducted within a defensive attitude intending to discredit what was perceived to be an invading hegemonic Western, secular conception of education. Therefore, even the most sophisticated accounts of Islamic Education, for example, the influential approach of Al-Attas (1979) which has been adopted by many in the West, such as Halstead (2004), reflect features of a reactionary response rather than being based on critical inquiry into discerning the core meaning of education in Islam. While these early interpretations emerged out of the vulnerabilities of the postcolonial Muslim world, much contemporary writing within the emerging so-called post-Islamist political space on education and pedagogy in Islam and Islamic schooling appears to perpetuate these reactionary postcolonial perceptions. The impact of Al-Attas’ reading of Islam within a deeper framework of perennial philosophy and his ‘Islamisation of knowledge’ approach, in particular, can still be discerned in the writings of the young generation of researchers in the field who work within the context of the Western Muslim diaspora. According to this approach, Islamic Education appears to be defined as an esoteric, spiritual framework in which the educational process is mostly identified with the term *adab/ta’dib*, a set of coercive moral practices and training. This partial (mis)interpretation of *adab* continues to shape the conception of Islamic Education in the rare philosophically-inclined works where its discipline and training implying form, *ta’dib*, is often mistranslated as ‘goodness and good action’ (Waghid 2011, p. 3; Davids and Waghid 2016), and in the wider recent literature (Memon and Zaman 2016; Abdalla et al. 2018). The latter authors appear to be operating within a specific epistemology of ‘Islamic revival’ that is interested in the literal recovery of an imagined essence of Islamic pedagogy preserved by the past, pious ancestors, *the salaf*, in the Muslim tradition.

In addition, these authors frequently use the word ‘pedagogy’ without much discussion. Pedagogy, mainly used to describe teaching methods in its original Greek, literally meant ‘to lead the child’. This definition is remarkably close to the meaning of upbringing, care and guidance suggested by the Arabic *tarbiyah*, a key inclusive educational concept that originates in the core Muslim sources (Sahin 2014). However, most of the recent discussions on Islamic pedagogy (e.g., Memon and Alhashmi 2018) erroneously equate pedagogy with the concept of *adab* with little evidence or nuance. Furthermore, Islamic Education has often been confused with ‘Islamic Studies’, a Western framing of the study of Islam that came out of the Eurocentric discourse of Orientalism and which is still not free from controversy (Adams and Martin 2001; Morris et al. 2013). In Islam, it is important to note that the concept of ‘*tarbiyah*’ does not depict education along dichotomic lines of religious or secular therefore, it cannot be limited to a form of religious education, instruction or nurture. It conveys a more comprehensive understanding of education as a holistic, embodied and reflective process that facilitates human flourishing and the transformation of the human condition in its diverse psychical, cognitive, spiritual, moral and emotional articulations. As such, *tarbiyah*, goes beyond the confines of a disinterested cognitive focus implied by the word ‘study’ or a mere religious/moral instruction and training. For a *tarbiyah*-embedded critical philosophy of Islamic Education, see Sahin (2014, pp. 167–91).

Most contemporary work on Islam and education in the West is produced by sociologists, historians, political scientists, and ethnographers rather than specialists in Education Studies. A special issue of *Comparative Education Review* claiming to distinguish the 'truths' from the 'myths' about education in Islam, edited by a celebrated historian of Islamic thought (Kadi 2006), fails to differentiate between diverse conceptualisation of education in Islam and engage with fundamental educational vocabulary used in Muslim core sources. There are few studies that, by using an educational analysis framework, attempt to discern the educational outlook of the Qur'an (Abdallah 1982), the theoretical basis of Islamic Education (Modawi 1977) and curriculum perspectives in the Qur'an (Risha 2014). The philosophically-grounded works of Modawi (1977) and Abdallah (1982) only offer a partial educational reading of the Qur'an, while the study by Risha (2014) presents a superficial interpretation of the Qur'an from the perspective of curriculum studies. Therefore, this literature, with few exceptions, often presents basic information on Islam and recycles the historical, descriptive material and country by country profiles of Islamic Education in Muslim majority and minority societies. A recent example of this approach can be seen in the edited handbook on Islamic Education by Daun and Arjmand (2018) which simply updates the sociological profiling of Islamic Education in different Muslim countries with occasional surface level engagement with some theoretical themes and issues. The volume, however, does include an exceptionally original contribution by Janson (2018) exploring the perceptions of being 'Islamically educated' in the children's literature, such as stories, books and poems prepared for informal teaching of Islam and nurturing Muslim faith in the Muslim diaspora communities in the UK.

There is also a body of literature on generic issues related to 'Muslims in education' (e.g., experiences of Muslim children in formal schooling, their educational underachievement, educational rights of Muslim minority communities, educational reform and international terrorism), produced by researchers in the subfields of educational policy, international/comparative education, study of ethnic minorities and politics of education (Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2017; Keddie 2017; Ebrahim 2017; Jackson 2014; Malik 2007; Meer 2007; Harris 2006; Haw 1998; Parker-Jenkins 1995). A few studies by Muslim authors aimed to introduce Islamic Education in Muslim minority communities in the West (Sarwar 1996, 1983; Ashraf 1985). The numerous historical studies on Islamic Education and increasingly popular Islamic pedagogy in medieval Muslim writings offer some more original perspectives (Günther 2015; Rosenthal 2007; Tibawi 1978; Makdisi 1981). However, scholars producing these works are primarily historians rather than specialists in the study of education. Their interpretations of educationally and pedagogically significant values, concepts and practices in classical Muslim thought are of limited value.

Overall, modern 'Islamic' definitions of education have emerged in reaction to what is perceived to be 'materialistic' secular Western education introduced during the postcolonial modernization process in newly established European-style Muslim nations. Indeed, the desire to 'Islamise' Western science and knowledge systems originates in a reactionary politics of resentment informing Islamic revivalist and reformist movements. It was mainly due to the self-censoring climate of political correctness after 9/11 that the notion of 'Islamisation of knowledge', once subject of a fierce debate over whether the idea was originally conceived by Al-Attas or the Palestinian-American philosopher Faruqi (1982), appears to have suddenly been abandoned. Currently, a more politically pleasing word, 'integration', seems to be frequently invoked within the discourse on educational reform in global Muslim societies. However, to develop integrated models of Islamic Education within the context of contemporary Muslim societies requires the presence of a critical dialogue with the diverse traditions of education in Islam as well as modern educational theories and pedagogic models.

Most of the literature, largely produced by Western anthropologists, ethnographers and historians since the turn of the last century, stressed, often with admiration, the 'embodied oral/aural features' (Nelson 2001) as well as the 'impressive textual literacy' within traditional forms of Islamic Education (Messick 1992). The Western anthropological literature, beginning with the work of Eickelman (1978), showed a fascination with the role of 'orality and memorisation', characteristic of Qur'anic memorisation (*hifz*), as embodied practices of learning and teaching in traditional Islamic Education

settings (Ware 2014; Boyle 2006; Nelson 2001). Furthermore, without much evidence, Rosowsky (2008) argued that sheer memorisation of the Qur'an by Muslim children in the UK, who do not understand Arabic at all, helped them develop the educational capital of 'liturgical literacy' which apparently acts as a catalyst for many positive learning habits among the children and creates continuity between their educational experience in the *madrassah* and mainstream schools. The study by Hoechner (2018) conducted among the *almajirai*, boys and young men from primary-school age to their early twenties who have come to the cities and villages in Northern Nigeria to study the Qur'an, adopts such a one-dimensional approach. There are few exceptionally nuanced studies that helps Western educators to appreciate some of the traditional features of Islamic Education (Gent 2018). But idealised readings of *madrassah* education and Islamic pedagogy are increasingly being put forward in some recent studies (Sabki and Hardaker 2013). Most of these anthropological/ethnographic studies have also emphasized the impact of bodily performances and rituals attached to the religious and spiritual 'voice' in invoking the divine presence, facilitating devotional listening, cultivating certain habits, orientations and dispositions essential for Muslim ethical life (Harris 2014; Hirschkind 2006; Graham and Kermani 2006; Gade 2006). In this perspective, religion is seen not so much as a body of belief and doctrinal content but as a living tradition, e.g., an embodied sensual performance and practice (de Vries 2008). More recently, Eisenlohr (2018) focused on the 'Islamic soundscape' more closely. He explores the *na't* recitation, a popular genre of devotional Urdu poetry in honour of the prophet Muhammad, among transnational Islamic networks in Mauritius.

This body of literature, often produced by Western scholars who deeply lament the loss of the tradition of 'learning by heart' in the West and its dismissal by those who privilege critical/analytical and textual forms of literacy, are less self-aware than they might be of perpetuating the myth of an 'exotic and sensual Orient'. As such, it appears that this literature does not engage with possible negative pedagogic and educational implications of such ritualised devotional practices of memorisation in shaping submissive, foreclosed mindsets and reproducing authoritarian structures within Muslim religious life. The Qur'an is deeply aware of its own oral composition style and its first audiences' oral culture, hence frequently mentions 'voice, hearing, chanting and listening' as it communicates its message. However, this literature does not appear to notice the fact that the Qur'an frames oral composition and transmission within a wider reflective and critical pedagogy of the voice that aims to facilitate human self-awareness and transformation: the Qur'an explicitly asks its audiences to listen to its message with 'reflective, comprehending ears and hearts' and demands them to engage critically with its voice (The Qur'an Chapter 69 verse 12 and Chapter 22 verse 46). The critical/reflective Qur'anic pedagogies shape the nature of prophetic education in Islam that is articulated in the reports (*Hadith*) attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (Sahin 2014). As a result, in classical Islamic pedagogy learning by heart was expected to be complemented by reflective insights, personal engagement and understandings, a crucial developmental stage of teaching/learning that is largely missing in contemporary practice of *hifz*, the memorisation of the Qur'an. Today, in order to respond effectively to the changing educational needs of young Muslims, the critical/reflective educational heritage of Islam shaping its devotional spirituality needs to be reclaimed so that young Muslims have a better chance to develop proper Islamic literacy, mature faith formation and engage creatively with the world around them.

Within the post-9/11 reality, the ever-increasing web of security-focused policies now includes the utilisation of 'public educational space'. There seems to be a strong interest to engineer politically correct 'liberal/secular' Islamic self-understanding(s) and leadership opening an easy route for the assimilation of Muslims into European societies. The training of faith leaders and teachers, a key provision in forging desired Muslim religiosities, appears to offer the best way forward for making such a large-scale state intervention. It seems that the democratic/secular principle of non-state intervention in the religious life of its citizens has been abandoned. Even in France, where the principle of secularism is most fervently observed, particularly in the education space, where there is no religious education provision at all, a new pro-government report openly advocates that the French government should

facilitate an Islamic reform for its Muslim citizens to produce a 'French version of Islam' (El-Karoui 2018). The report goes on to suggest state regulation for the training of imams and the teaching of Islam in all levels of the state and community-based educational system. A milder version of such an artificial engineering of an 'Islamic reform' agenda in the UK has been pursued for some time by proxy official institutions, sponsored by the wider Prevent policy, to produce a politically correct 'British Islam'. However, there is an increasing awareness that such an ambitious intervention will not have a broader appeal unless Muslims themselves produce an Islamic rationale for initiating a meaningful internal transformation within their new contextual reality.

In continental Europe, a much more sophisticated policy approach has been in progress to shape the future of Islam in Europe. For more than a decade, state-sponsored Islamic teacher training and theology provision has been offered in major universities. It was expected that Muslim communities would have shown interest in setting up such educational and religious institutions, vital for contextualising their Islamic presence in Europe. Instead, they appeared content to reproduce institutions set up by the states of their countries of origin or transnational Islamic revival movements, to maintain the cultural, ethnic and religious ties with home countries. Diaspora Muslims have shown little interest in developing alternative religious and educational institutions capable of facilitating the emergence of an indigenous mature European Muslim *ummah*.

The impact of these new state-sponsored Islamic Education policy is yet to be subject to a rigorous assessment. However, there is little evidence to suggest that such a formal institutionalisation has led to the formation of theory and practice of a new academic field. Overall, it seems, the imitation of Western Orientalist study approach within the Islamic Studies discourse has been replaced by uncritical borrowings of ideas and practices from various Christian denominational approaches to religious education. Furthermore, to highlight and address problems with Muslim institutions, research on controversial issues, such as the teaching of Islam in mosques, Islamic schools and nurseries, has been prioritised. As a result, the research into concepts of Islamic Education or Islamic pedagogy, curriculum and teacher education-related issues have not been subject to proper research and development. In the UK, while the same securitisation policies have been in place, lately it would appear that the state has begun to introduce surveillance and monitoring of the public education space, starting with primary schools. After the widely publicized Trojan Horse Affair in Birmingham in 2014, there have been attempts to control tightly Muslim parents' involvement within state education provision and to monitor Islamic ethos schools. There are increasing discussions on imam training in Western Europe (Hashas et al. 2018) and concerns raised over the difficulties of forming a new European Muslim religious authority. However, there has not been any systematic research into traditional Islamic higher education institutions, the *dar al-uluuum*, nor into policy developments in response to challenges facing Muslim seminaries where most of the traditional Islamic faith and education leadership is reproduced.

It must be noted that there is a considerable body of literature (Breen 2018; Brooks 2018; Miah 2017; Veinguer et al. 2010; Tinker 2009) exploring independent and state-funded formal Islamic schooling in multicultural, secular European societies. Due to its well-established tradition of faith-based schooling, UK has Europe's strongest Islamic schooling movement. These studies essentially argue that the secular liberal state needs to recognise the educational rights of minority Muslim communities who also experience Islamophobia. It is interesting to note that most of these studies originate in the anti-racism education movement and continue framing Muslims in an explicit secular category of 'race and ethnicity'. They largely avoid engaging with the Islamic ethos of these schools and are thus unable to assess whether they foster or hinder social cohesion and integration within contemporary religiously and culturally diverse European societies. It must be noted that increasingly in the West, Islam and Muslims are seen in political terms, to the extent that Islam itself is often assumed to be a political ideology rather a faith tradition. Most of the social scientific literature on Muslims living in the Western diaspora, produced by researchers who are sympathetic or critical of Islam and Muslims, also exhibits this 'politicisation bias'. This literature mainly focuses on cultural, ethnic, political and socio-economic dimensions of Muslims, rather than examining the experience and articulation of

Islam in the individual and collective lives of Muslims. As a result, studies on Muslim youth and extremism (Nilan 2017; Pantucci 2015), international Islamic networks (Inge 2017; Janson 2014) and Islamic Education and radicalisation (Afrianty 2012; Malik 2007) do not engage with the faith dynamic, the theology, shaping the core of these topics. This shortcoming appears to be persisting when the researchers use an explicit theological language, such as 'neo-theo-tribalism' (Nilan 2017, p. 173), to try to account for the emergence of religiously-based extremist subcultures among Muslim youth. There are almost no studies using Psychology and Sociology of Religion directly focusing on the formation of diverse Muslim 'religiosities', including the pathological faith formations that lead to violent and non-violent forms of extremism (Sahin 2016b). It must be noted that Meijer (2009)'s work presents an exceptional reflective perspective on Islamic Education and the short study by Hull (1998), examining Muslim communities' objections to inclusive RE, is based on a rare rigorous educational analysis that has not yet been surpassed. For a more comprehensive review of the literature on Islamic Education, see Sahin (2019).

2. Aims, Method and Rationale of the Inquiry

This paper discusses critically diverse conceptualisations of Islamic Education and engages with central theoretical issues related to the reframing of the field as an academic interdisciplinary area of research and professional development. By specifically focusing on higher education, the paper aims to examine the degree to which Islamic and Western, liberal, secular conceptions and values of education remain irreconcilably divergent or open to a convergent dialogue of exchange, reciprocity and complementarity.

The inquiry is conceptual in character and adopts a phenomenological analysis framework, originally suggested within the latter work of Husserl (1970), to explore its central aims and questions. Husserlian phenomenology offers a rigorous method by which to understand how meaning(s) are generated in human experience, and which also form the *intersubjective* fabric of individual and collective 'life-worlds'. The present study argues for a reciprocal dialogue in which cultural and religious *difference*, which defines diverse 'life-worlds', is dignified and not simply tolerated but, most significantly, the reality of a wider context of inter-dependency and inter-relationality is firmly recognized. Every genuine encounter is also an opportunity for being moved and redefined by one another. It is through such a relational ethics of mutual trust and care, rather than a legally-framed ethics of rights, that such a respectful and just co-existence can be nurtured. Islamic and Western liberal education, often perceived through a distorting binary lens, have distinctive differences but also commonalities that challenge such stereotyping. The pedagogic values of 'critical openness and critical faithfulness' (Sahin 2015, 2017), for example, are shared by both educational traditions. Such values, if nurtured within educational institutions, can enable diverse communities of learners to show competence for *critical self-reflexivity*, an important form of contextual self-understanding needed to achieve better social cohesion, harmony and justice in plural societies.

Islamic and Western educational cultures now inform the wider educational experience of millennial, European Muslims. A reflective conversation between the traditions of higher education in Islam and the contemporary West can lead to the emergence of a more inclusive, just and meaningful modern higher education system. Such a dialogue can foster civic values of trust and the common good, as well as a vision of a caring global learning and citizenship. The gradually emerging European Islamic higher education institutions, established as a result of the communities' post-Second World War migration history, can no longer narrowly focus on reproducing certain identity narratives privileged and propagated (*da'wah*) by the transnational, religious movements. Instead of trying to forge young peoples' identities, it would be much more meaningful for these institutions to offer a broad and balanced education capable of enabling young people to develop contextual understanding of their faith heritage and its diversity, and encourage them to form a reflective, religious agency capable of articulating Islam within the everyday reality of their life-worlds. In this regard, collaboration between mainstream and faith-heritage universities is crucial. Such a collaboration should not be based on a

pragmatic motive of simple degree-validation/income-generation but in order to integrate Islamic higher education within the wider mainstream university system. This can be achieved through facilitating exchange and dialogue leading to the formation of a genuine reflective pedagogic culture, a modern *critical/reflective Muslim paideia*, rooted in the transformative/holistic conception of education in Islam (*tarbiyah*) (Sahin 2014). With such an integrative educational ethos, these intuitions would be in a better position to facilitate a contextual Islamic faith leadership training in the modern world and more effectively respond to the educational needs of students under their care.

3. Thinking Educationally about Islam and Islamically about Education

Education is a value-laden process that closely reflects the wider cultural reality of a given society. It is inevitable that there are theological hermeneutics present in the qualification of the educational process as Islamic. The empirical research in Islamic Education Studies contributes significantly to the formation of an Islamic practical theology. By bringing the core Islamic values to bear on the meaning of education, the theological framework springs from a deeper understanding of Islam itself. If this theological dimension is disregarded or naively taken for granted, the 'Islamic' in the expression will function as an ideological heuristic that leads to an inaccurate monolithic and dogmatic conception of education in Islam. Above all, understanding education within Islamic sources or *interpreting education Islamically* are human activities that are inevitably limited, contextual, and subject to critique and revision. However, some feel that the concept of 'Islamic Education' implies dogmatism, and so they argue that it is a misleading and narrow description. Instead, it is suggested that the expression 'Muslim education' is a broader and better depiction, as it ostensibly takes the direct religious and dogmatic faith association away. However, changing the definition of education from 'Islamic' to 'Muslim' is simply a semantic ploy, as 'Muslim' education implies that the education activity is interpreted by Muslims, i.e., those who self-identify with Islam even if this association can be limited to a broader cultural affiliation rather than religious observance.

Often there is a deeper motive behind this hair-splitting semantics: the minority sects whose syncretic Muslim self-definition came from a significant process of deconstruction of traditional Islam in favour of such differentiation. By necessity, both of these expressions—'Islamic Education' and 'Muslim Education'—require association and engagement with Islam. What is important is to have a self-reflective theological awareness so that the descriptors 'Islamic' and 'Muslim' are not merely employed to serve a process of ideological reification. Most importantly, Islamic Education Studies is actually an inclusive expression indicating the scholarly engagement and knowledge production conducted by Muslim and non-Muslims alike in describing and critiquing what counts as education and educational values and thought within the Islamic tradition. 'Muslim Education' may well imply that such study activities are confined to Muslims alone. A similar distinction was suggested by Bucar (2018) who prefers 'Islamic virtue ethics' as opposed to 'Muslim virtue ethics', as the former category is more inclusive. As will be discussed below, historically many non-Muslim scholars contributed to the formation of classical Islamic educational, as well as ethical thought.

Recently, Ahmed (2015) suggested that within historic Islam equally plausible, contradictory patterns of Islamic meanings/readings (or *Islams*) have existed side by side. Such a paradoxical incompatibility, which apparently rules out the existence of any normative Islam, has defined classical, historical expressions of Muslim faith. It appears that according to Ahmed, claiming that 'Islam' as an Abrahamic faith tradition originated in the distinctive, prophetic experience of Muhammad that was formed by the Qur'an and perceived by the early Muslims as shared normative guidance, becomes a subjective, if not fictitious, belief. As any serious student of Islam will note, it is true that Islam became a world civilization precisely because its core spiritual/ethical values shaped diverse cultures, and, in turn, Islam itself was creatively interpreted and articulated within different historical, cultural and geographical landscapes. Scholars have found it difficult to conceptualise this process, in which both Islam and the indigenous cultures have been reciprocally reinterpreted to bring about new '*Islamically meaningful patterns of creative syntheses*' in history. Hodgson (1977), coined the term 'Islamicate' to

account for the inevitable presence of a theological core present in diverse historical expressions of Islam by people of different races and cultures. Ahmed, while acknowledging the significance of core 'Islamic' religious ideas in bringing about cosmopolitan Muslim civilization, implausibly tries to attribute this creativity to certain so-called 'liberal and enlightened' historical expressions of Islam (i.e., Balkans to Bengal in the period 1350–1850, when apparently literature and philosophy reigned supreme and the sense of normative Islam was rather dim, if it ever existed at all). His account almost totally disregards the inclusive central narrative of Islam formed around the Divine Word and its embodied transformative presence in the life of Muhammad. As such, his book does not go beyond the insights already offered by Smith (1991), to account for the dynamics informing the historical emergence of Muslim civilization and its subsequent reification and decline.

It must be noted that in the Muslim tradition, as in Judaism, there has been a strong emphasis on the notion of Divine law, hence, a strong legal hermeneutics has shaped the perception of Islam among Muslims. Spiritual, moral, theological, philosophical and political interpretations of Islam were also developed. Today, Muslim educators, in particular, should to consider the need to think *educationally about Islam*, the educational hermeneutics mentioned above, if they wish to discern pedagogic insights from their faith tradition. Absence of a clear 'educational hermeneutics' appears to be at the core of the confusions over the meaning of education in Islam, as well as the inability to recognise the 'compassionate transformative pedagogy' that shapes the heart of the Islamic message and its core sources (Sahin 2017).

4. Education as an Embodied and Embedded Transformative Cultural Practice

Inspired by Husserl's phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty (2013) in his ground-breaking *phenomenology of perception*, originally published in 1945, stressed the embodied nature of human experience and its embeddedness in an inseparable, physical and cultural milieu. Values are culturally-embedded and culturally-mediated enduring beliefs and ideals that shape one's sense of purpose, meaning, trust and worth in life. Education, a defining feature of human experience, is a fundamental organising principle of human existence that articulates diverse 'life-worlds', value systems that are crystalized in specific historical/cultural settings as different interpretations of being human. Crucially, educational activity in its formal/informal embodiments both reflects *and* promotes a given society's ideal core values. However, the perception of education in contemporary higher education systems in the Western and Muslim worlds appears to be more vocational, designed to respond to the needs of the labour market. Hence, it overwhelmingly reflects a narrow competence-based epistemological function. The focus on imparting certain bodies of knowledge and skills comes at the expense of ignoring the deeper power of educational practice in facilitating human flourishing. Critical educational theorists (Giroux 2011; Nemiroff 1992) argue that the capitalist market priorities dominating Western societies have shaped the educational culture and values of higher education. The role of universities in preparing young people for employment, economic prosperity and independence are crucial, of course. Gibbs (1998, p. 14), however, questions whether one can trust in such a competence-focused, industrialist university model where 'moral trust is replaced with the unsupported notion of competence of trust, which ultimately dilutes the moral dimension of higher education'. Furthermore, rapid demographic changes, increasing cultural diversity, mass migration coupled with growing socio-economic inequalities, and environmental concerns challenge universities to rethink their educational mission in a fast-changing world.

Naturally, Education Studies within academia is expected to be more directly involved with this rethinking process. 'Education Studies' is a relatively recent field, rather than a discipline, where interdisciplinary research designs are utilized to understand the complexity informing different levels and forms of educational processes, including further and higher education (Bartlett and Burton 2016; McCulloch 2002). However, the distinction between a 'field' and 'discipline' does not always seem to be clear-cut. Phenomenologically considered, the possibility of a distinctive educational way of looking at life, an ability to 'think educationally', does enable 'Education Studies' to be considered a discipline

making claims to a special branch of knowledge, methods of inquiry and analysis. In academia, international and comparative education departments are popular, often advancing the international development agendas of Western countries in the so-called underdeveloped world. However, as Levine and White (2017) note, the study of diverse educational cultures, and their philosophies and values of human development, have not yet been given due space and recognition in Western academia.

The Latin word ‘Universitas’ refers to a guild or corporation of students and masters. (Coincidentally, the word ‘corporation’ also derives from the Latin and refers to a ‘body of people’.) According to some historians (Goodman 2003; Makdisi 1990; Nakosteen 1984), the early Islamic higher learning institution, the *madrassah* and its religiously-sanctioned voluntary funding framework, *waqf*, might have had some influence on the formation of universities in Western Europe, such as those of Bologna (1088), Oxford (1096) and Paris (1160–70). The values informing the tradition of collegiality and commensality—that is, the manner in which college educational life forms the relationships of its members, tutors and students, associated with Oxford and Cambridge (Tapper and Palfreyman 2010)—is very similar to the organisation of the traditional Islamic college system. *Madrassah*, literally ‘place of study’, originally emerged as a private affair formed around inspiring religious teachers, with small study circles (*halaqa*) taking place in special meeting places (*majlis*) where the values of intellectual engagement, friendship and sense of a ‘learning community’ were nurtured. Learning was not confined to knowledge retention but, as in its original Arabic, knowledge (*‘ilm*) is meant to be a sign pointing towards grasping a deeper reality. Like its equivalent in the Hebrew Bible, *yada* (Snaith 2009), *‘ilm* meant developing inner engagement, inspired intimacy, attachment and embodied awareness. Higher education remained private and, thus, scholars, *‘ulama*, maintained their independence. However, the education became institutionalised and *‘ulama* gradually moved away from their volunteer beginnings to a bureaucratized class of professionals (Gilbert 1980). It appears that proper ‘scholar-bureaucrats’, who emerged during the Ottoman Empire (Atçıl 2017), were openly aligned to the ruling classes and incorporated into the Muslim imperial order. *Madrassahs* were often attached to a mosque where worship, learning and study were integrated. The word for such a large mosque compound is *al-jaami’*, which is related to the modern Arabic word for university, *al-jamia’ah*. The modern University of Al-Qaraouiyine, founded in Morocco by Fatima al-Fihri in 859 CE, is considered by some to be the oldest degree-granting university in the world.

The *madrassah*, particularly in its most creative period (8th–13th centuries), integrated the transmitted religious sciences (*naqliyyaat*), via a strong provision for auxiliary sciences (*aliyyat*)—such as the study of language and logic—with the philosophical and natural sciences (*aqliyyaat*). This attracted European students who were prevented by the medieval Church from engaging in free and critical inquiry. In today’s popular Muslim discourse, the latter point often gets exaggerated and idealised. However, Western students, encouraged by the open educational culture of the Muslim learning institutions, were re-connected with the ancient Greek philosophical and scientific heritage that in turn had stimulated the emergence of Renaissance humanism. The latter acted as a catalyst for medieval Europe to reform itself around a new reason/science-based secular Enlightenment narrative and to create institutions of higher learning that eventually eclipsed the no-longer-dynamic Muslim *madrassah*. Makdisi (1981) attempts to confine classical *madrassah* to the transmitted religious sciences (*naqliyyaat*) and sees it as not more than a specialist guild of higher legal study (*shariah*). But, he nevertheless appears impressed with the elaborate and innovate pedagogic practices, such as licensing/authorising (*ijazah*) students who had mastered certain sciences that formed the basis of modern degree confirmation and certification. He seems, however, to neglect the fact that *madrassah*, inspired by core educational values of Islam, included theological focus as well as specialisms in natural sciences, including medicine and astronomy, where basic religious subjects were also taught.

A narrower and, in many ways, inaccurate depiction of *madrassah* was offered by T. E. Huff in his controversial book exploring the rise of early modern science in Islam, China and the West. His observations on *madrassah* are based on dated, secondary literature produced by Orientalists, like Goldziher (1981), which purported to establish that *madrassah* resisted to the study of rational

sciences and religion, as in the West, was a hindrance to advancing science in Muslim societies. Huff is reluctant to acknowledge that most innovative mathematical and astronomical ideas discussed during the European Renaissance were themselves borrowed from Islamic/Arabic, Chinese or Indian civilizations through multiple routes that are now being rigorously explored (Saliba 2007). He shows almost no curiosity concerning the roots of modern science and whether it should be seen as a pure achievement of Western culture or other cultures, such as Islamic, Chinese or Indian. It is more concerning that Huff, in the latest edition of this book (Huff 2017, p. 171), can make an anachronistic claim that even the ‘Arab spring of 21st century somehow failed because the *madrassah* remained obsessed with the study of the Qur’an and prophetic traditions thus causing the stagnation of the entire Islamic civilisation’. More recently, Brockopp (2017) has offered a slightly more nuanced account, based on available documentary evidence, of the early formation of Muslim scholarly circles and networks.

The curriculum of medieval education in the West consisted of a seven-subject syllabus, based around particular books, and composed of the preparatory *trivium* (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music), known as the seven liberal arts which lie at the heart of the idea of a liberal education. The early modern period did see humanism taking root in Western universities, challenging medieval ‘scholasticism’ with its emphasis on free will, ethical values and individualism. However, philosophy and the values of ‘scholasticism’ dominated the Medieval university, which held biblical truth as pre-eminent in what was essentially a defence of Christian dogma: the pursuit of divine truth and learning. The humanists’ goal for liberal education was the well-rounded development of the student. Education became human-centred, defining a key aspect of Western, secular modernity facilitating its new scientific spirit that nurtured the values of free inquiry, question and curiosity. In the 19th century, Newman (1996) stressed that the university is only for intellectual pursuits, an end in itself. However, it was the context of the industrial revolution whereby a heavy, instrumentalist and utilitarian perception of science gave rise to a technology/skills-focused university model. It was the University of Berlin in 1810, which became known as the first of the ‘Humboldtian’ universities, whose philosophy and structure have shaped contemporary universities (Scott 1993, 2005).

Clark (1983) in his seminal work analysing the nature of modern higher education in a cross-national perspective, suggested four basic underlying values—namely, ‘social justice, competence, liberty, and loyalty’—as being required for shaping the future of higher education policy. The emphasis on loyalty was interpreted as referring to the values fostering the greater ‘national integration and identity’. It appears that, within such a liberal analysis, the *conserving* function of education, central to the formation and survival of nation states, was predominant. The diversity of cultures in Western societies largely facilitated by the need to draw on global human resources had not yet been properly recognised. However, with the increasing marketisation of higher education, loyalty has been gradually replaced by the values of ‘accountability, efficiency and excellence’ all of which came to define a regime of outcome/measurement-based ‘quality control’ dominating modern higher education.

As a consequence, the performative set of skills and values, rather than personal transformation or human happiness and fulfilment, appear to have been prioritized. In reaction to this, at the beginning the early 20th century, a person-centred humanist educational movement briefly re-emerged to emphasize the *liberating* character of the educational process that was an integral part of wider family and community life. Consequently, a progressive agenda, couched not in terms of bureaucratic efficiency but rather in terms of transformative pedagogic values promoting ‘personal development, fulfilment, happiness’, as well as nurturing those civic social values necessary to maintain a democratic way of life, gained priority (Dewey 2011).

Critical pedagogy is a radical approach combining education and Critical Theory which is associated with the work of philosophers like Habermas (1973). Habermas, unlike other influential 20th century liberal, political theorists such as Rawls (2005), advocated a notion of public reason and ethics in secular Western societies that is inclusive of their growing cultural and religious plurality and mindful of the inequalities caused by their capitalist economic system. Critical pedagogy stresses

the significance of integrating 'reflection' with 'criticality' so that the former does not turn into a self-serving introspection. It operates from an understanding that the basis of education is 'political' and hence it emphasizes *critical reflexivity* to prevent misuse of power that produces inequalities. P. Freire's concept of 'conscientisation', or critical consciousness, is a good illustration of this perspective and refers to 'learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the conditions forming oppression in human individual and social life' (Goodson and Scherto 2014; Giroux 2011; Groenke and Hatch 2009; Freire 1996; Patterson 1973).

The study by Allen and Bull (2018, p. 23) shows how, due to financial pressure, even the values informing research and policy in UK universities become vulnerable to the ideological influences exhorted by big corporations and, increasingly by neoconservative international organisations. They discuss the US-based John Templeton Foundation's recent large investment in shaping research and policy development in character education in the UK which, they argue, aims 'to promote values of free market, individualist and socially conservative worldview'. Clark and Jackson (2018) offered a critique of neoliberal educational discourse which often uses positive-sounding values such as 'entrepreneurship', 'widening access to higher education' and 'serving students as clients'. Their analysis suggests how these values, reflecting the principles of democratic access, inclusion, social justice and benefiting from economic opportunities, actually hide the reality of growing inequality in global economic systems. Furthermore, while access to universities is widening, inequalities in higher education participation persist. What is more concerning is that the value of higher education itself has been increasingly put into question, as there is less evidence linking having a 'university degree' with the desired outcome of positive social mobility.

With the reality of globalization, there is also a growing presence of international students in Western universities who are mostly seen as an easy revenue source. However, the responsibility for higher education institutions to provide learning opportunities that are transcultural in terms of ethos, values, place/environment of study, content and pedagogic experience has also become apparent (Matus and Talburt 2015; Gu et al. 2010). Higher education is increasingly associated with the values of 'global learning', a term which originated with the founding of the Global Learning Division of the United Nations University (UNU) in 1982. The aim was to develop educational practices that would enable people of different cultures to understand and respond to transnational challenges such as poverty, conflict, and environmental and ethical dilemmas that face global human society. Furthermore, it suggests a strong sense of learning to think globally: that is, recognizing the interconnected nature of the modern world (Soedjatmoko and Newland 1987). This has paved the way for the idea of modern 'global citizenship' (Hovland 2006) and the recognition of serving the 'global public good' (Kehm 2014) signifying the need to have a sense of shared interdependent futures.

We are currently in the midst of a digital revolution, radically reshaping the character of post-industrial societies, including educational culture within universities (Selwyn 2013), and generating the possibility of entirely online universities. The rise of social media and online technologies is expected to become a positive force creating better human cooperation and mobilizing masses to form solidarity against human rights abuses. To some extent, these positive developments have taken place. The infamous 'Arab spring' which started in 2010 and mobilized young people across the Arab Muslim world was largely enabled by the use of social media. Young people desperate for a better future were energised by connectivity created by online platforms and took on the oppressive regimes that were largely set up within the legacy of Western colonialism. However, while social media gave freedom and means of solidarity, such mass movements simply produced crowds on the streets without the effective leadership that could have guided the anger and energy of young people in order to produce the desired reform and change. The subsequent near total control of social media by the state quickly suppressed what could have become a genuine transformative moment of change in the Arab Muslim world.

The market-driven performance- and measurement-centred values defining most higher education systems have been widely criticized (Goodson and Scherto 2014; McLaren 2009; Tight

2009). In their vision and mission statements, most universities do emphasize certain aspirational values such as fostering ‘values of inclusive learning, inquiry, enterprise and contributing to social cohesion, well-being of society, responding to the needs of global citizenship’ (Scott 2005). However, the everyday reality of universities increasingly resembles a corporate life where students are seen as units of income and spending. Alternative models and philosophies of higher education have been put forward: university as a house of wisdom (Ferrari 2008; Maxwell 1984), universities as civic spaces (Nixon 2018), a ‘thinking and thoughtful’ university where involvement, care, and societal engagement complement the openness of thought itself (Bengtson and Barnett 2018), and an ecological university where education is embedded in the physical environment, social relations and human subjectivity (Barnett 2017). However, the debate on the changing values in higher education urgently needs to take seriously the diversity of educational and pedagogic cultures increasingly sharing the same social space within contemporary societies. Universities, as places of global learning, can serve a culturally and religiously diverse student community and operate within an interconnected world.

Recognition of gender, culture and religious *difference* shaping the human condition requires nurturing values of mutual trust, respect, tolerance, justice and dignity through a reflective and open educational process. Absence of such an inclusive, critical and educational awareness may foster the formation of negative attitudes and values that create a culture of suspicion, fear, hatred and rejection of difference and diversity. Furthermore, self-centred human instincts—often encouraged by nationalist, religious and ideological tribalism—can easily portray the ‘other’ as a potential source of threat (Allport 1979). However, humans by nature are social and their survival depends on having values fostering exchange and cooperation. Studies (Page 2007) exploring the impact of group diversity in engaging with complex problem-solving and prediction tasks found that the groups with people of diverse cultures and backgrounds generated more ideas and more accurate, efficient and innovative perspectives than did the homogeneous groups even if the latter had the ‘best’ problem-solvers.

The current reactionary wave of nationalist populism and the rise of far-right politics across most of the Western world—indeed in much of the contemporary world—shows an irrational fear of difference and threatens the values of Western liberal secular democracy. Within a highly sensitive political context, an open and responsible dialogue has been replaced by the urge for an authoritarian instruction inculcating a deceptive sense of self-sufficiency, and territorial, cultural, racial and religious ‘purity’ and superiority that needs to be defended against what is perceived to be a contaminating ‘other’. There is, however, a sociological rationale behind the need for facilitating a reflective dialogue between Islamic and Western ideas and cultures of education. The life-world of young generations of Muslims has been informed by both Islamic parental heritage as well as the wider secular culture. How young Muslims develop their sense of belonging and agency within such a demanding cultural reality needs careful consideration by the community as well as wider society.

The increasing Islamophobia and the negative impact of the official Prevent policy in the UK that now adds universities to its web of surveillance, makes constructive conversation on such sensitive issues very difficult. Recent statistics released by the Home Office (2018a) showed more than half of 8336 religiously-motivated attacks in 2017–18 (52%) were directed at Muslims. Although there are an estimated 300,000 Muslim students in the UK in further and higher education, there is very little empirical research exploring the campus experiences of Muslim students. The existing small-scale research, however, has produced alarming findings. A recent survey exploring the experience of Muslim students on university campuses by the National Union of Students (2018), based on a sample of 578 participants, found that one-third of respondents reported having being negatively affected by the Prevent strategy, and 43% of them felt uncomfortable in expressing their views and engaging with debates on campus, hence resorted to self-censor, due to the fear of being reported. One in three of the participants reported having experienced some type of abuse and female students were mostly worried about their presence due to wearing visible Islamic dress, such as a headscarf. Similarly, an official government report (Home Office 2017) on social mobility among Muslim youth suggests that there is a relatively high level of Muslim participation in higher education. The findings, however, also

indicate that Muslim students are more likely to find themselves on unsatisfying study programmes, to experience higher dropout rates, and, most likely (particularly for females) not be able to gain access to post-university job markets.

5. Islam and Western Values of Education: Towards a Critical Dialogue of Convergence

A binary view of Islam and the secular West held by some Muslim and non-Muslim educators, such as Tan (2014), Ashraf (1987), Bilgrami and Ashraf (1985), Al-Attas (1979) and Ashraf and Hussain (1979) often stresses the presence of an unbridgeable gap in the perception of education between Islam and the secular liberal West. There are some short studies (e.g., Cook 1999) discussing this perceived dichotomy between Islamic and Western conceptions of education. This dichotomy has also been supported by some well-known Western educational philosophers, such as Hirst (1985), who stressed the incompatibility between the perception of truth in religious traditions and the plurality and relativity informing liberal conception of individual values and truth. In the Muslim context, such a dichotomy, which lies deep in a history of conflict illustrated by the Medieval Crusades, has largely emerged as a reaction to the trauma of colonial experience whereby Western secular education was enforced, usually in an authoritarian style, on the majority of Muslim nations. As such, one can appreciate to some extent such a strong negative reaction within the context of the colonial/postcolonial Muslim world. However, it is very concerning that such a binary mindset, transplanted from the grievance-ridden narrative of the postcolonial Muslim world, persists within the European Muslim diaspora. This has direct implications for the self-understanding of European Muslim youth and the way in which they relate to the cultural plurality in their lives.

Table 1 offers a summary of an often-perceived incompatibility between Islamic and Western secular values of education:

Table 1. A binary view of Islamic and Western educational and pedagogic values.

Western Liberal Secular Education	Islamic Education
Human-centred	God-centred
Learner-led	Teacher/text-led
Freedom, autonomy	Obedience, reverence
Scepticism, rationality, criticality	Certainty, trust, piety, fidelity
Individualistic, personal fulfilment	Collectivist/religious fellowship (<i>ummah</i>) and discipleship
Free inquiry-based knowledge	Revelation, tradition-based knowledge
Materialistic, market-driven, dualist secularism	Spiritual, moral, holistic
Discovery, questioning	Instruction, memorization, transmission, indoctrination
Progressive/linear time perception	Retrospective, cyclical and apocalyptic time perception
Literate, organised, intellectual, scientific	Oral/aural, story-shaped nurture, unscientific
Democratic, open	Authoritarian, inward-looking
Measured, assessed, outcomes-based	Informal, repetitive, unmeasurable
Civic, inclusive	Intolerant to religious, gender, cultural difference, no interest in the study of other faith traditions or worldviews
Interpretative plurality, relativity of values and truth	Essentialist conformity, monolithic perception of values and truth & no role for personal interpretation
Gender equality	Gender inequality
Focused on 'this' world	This world seen as preparation for the 'next' world
Teachers seen as knowledgeable guides and co-learners	Teachers revered as repositories of knowledge

However, this binary view reflects an ahistorical, literalist and reified perception of both Islam and the West. Some of the observations may well be based on contemporary Muslim educational practices and extremist, explicitly anti-Western education movements such as Boko Haram or Muslim

impressions of Western education. However, this categorical difference is largely formed out of a mutual prejudice and stereotyping of both educational cultures. It certainly disregards the educational self-understanding of Islam and the historical experience between the educational cultures and thoughts of early Islam and the West. Crucially, it ignores the open, educational attitude of the Qur'an and prophetic tradition that had motivated the first Muslims to adopt an educational curiosity about the diverse cultures with which they came into contact. The remainder of this article offers a brief deconstruction of this binary literalism by drawing on the relevant historical evidence and discussing the nature of educational values in diverse traditions of Islamic higher education.

Seeing the world from a relational holistic educational vision, enshrined in the central Qur'anic theological concept of *tawhid*, stimulated early Muslims to engage with the indigenous thought and wisdom of the traditions of Persia, India and ancient Greece that, in turn, have contributed to the emergence of Islamic civilization (Sahin 2014). A key literary, educational and moral concept that shaped Muslim higher education—particularly its humanities curriculum, the *adab*, mentioned above, which meant refinement of character, manners, aesthetic and literary taste—was developed out of interaction with the Indio-Persian heritage that Muslims inherited (Metcalf 1984). Ibn al-Muqaffa (d.670), a convert from Persia, is usually credited with the development of the literary- and moral education-focused *adab* genre that is often overlooked in the recent literature discussed earlier. It is significant that, when Muslims first reached Southeast Asia, largely through trade, instead of dismissing the deeply-rooted values of Hinduism and Buddhism of the region, they integrated and creatively expressed Islam within this rich civilizational tapestry. The morally and spiritually redefined Islamic *adab* become easily adoptable by people who mostly voluntarily converted to Islam. The *adab* complemented and was richly reinterpreted within the indigenous educational cultures. For example, it was infused into the sense of being an 'educated person' as depicted in the *Darangen*, the pre-Islamic oral epic poem of the *Maranao* people of southern Philippines (Milligan 2005). It is not surprising to note that so many contemporary Muslim thinkers in Southeast Asia, like Al-Attas (1980) in Malaysia mentioned above, have preferred the concept of *adab* to be at the centre of their understanding of education in Islam.

Perhaps the largest outside influence contributing to the early flourishing of Muslim civilization came from the encounter with ancient Greek thought, mainly Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism, that had already shaped Christianity and to some extent Judaism. Muslims preserved, studied and expanded ancient Greek philosophy and science (Gutas 1998; Walbridge 2001) without much serious hindrance from their faith. Most of the early Muslim moral and educational thought was actually modelled on ancient Greek works. Even Muslim theologians, *mutakallimun*, could not resist adopting the systematic thinking habits of the ancient Greeks. It was mostly the educated Christian Arabs who possessed the required linguistic competence and were encouraged by the Muslim Caliphs to translate Greek philosophical and scientific works into Arabic (Ephat 2000). A Muslim philosopher like Al-Farabi (d.951), in his well-known book on 'attaining happiness', not only commented but developed these original works to the point of attempting to reconcile the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (d.1037) even began to domesticate Islam within the thinking habits of ancient Greek philosophy, which he took to be superior to the religious language of Islam that he merited only as a good source of general public moral education. Muslim theologians like Al-Ghazali (d.1111) and Ibn Taymiyah (d.1328), who had mastered Greek philosophy and classical Islamic sciences, eventually offered a much more nuanced and critical reading of the ancient Greek legacy. Al-Ghazzali (2002) exposed the incoherence in the philosophical discourse of Muslim philosophers like Ibn Sina, and Ibn Taymiyah wrote influential works refuting Aristotelian logic (Hallaq 1997). However, even the pioneers of early indigenous Islamic rationality, *Mutazilah*, could not resist using the categories of philosophical thinking that had led to the emergence of Islamic philosophical theology. The Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (d.1198), working in the early Muslim Western context of Spain, persuasively argued for the strong compatibility between Islam (*shariah*) and Greek philosophy. As Günther (2015) short comparative study demonstrates, nourished by ancient Greek ideas, the Muslim Averroes's

and the Christian Thomas Aquinas's philosophies of education exhibit stark similarities. Such a dialectical engagement enriched classical Muslim thought as it enabled a synthetic and integrated Muslim educational self-understanding to flourish. *It cannot be stressed highly enough that contemporary Muslims need to have confidence in their tradition and revive this early Muslim spirit of learning and critical education in order to engage creatively with the challenges facing them.*

Moreover, in order to demonstrate this Islamic/Western creative exchange and dialogue, it suffices to consider how early Muslim scholars developed a notion of being a 'perfect human being' (*alinsan alkamil*) through educational practice that had many parallels with the ancient Greek perception of the same idea. Yahya ibn 'Adi (d.974), a student of Al-Farabi who was a Syriac Jacobite Christian philosopher, theologian and translator working in Arabic in medieval Baghdad, suggested that the 'perfect man' is the one who has 'every virtue and is without vice'. He lists these virtues as 'temperance, contentment, preservation of one's reputation, clemency, dignified and modest behaviour, affection, compassion and mercy, loyalty, trustworthiness, keeping of secrets, modesty, cheerfulness, truthfulness, good will and sincerity'. Ibn Sina, just like Aristotle, believed that the heart is the seat of all human faculties, even though they function through different parts of the brain. The 'best or perfect man', according to Ibn Sina, is one whose soul is perfected by becoming an intellect in act, and who has acquired the morals that constitute the practical virtues (Mahdi 2001).

Similar ideas shaped most of the classical Muslim spiritual tradition, *tasawwuf*, particularly the theosophical thought represented by influential figures like Ibn 'Arabi (d.1240) who was most receptive of philosophy. As Chittick (2007) observes, Ibn 'Arabi sees the human higher faculty of the intellect as the heart (*qalb*) that is capable of receiving divine gifts as distinct from discursive reason ('*aql*). The discursive rationality has analytical capacity to distinguish one thing from another. The 'heart', *qalb*—literally 'that which turns over, rotates'—on the other hand, symbolises the soul's innate yearning and dynamic search for the blessings as fresh manifestations of the divine Being. Furthermore, Muslim philosophers and theologians agreed with Aristotle's view that 'reasoning' is the distinctive essence or telos symbolizing human excellence as it uniquely enables humans to have a reflective understanding of the world and one's special place within it.

Most classical Islamic ethical thought and moral education, with few exceptions, have parallels with, if are not actually modelled on, early Greek thinking. This was not a simple borrowing but a creative appropriation and integration into the core revelation-based Islamic values. For example, the books written within the genre of *adab* were mostly entitled 'refinement of character' (*tahdhib al-akhlaq*) and modelled on the original Greek-inspired work by the Christian Ibn 'Adi mentioned above. Naturally, Ibn 'Adi's book has no reference to the Qur'an (Al-Takriti 1978) but the equivalent works by Muslim scholars—such as al-Raghab al-Isfahani (d.1109) and even philosopher Ibn Miskawayh (d.1030) who penned a work with the same title (Miskawayh 1968)—integrated the core Greek ethics with insights gleaned from the Qur'an and prophetic traditions (Ansari 1963). It appears that the philosophical and educational ethics in Islam were deeply shaped by ancient Greek concepts (Bucar 2018), such as *phronesis*, referring to the kind of practical wisdom and virtues, in Muslim tradition *hikma*, needed for developing a good sense, judgment and following the best course of action in one's life. The epistles of *ikhwan al-safa*, the brethren of purity, in the 8th/10th centuries, is another integrated model of an early comprehensive work on Islamic public education (Sahin 2012). Muslims adopted an educational learning attitude towards their own faith but, most crucially, towards the wisdom embedded in humanity's collective memory. As the 20-volume work, *Book of Songs*, by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d.967) illustrates, even the pre-Islamic Arab oral traditions of singing, poetry, humour, and story-telling were diligently studied and used as educational resources. *Adab* quickly became the literary tradition of the secretarial or administrative class within the Caliphs' court, representing the culture of the professional literati and which indicated an acquired taste, refinement, revered statesmanship, and so on. *Adab* also came to define Islamic spirituality and signify the ethics and manners needed to be observed in different sciences that included the science of exploring the values of

being a good learner, teacher and even conducting scientific inquiries (*adab al-ta'lim wa al-muta'llim/adab al-tahqiq*) (Sahin 2017).

Most crucially, the dichotomic perception laid out in Table 1 does not square with the nature and character of educational self-understanding in Muslim core sources and the diverse traditions relating to its higher education institutions. There is no space here to explore the dynamic educational theology and hermeneutics that shaped the Muslim intellectual heritage but, suffice to say that while Muslim higher education was open to the values developed within diverse pedagogic and ethical models outside the Muslim world, it managed to interpret them within a higher Islamic educational value system. For example, as already noted, the classical Greek ethical idea of *sophrosyne* ('excellence of character, perfect harmony') that also refers to the 'power of self-control, training and controlling passion with reason' influenced Muslim educational ethics and its perception of the perfect human being. However, the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions put forward a much more holistic perception of human nature and its perfection into a balanced maturity that integrates bodily, rational, emotional, moral and spiritual elements. The idea of human excellence, harmony and just balance is expressed not with the brute power of control or possession of abstract knowledge but with the concept of *ihsaan*: that is, perfecting one's conduct in life and showing values of kindness, compassion, generosity, hospitality and openness. The inner control is tied with increasing self-awareness and God-consciousness (*taqwa*). Furthermore, a rigorous application of educational hermeneutics on the Qur'an reveals that the value of gratitude (*shukr*) defines the nature of Islamic faithfulness and bringing about a grateful humanity lies at the heart of Qur'anic critical and reflective pedagogy (Sahin 2017).

The early Muslim community, inspired by the transformative divine educational vision of the Qur'an that can best be expressed with the concept of *tarbiyah*, imbued its spiritual devotion with a deeper reflective competence, thus becoming witness to the 'critical faithfulness' embedded at the ethical core of monotheism as voiced by the Abrahamic faith traditions (Sahin 2016a). This educational curiosity motivated early Muslims to deepen their understanding of Islam and the world around them. Naturally, this triggered the emergence of a dynamic and holistic Islamic epistemology, facilitating the advent of the classical Muslim sciences and a creativity which generated new knowledge, insights and meanings. Early Muslims' educational openness, which was a key catalyst in the initial rapid expansion of Islam, enabled them to have the confidence to accommodate the creativity of the new Muslims who brought with them diverse sets of cultural and intellectual insights thereby enriching Muslim civilization.

Furthermore, the values of educational ethics in Islamic and Western civilisations in their secular and religious foundations rests on the notion of human dignity. For example, within the Judeo-Christian tradition there is a clear emphasis on the idea that humanity is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–28) and, therefore, the dignity and sanctity of all humanity, regardless of colour and creed, need to be respected. Moreover, within prophetic monotheism there is a clear demand that practising justice and addressing inequality should be part of faithfulness. In the Muslim tradition, contributing to the 'common good' (*maslahah*) and ensuring the dignity (*karamah*), well-being and security of all, regardless of communities' ethnicity and religious affiliation, are fundamental educational and ethical values (Sahin 2018a).

Recognition of the dignity of the 'other' requires a willingness to 'relativise' (that is, contextualise) our inherited identities, a necessary if not sufficient condition to engage with and learn from one another. This requires 'critical openness'—a key competence which needs to be nurtured in multicultural societies if a new sense of solidarity and social cohesion is to emerge. If we are unable to show humility, we will risk doing violence to the other by simply assimilating them to our own self-understanding. It must be stressed that faith implies a capacity for both 'self-relativising and self-transcendence': that is, an ability to recognize both the contextual/contingent character of human existence and the need to remain critically open to the world around us and the ultimate reality beyond us (God). Contrary to current political readings depicting Islam as a totalitarian closed system, its educational theology emphasises the contingent character of the human condition so making human

life always *relative* to certain contexts, which in turn opens up the possibility of dialogue. The difference and diversity in human life and in nature in the Qur'an were acknowledged as signifying God's eternal knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, respecting diversity could be seen as appreciating the Divine creativity. All of these critical educational values are actually mentioned in the Qur'an as being among the central features of a faithful and balanced community (Sahin 2017). Read within such a contextual hermeneutics, theology (that is, the vertical dimension of faith, or God-centredness) becomes an anthropology (that is, translates into a human-focused horizontal dimension articulated as an ethical demand to facilitate human well-being, justice, happiness and fulfilment). As such, faith becomes a liberating and empowering educational force facilitating human flourishing (*tarbiyah*), nurturing values of gratitude (*shukr*) and respect for human dignity (*karamah*), and emphasising the need to remain open to difference (*taaruf*). The Islamic education of Muslim children and young people therefore should necessarily include understanding the plurality in Muslim tradition and the wider religious diversity in the modern world. As such, Islamic Education and inclusive Religious Education in the UK schooling system, for example, instead of being antagonistic, in fact, can complement one another (Jackson 2018; Sahin 2010). For a detailed analysis of this critical educational concepts in Islam, see Sahin (2013, 2014).

6. Islamic Higher Education in a Secular Context: Towards a Critical Islamic Pedagogy of Reconciliation

There is a complex set of challenges that arise from the presence of diverse Muslim communities in Europe today. Challenges are often perceived, interpreted and responded to differently by the minority Muslim communities in Europe and the wider secular European states and societies. Instead of a dialogical *convergence*, there seems to be a politics of *divergence* at work when framing this sensitive issue. The widespread policies of surveillance and feeling of being under suspicion severely undermine Muslim civic rights, recognition and participation within the democratic polity that professes to be open and inclusive of cultural and religious plurality. There is a growing number of promising Muslim individual and group initiatives that aim to create a positive change within British Muslim communities (Lewis and Hamid 2018). However, it is regrettable that during the last two decades Muslim communities, by and large, have been very reluctant to acknowledge the rise of religious extremism in their midst while policy-makers have simply assumed that a security-focused approach will solve the problem of radicalisation and violent extremism. Within such a polarised context, it is difficult to discern constructive ways with which to address the challenges that are strongly felt and voiced by both Muslim communities and wider society.

The worrying political developments appear deliberately to undermine the core values of Western secular democracy and reignite the appeal to the ideology of far-right movements that aim to capitalize on anti-migration, anti-globalization and anti-Islam/Muslim sentiments. The aim is to spread suspicion over ethnic and cultural diversity by invoking a sense of imagined national 'purity and uniqueness' that excludes those deemed to be the outsiders. The Muslim 'other' has been particularly singled out as an intrusive alien force that pollutes the 'pure European culture' with 'barbaric' institutions like *shariah* courts and practices like wearing the face veil (*niqab*) and headscarf (*hijab*). Recently, several European countries such as France and Denmark, under pressure from far right-leaning groups, have introduced a 'niqab/burqa ban'. Despite denials, it is a reactionary blanket ban that unfairly targets Muslim women. It is an unnecessary and disproportionate measure that will be largely counterproductive by further alienating and stigmatizing European Muslims. Considering that only a tiny minority of Muslim women actually wear *niqab*, it is more concerning that the state felt the need to introduce such a blanket ban. This will promote the false 'us and them' narrative actively propagated by both extremist Islamists and the anti-Islam-focused rhetoric of the far right. Both thrive on manipulating people's insecurities and imagined fear of one another. The ban's pretext of preventing the perceived oppression of Muslim women and helping to integrate people living in the 'ghettos' into wider society is deceptive. Renewing mutual trust by addressing crippling socio-economic conditions affecting

minority communities would have been a far more obvious and effective way of facilitating social mobility and preventing the formation of ghettos.

As argued at the start of the article, many non-specialist academics in Social Science feel the urge to produce books on education, Islam and Islamic Education (for two good examples, see [Daun and Arjmand 2018](#); [Abbas 2010](#)). With very few exceptions, however, most of the literature on contemporary Islamic Education and more specifically Muslim higher education adopt a narrow historical or socio-political focus while neglecting engagement with educational and pedagogic culture within these institutions. A meaningful integration of Islamic higher education within the mainstream university system in the West requires collaborative partnerships. Above all else, it requires the presence of a professional approach to Islamic Education as well as a critical/reflective holistic Muslim educational philosophy that is not hindered by the simplistic dismissal of Western liberal secular education. Similarly, Western liberal educators need to be part of this critical dialogue, showing curiosity about the educational thought of Islam, rather than simply dismissing Islamic education as mere religious instruction and indoctrination.

In such a volatile socio-political context, it is important to find out how Islamic higher education institutions respond to the educational challenges facing the community. In the UK alone, there are more than 25 traditional Muslim higher education institutions (the theological seminaries known as *dar-al-uluum/hawza*), none of which are recognised by the mainstream UK education system. They have similarities with the Jewish learning institution, the Yeshiva, that focuses on the study of traditional religious texts, primarily the Talmud and the Torah, and share the same challenges regarding recognition and integration into the wider secular educational system. There is a handful of independent hybrid Muslim higher education institutions which offer externally validated degrees. Most of these institutions have been set up by contemporary transnational Islamic movements, networks belonging to both majority *Sunni* and minority *Shia* Islam. Most of these movements have come out of the trauma of the postcolonial Muslim world and largely shape the religiosity of Muslims in the UK and wider Europe. Mainly due to access issues, there has not been any serious study of these institutions exploring the student-intake, duration, curriculum, and the expected religious- and employment-related outcomes of such a long educational process that includes a parallel study provision for completing GCSEs and A levels. However, the few existing ethnographic studies, as well as government-sponsored short reports on Muslim seminaries and training of Muslim faith leaders, are too anecdotal to be taken seriously. The recent Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded projects on hybrid Muslim higher education institutions and their collaborative partnerships with wider UK universities do not appear to be engaging with the challenges facing these institutions. [Home Office \(2018b\)](#) recently put forward a new Green paper that addresses challenges of communities' integration in the UK and appears to engage with the barriers to traditional Islamic seminary training achieving intuitional accreditation and validation of their courses. However, it must be stressed that in order to mainstream Muslim seminaries, first the nature and standards of education in these institutions need to be properly mapped and, most significantly, the impact of the teaching/learning experiences on the formation of students' identity and values needs to be urgently researched ([Sahin 2014](#)).

Often set up by charismatic personalities, these institutions act like missionary networks (*da'wah*). They show more interest in reproducing the existing power structures as well as expanding their influence among the young by perpetuating certain interpretations of Islam through a network of mosques, educational institutions and diverse forms of activism. It appears there is less interest in building an open reflective Muslim educational culture that adopts a professional attitude to education, develops recognisable educational standards, and puts student needs at the heart of its pedagogic mission. For over a decade, I have been exploring the formation of religiosities among Muslim youth, faith leaders and graduates of traditional Islamic seminaries in Britain over more than a decade ([Sahin 2014](#)). The data were gathered through a 'Semi-Structured Muslim Subjectivity Interview Schedule' (MSIS) which includes an 'attitude towards Islam' scale, a self-characterization sketch and several theological/socio-political themes that the participants are invited to discuss. The interviews were

analysed by applying a set of assessment criteria constructed to discern psycho-social processes of 'commitment and exploration' as articulated within the religious life of the participants.

This longitudinal study has revealed four types of 'religiosity' amongst the students and the graduates of Muslim higher education institutions in the UK. The first is an 'exploratory' religious identity, mostly observed among female and younger age groups, who wanted the relevance of Islam to be demonstrated rather than merely asserted; the second is a 'diffused identity' where Islam only functions as a cultural sentiment; the third is a 'foreclosed' religiosity where the personal agency is least visible, potentially rendering individuals vulnerable to radical voices. Different degrees of foreclosed religiosities appear to dominant the religious and religious life-world of many Muslim young people. The two latter religiosities—coupled with increasing Islamophobia, socioeconomic inequalities, the reality of inter-generational change and what is perceived to be unjust and unethical Western foreign policy towards the Muslim world—have created a fertile ground for religious extremism to emerge. The fourth, 'achieved mode' of religiosity, signifying an exploratory and confident sense of religious agency, showing willingness to accept diverse interpretations of Islam and engage with the cultural plurality, has not been observed among the study participants. Two recent empirical studies (Zaheer 2018; Khan 2015) using Sahin's MSIS, show that the educational and pedagogic culture which is overwhelmingly 'text-teacher-centred/transmission-oriented', observed in current traditional Muslim theological seminaries, and the hybrid Muslim higher education institutions appear to be largely reproducing the dominant 'foreclosed type' of religiosity and hence perpetuating the leadership crises affecting Muslim communities.

Research on the traditional Muslim seminaries in the UK is scarce. As such, what is even less known is the female students' experience of studying in these institutions and whether these institutions are able to effectively facilitate the formation of Muslim female education and faith leadership in the UK. A recent qualitative case study (Sahin 2018b), consisting of 25 in-depth interviews conducted among the female graduates of traditional seminaries in the UK, indicates the presence of worrying pedagogic, educational and student-welfare related issues. Students were immensely proud of acquiring '*ilm*, religious knowledge, at a high level and emphasised the significance of *dar al-uluum* education in preserving Muslim faith heritage among young generations of British Muslims. However, based on their experience, the participants seemed skeptical about the degree to which this aim was properly achieved. Many young people they knew who went through the system, including the non-residential *alimiyyah* courses, did not always develop the expected deep understanding of Islam and, in some cases, once out of the control of the institution, had even become less religiously observant. Although English is increasingly becoming adopted as the language of instruction, most of the texts studied are in classical Arabic or Urdu. Mastery of these languages remain a challenge for most of the students.

The participants appreciated the emphasis on respect for the teachers and deep reverence towards the texts they studied. However, they would welcome the opportunity of developing critical/reflective study skills to engage with diverse aspects of Islam which, they thought, would greatly assist their personal exploration of Islam. They stressed that the *dar al-uluum* education is very demanding and not many could cope with such a long theological study. They further suggested that for many students having an essential Islamic literacy necessary for proper practice of Islam would be enough. Those who wish to continue with the full theological specialism in the *dar al-uluum* should be carefully selected, based on their competence, as they will be prepared for the role of representing the religious and spiritual authority in the community. Moreover, they voiced concern over a lack of career guidance in these institutions. Unlike male students who do have a chance of being employed as an imam, they had to settle for a teaching position in their local *madrasah*, a role they felt they were not prepared for. Participants expressed that they attended seminaries out of strong family encouragement and the fear of a secular college/university that is perceived to be alienating young people from their faith and culture. They felt uncomfortable with the discontinuity in their educational experience gained in mainstream schooling and the *dar al-uluum*. The latter, they opined, was a much more controlling

educational culture, centred around the authority of the teacher(s) and contributing less to formation of their personal agency. They felt that for some of them, the residential students in particular, the *dar al-uluuum* education can be very isolating. These initial findings contradict the aspirational arguments put forward in some recent studies (Bano 2017) that suggest Muslim women empowerment that ostensibly occurs in contemporary female Islamic education movements across the Muslim world.

Most hybrid Islamic higher education institutions are based on highly pragmatic collaborative partnerships with mainstream universities validating their academic degrees. Such a collaborative provision, which in principle is a positive development that needs to be encouraged, increases the legitimacy and academic reputation of the former institutions. However, despite such partnerships having existed for almost two decades now, there is hardly a single convincing case where it has led to formation of a reflective educational, academic exchange and dialogue between Islamic institutions and their validating university partners. The educational/pedagogic culture and the wider academic environment within these institutions almost always remain the same: a variation of a teacher-text centred provision that hardly encourages students to develop reflective critical learning skills and facilitate an open engagement with the curriculum. Therefore, such partnerships often do not go beyond an initially set short period and have not facilitated enough academic capacity-building that could enable these institutions to offer their own degrees and become the first models of trusted and inclusive Islamic higher education institutions in Western Europe. Most importantly, what European Muslim communities desperately need is establishment of specialist Islamic teacher training colleges so that educational and pedagogic challenges facing Islamic schooling, including the supplementary sector (*maktab/madrassah*) and higher education (*dar al-uluuum*), can be properly addressed.

Young European Muslim leadership needs to be resourced with a *reflective Muslim paideia*—the interpretive and imaginative educational culture (*tarbiyah*)—that facilitate indigenous Islamic expressions of being European and European articulations of Islam. Islamic higher education appears very distant from bringing about such an urgently needed education model in both majority and minority Muslim societies. In continental Europe, due to the pressure to mitigate against perceived Islamist extremism, there is now state-sponsored academic provision for Islamic theology and teacher training which, due to space limitations, has not been evaluated here. In the UK, the first Islamic Education access course that is focused on bridging *the pedagogic gap* between the educational cultures of the traditional Islamic higher education institutions and mainstream university is offered at the University of Warwick, where Islamic Education Studies is a recognised interdisciplinary field of research, scholarly study and professional development¹.

7. Educational Crisis in Muslim Majority Societies: Failures of Religious Revival and Secular Reform Agendas

Recent studies of world religious demographics suggest that Muslims are the only major religious group predicted to increase faster than the world population as a whole (Pew Report 2015). The higher birth rate means continuous higher percentages of young people within the overall demographics of Muslim societies. The absence of an open, political system and a functioning quality higher education prevent young people from developing their agency and gaining the skills necessary for accessing jobs and fulfilling their potential. Instead, most of their energy and talent are wasted as they experience challenges stemming from the reality of inter-generational change and frustration with the lack of job opportunities preventing them becoming productive members of their societies.

The challenges facing the educational culture at the universities in Muslim majority societies need to be taken up by a separate study. The existing literature on higher education in the modern Muslim world, while encouraging the need to have a dialogue between Islamic and Western universities (Muborakshoeva 2013), does not offer a critical engagement with the educational culture and pedagogic

¹ For further information see: https://warwick.ac.uk/newsandevents/pressreleases/uks_first_access/.

practice shaping the educational crisis facing these societies. However, there are a few encouraging attempts, particularly in Indonesia, to develop an integrated model of Islamic higher education (Woodward 2015). It appears that an indigenous 'Islamic civic, democratic educational vision' is starting to shape Indonesian Islamic universities. It is important not to idealise this situation as is often done in the existing literature on Indonesian Islam, for example in the well-received works by anthropologist Hefner (2000, 2018). Both the 'progressive reform' and 'conservative revival' agendas in Indonesia have been shaped by wider political forces of Westernisation, nationalism and Islamic renewal movements (Barton 2004). The Islam/West binary, explored above, continues to frame higher education in most of the so-called hinterland of the Muslim world too. As several Arab Human Development Report (2003, 2005, 2009) have shown, there is little evidence suggesting that higher education is actually contributing to positive social change, even in oil-rich Arab Gulf states (Willoughby 2018).

The newly found wealth seems to have enabled a reconfiguration/modernisation of traditional Islamic higher education institutions. They have become significant 'soft powers' creating transnational religious economies that include both material and spiritual capital essential for disseminating the mission (*da'wah*) of international revivalist networks across the globe. The interesting study by Farquhar (2016) illustrates this point by exploring the role of the international Islamic university in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, in promoting the *salafi* interpretations of Islam in Muslim majority and increasingly minority communities through its international alumina. On the other hand, the increasing colonisation of higher education space by the Western universities, mainly motivated by business interests, appears to be making little positive impact. In fact, it only reinforces the dichotomy between Western liberal arts/science education and traditional perceptions and values of education in these societies (Guessoum 2018).

Overall, Muslim societies appear unable to meaningfully manage the reality of inter-generational change and internal ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and to address the rise of religious extremism, as well as the concerns over gender equality, human rights and lack of social mobility and economic justice. The long-term consequences of these multifaceted challenges become detrimental when Muslim societies no longer display the educational capacity, resilience and confidence to engage and respond to these complex challenges (Boutieri 2016). It appears that the educational crisis affects both the centre of the Muslim world, including the oil-rich Arab Gulf states, as well as the so-called Muslim periphery, such as South East Asia, that actually houses the largest Muslim country in the world (i.e., Indonesia). How do we account for the disturbing fact that educational institutions, whether traditional/indigenous or enforced/borrowed secular Western, have failed to bring about positive change in contemporary Muslim societies? How can contemporary Muslim societies effectively address this chronic educational crisis and engage with the urgent task of forming a dynamic transformative educational culture vital for their survival and a meaningful re-articulation of Islam in the 21st century world?

As argued at the start of this inquiry, a deeper probing of the above questions will require examining the perception of education and the attitudes toward learning and teaching in Muslim societies. This search will inevitably bring about the need to explore Islamic educational culture and its traditional institutions within contemporary Muslim societies. Both formal and informal Islamic education provision remain crucial in the formation and continuity of a shared faith-centred universe of meaning and values across Muslim societies. Moreover, the formation of an indigenous meaningful narrative on nationhood, citizenship and civic identities cannot ignore the reality of Islam, its ethical values and patterns of educational transmission across generations. Due to its significance, it follows that there is an urgent need to rethink the overall Islamic educational culture and the role it plays within the way these societies perceive and manage this unprecedented rapid socio-cultural change in their midst.

The critical and reflective Islamic reform advocated by the so-called first Muslim modernists during the late 19th/early 20th century, such as J. Afghani (d.1897), M. Abduh (d.1905), R. Rida (d.1935), as well as in the Muslim minority context of India by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d.1898)

(Lelyveld 1978), was largely framed in the context of admiration for the scientific achievements of the prosperous West. As such, they advocated directly borrowing Western science and its secular higher education institutions that they thought would achieve similar miraculous results for the intellectually, socially and economically backward Muslim societies. Furthermore, they legitimised such wholesale borrowing by asserting, rather than demonstrating, that unlike Christianity Islam was compatible with science. The Qur'an was seen as a science book confirming scientific discoveries. Even scientific commentaries of Qur'an began to appear, like the work by the Egyptian exegete Tantawi Jawhari (d.1940). Although some of these early reformers were involved in an official capacity with educational reform in the Muslim world, it appears they had not quite recognised the fact that scientific achievements come out of a scientific attitude towards life, which, in turn, was nurtured within a deeper reflective, inquiring, educational culture.

It was with the pioneering work of late 20th century reformist scholars who had a genuine experience of the modern West, such as Fazlur Rahman, that the significance of a more foundational level educational/intellectual reform was recognised as essential in order for Muslim societies to undertake a critical engagement with their historical legacy, as well as producing a meaningful educational response to Western modernity. Rahman (1984) called for the establishment of strong Social Science and Humanities provision within Muslim higher education institutions so that young generations of Muslims could develop the competence and confidence to engage with this urgent task. For him, bringing about a mature Islamic presence in the modern world was conditional on the availability of a transformative Muslim educational culture that would facilitate formation of a distinctive 'Islamic modernity' by creatively integrating and expressing Muslim tradition within the context of the contemporary world. This, he forcefully argued, should not be confused with authoritarian top-to-bottom reform/modernisation attempts aimed at simply copying Western secular modernity and its political, legal, economic and cultural institutions.

The secularist reform agenda did enforce the establishment of Western style secular educational institutions including Science, Social Science and Liberal Arts/Humanities provision. But they have remained artificial imitations only serving the needs of a highly Westernised elite, thus perpetuating certain power relations but having almost no impact on the rest of society in facilitating a reflective dialogue with the cultural reality of these societies. Rather, the top-to-bottom Western education has intensified the phenomenon of 'double alienation' by producing monolithic binary mind-sets formed around mutually exclusive, secularist or traditionalist positions. Lack of trust, fear and prejudice towards one another left them incapable of showing desire to engage with a reflective dialogue. It is interesting to note that exposure to science education among religiously committed Muslim young people does not appear to be helping them form 'exploratory' identities and religiosities. On the contrary, it seems most of the individuals engaged with violent Islamist extremism come from science education backgrounds such as engineering (Gambetta and Hertog 2016).

This one-dimensional educational culture has neither been overcome nor bridged nor addressed by the more recent reform initiatives sponsored under the rubric of international aid and development programmes. The assumption that, if we simply inject Western Science, humanities and Liberal Arts curricula or indeed introduce habits of post-modern thinking/reading of the Muslim heritage into traditional Muslim education institutions, Muslim societies will be transformed, is rather short-sighted. What is needed is the formation of a new transformative Islamic educational philosophy capable of nurturing a pedagogic culture of meaningful integration and dialogue. This task, as argued at the outset of the inquiry, requires the adoption of a distinctive educational and pedagogic habit and method of thinking and engagement (educational hermeneutics) in the first place. It appears that this fundamental hermeneutic task has not even been recognised let alone discussed in various 'World Conferences on Islamic Education' convened to engage with the openly-acknowledged educational crises in Muslim societies: for example, in Makkah (1977) on the Islamic educational objectives, in Islamabad (1980) on the curriculum, in Bangladesh (1981) on textbook development, in Jakarta (1982) on teaching methods, in Cairo (1987) on evaluation of Islamic Education, in Cape Town (1996) on

extending Islamic Education vision to shape the rest of the school subjects, in Selangor (2009), and in Brunei (2012) on Islamisation of education and globalisation.

Furthermore, educational attainment in Muslim societies—from literacy rates to Mathematics/Science achievements—are well below global standards. Almost none of the goals set in 2000 by the National Education for All (EFA) pledge have been achieved. According to [Arab Human Development Report \(2009\)](#), the gap between rich and poor continues to grow, and poor children receive grossly inadequate schooling. The performance indicators on the Higher Education Sector are equally concerning. Despite the Muslim world possessing large natural resources and wealth, the quality of life in contemporary Muslim societies and their contribution to human knowledge and creativity all remain inadequate. It is important to stress that none of these self-critical observations suggest idealising Western education and thus obscuring the fact that Western educational institutions are turning into quasi-markets, reducing education to mere training and measurable performance. Nurturing individual autonomy/agency, building reflective capacity and moral awareness—as well as accountability towards one's self, others and the wider environment—are fast dropping in the list of priorities in the West, too. Even 'values education' has been largely colonised and re-packaged as 'generic skills' or 'competencies' and students are being encouraged to capitalise on performative values rather than develop transformative values.

However, any critique of Western education should not act as a defence mechanism and a comfort zone to avoid facing the painful reality of an acute, educational crisis, a crisis evident in a rigid pattern of Islamic identity formation, as well as inability to transform the contemporary intellectual, socio-economic and political stagnation in much of the Muslim world. The internal, educational weakness and absence of critical reflection constitute the crisis at the heart of contemporary Muslim societies. Without a transformative educational culture, the wider social, economic and political reform agendas are bound to remain unsuccessful. This educational crisis, as discussed above, predates the Muslim encounter with Western colonialism. The latter, however, has largely shaped the emergence of reactionary 'Islamic renewal and reform' initiatives in Muslim societies since the late 19th century and translated into largely unsuccessful modernisation/Westernisation projects in the modern world. The lack of an indigenous, transformative, educational vision necessary for enabling the society to own this process of profound change and the struggle for a new self-articulation has severely hindered the reform agendas.

8. Conclusions

Contemporary societies are increasingly defined by cultural and religious plurality. Making sense of such hyper-cultural diversity, enabling it to become a positive resource for enriching humanity, and inspiring peaceful and just coexistence, is one of the central challenges facing the 21st century world. The irrational fear of the 'other' and cultural plurality have begun to put humanity into a regressive mode of desiring to return to an 'imagined' past seeking solace in an idealized 'pure identity narrative'. This threatens the inclusive nature of democratic societies and deepens the structural inequalities in these societies. This paper has discussed the importance of creating a reflective dialogue across contemporary, diverse cultures of higher education in order to facilitate mutual understanding and a desire to better relate to one another, thus leading to a community of global learners and just and peaceful coexistence. The younger generation needs to be given the opportunity for developing intercultural competence and educational values, inspiring them to learn and remain critically open to one another.

This article has deconstructed the imagined, binary incompatibility between Islamic and Western higher educational values. In its place, it has offered evidence for the presence of a shared reflective and critical educational heritage between Islam and the West and argued for the need to revive this forgotten tradition of *pedagogic curiosity* in order to inspire a new cross-pollinating dialogue capable of acknowledging the dignity of difference and recognizing the reality of sharing an interdependent world.

The gradually emerging Muslim higher education institutions and wider mainstream universities need to extol and embed the educational values of critical openness and dialogue so that they can better respond to the changing needs of students under their care. The paper's overall conclusion is that the formation of Islamic Education Studies as an interdisciplinary field of empirical research, scholarly inquiry and professional development in both Islamic and wider Western higher education would facilitate such a much-needed, critical/reflective dialogue between Islamic and diverse Western educational traditions.

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