



# All That We Lost: The Colonized Mind and the Decline of the Islamic Education System

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## Author Biography

**Faisal Malik** has a BA in Religion from Concordia University and an MA from the department of Near/Middle Eastern Civilizations from the University of Toronto. He has researched the impact of colonialism on the education system in different regions of the Muslim world and presented on the topic of colonialism and education at various conferences in the US, Canada, and Malaysia. He is currently a Marketing & Project Coordinator for ICNA Relief Canada.

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## Introduction

### In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

In a 2009 CNN documentary entitled *Generation Islam*, a segment dedicated to Islamic education in Pakistan stated: “Many madrassas teach a version of Islam that's locked in the past. Students are rarely taught math or science...” The documentary then goes on to praise an NGO worker by describing him as “...on the forefront of the battle to modernize Pakistan's madrassas....”<sup>1</sup> The documentary's depiction of *madaaris*<sup>2</sup> as remnants of a pre-modern Muslim culture frozen in time, out of touch, and at times in conflict with the modern world, is reflective of a wider discourse found in media outlets, think tanks, intellectual circles, and governmental bodies<sup>3</sup> that explains educational challenges of the Muslim world as a result of a lack of “modernization.” From this vantage point, the inability of educational institutes in many parts of the Muslim world to meet the needs of their populations,<sup>4</sup> is explained away as being the result of an inability to evolve into modernity.

The “tradition vs. modernity” narrative has been supported by various historians and academics who have depicted Islamic educational institutes as having a very limited role in intellectual development in Muslim civilization.<sup>5</sup> This narrative, however, has been challenged by many other historians, intellectuals, and scholars over the years,<sup>6</sup> despite the fact that the depiction of Islamic educational institutes,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0908/13/se.01.html>

<sup>2</sup> Plural of *madrassa*.

<sup>3</sup> Farish Noor, Yoginder Sikand, and Martin van Bruinessen, eds., *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG). 2004, October 7. Pakistan: Reforming the Education Sector. Islamabad/Brussels: International Crisis Group & Arab Human Development Report, 2003, *Building a Knowledge Society*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

<sup>5</sup> For examples of influential academics of the past see Goldziher, Ignaz, “The Attitude of Orthodox Islam toward the Ancient Science” in *Studies on Islam*, ed. Merlin L. Swartz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 185–215 & Makdisi, George. *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981). For examples of more recent writers see Hoodbhoy, Pervez, *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality* (London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1991) & Huff, Toby E. *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> For examples of historians and academics who have put forth a more nuanced view of Islamic educational institutes in Muslim civilization, see Ekmeleddin, Ihsanoglu, *History of the Ottoman State, Society &*



such as the *madrasa*, as archaic remnants of a medieval past is still prevalent in popular discourse. Following on the works of earlier researchers and intellectuals, this paper demonstrates that the current state of education in the Muslim world, far from being a remnant of ancient Muslim civilization, is rather a by-product of developments that began during the colonial period.

To make the case that the current state of education in the Muslim world is quite modern, as opposed to a relic of the past, I will examine the philosophical foundations of schooling in the Muslim world and the impact of colonialism on these educational systems. For context, in the Muslim world, the establishment of various school systems were developed on the basis of an Islamic worldview. The oneness of God (*tawhid*), prophethood (*nubuwwa*), and the afterlife (*akhira*) helped shape and sustain the educational institutes established in traditional Muslim societies. Starting in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of European colonialism, the educational system in the Muslim world underwent a radical transformation. European colonialism introduced into the Muslim world educational theories and institutes that were grounded within a secular paradigm. With exposure to these new understandings of pedagogy and schooling, older understandings of education became displaced in many parts of the Muslim world. A problem arose, however, with the fact that these new school systems were established on epistemologies and worldviews that were foreign to the Islamic worldview, which in turn created an educational crisis in the Muslim world that exists to this day.

In this paper I focus on three specific areas:

- 1) The philosophical foundations of schooling in the Muslim world;
- 2) The impact of colonialism on educational systems in the Muslim world;
- 3) An exploration of educational reform in the Muslim world.

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*Civilization* (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture IRCICA, 2002) & Langohr, Vickie (2005) "Colonial Education Systems and the Spread of Local Religious Movements: The Cases of British Egypt and Punjab," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 1 & Robinson, Francis, 1997, "Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 & Sahin, Abdullah. 2018. "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Religions* 9, no. 11: 335, & Iqbal, Muzaffar. *The Making of Islamic Science* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2009).

## The philosophical foundations of schooling in the Muslim world

### *Iqra!* The divine commandment and knowledge

When discussing education in Islam, Muslim historians will often begin with the first verses of the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The first word revealed in the Qur'an was the commandment *Iqra!*, meaning 'Read!' From the next few *ayaat* (verses), it can be extrapolated that Islam from its inception gave importance to searching for knowledge through the divine injunction to read (96:1); to elevating literacy by referring to the pen (*al-qalam*) as being a tool to teach humans (96:4); to examining the observable world by making reference to human origins from an '*alaq* (96:2);<sup>7</sup> and, finally, connecting acquisition of knowledge with gaining cognizance of God (96:1-5).<sup>8</sup>

The call to acquire knowledge is a recurrent theme throughout the Qur'an. In fact the word for knowledge in the Qur'an—'*ilm*—and its derivatives occur more than 800 times in the Qur'an<sup>9</sup> and, after the word *Allah*, this word is the second-most repeated word in the Qur'an.<sup>10</sup> True knowledge from a Qur'anic perspective is not just information and data that can be functionalized for people, society, and institutions; rather, true knowledge is that which transforms human beings and connects them with the source and purpose of their existence and brings them into harmony with the cosmos. In an Islamic framework, the pursuit of knowledge cannot not be divorced from divinely legislated ethics<sup>11</sup> and the metaphysical

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<sup>7</sup> '*Alaq* literally means to cling, has been interpreted as referring to an embryo or a stage in the development of the fetus; see *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 428.

<sup>8</sup> Take, for instance, that the commandment in the first *aya* is not just 'Read!' but to Read in the name of God; the commandment to read is repeated in *aya* 3 and this time followed immediately with a description of God.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 78 & Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, x & Muhammad Abdel Haleem and Elsaid M. Badawi, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008), 635.

<sup>10</sup> Al Zeera, *Wholeness and Holiness in Education*, 63.

<sup>11</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Al-'Ilm: The Book of Knowledge, Book 1 of the Ihya 'Ulum Al-Din: The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, trans. Kenneth Honerkamp (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2015), xxx.

realities that underpin human existence. True knowledge must always lead one back to God.

In regards to the pursuit of knowledge through institutional forms, three terms came to be used for education in the Arabic language and in Muslim civilization:

- 1) *ta'lim*, the root of which means to know, be aware, to perceive, to learn;
- 2) *tarbiyya*, the root of which means to increase, to grow, to rear;
- 3) *taadib*, the root of which means to be cultured, refined, well-mannered.<sup>12</sup>

From these concepts, one can derive the notions of awareness, growth, and refinement as part of the aims of the educational process in the Islamic worldview.

## Flourishing of education institutes in the Muslim world

During the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the first generation of Muslims were encouraged to learn and seek knowledge. The emphasis on acquiring knowledge was so great that during the first major battle of the Muslim community, the Battle of Badr, after the Makkans were defeated, the Prophet ﷺ laid a condition upon some of the Makkan prisoners of war that they could gain their freedom if they were able to teach 10 children to read and write.<sup>13</sup> For the first Muslim community, teaching and learning occurred first in private houses of Muslims, such as the house of ibn al-Arqam, and then later gravitated towards the *masaajid* (plural of *masjid*).<sup>14</sup> While the *masaajid* marked the beginning stages of educational development in the Muslim world, eventually more complex institutions of learning would emerge.<sup>15</sup> With the passage of time and through the system of pious religious endowment (*waqf*), the *madrasa* was born, which helped

<sup>12</sup> Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, xxvi.

<sup>13</sup> Kuldip Kaur, *Madrasa Education In India: A Study of Its Past and Present* (Chandigarh: Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CCRID), 1990), 6 & Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar: Ar-Raheeq-ul-Makhtum*. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2002), 276.

<sup>14</sup> Shawkat Omari, "Towards an Islamic Vision of Parallel Education Institutions," ed. Hussein Abdul-Fattah and Fathi Malkawi, in *The Education Conference Book: Planning, Implementation, Recommendations, and Abstracts of Presented Papers: A Conference on "Towards the Construction of a Contemporary Islamic Educational Theory"* (Amman: Islamic Studies and Research Association, 1990), 176-177 & Sajid Muhammad Qasmi, *Madrasa Education Framework* (Dehli: MANAK Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2005), 12-15.

<sup>15</sup> George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 10.

pave the way for mass institutionalized learning throughout the Muslim world.<sup>16</sup> Under Nizam al-Mulk, the Vizier of the Seljuk Empire in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (CE), the *madrasa* system would flourish<sup>17</sup> and would expand further with the coming of the Ottomans centuries later.<sup>18</sup>

Schools became prevalent in many parts of the Muslim world and were generally accessible to various levels of society. Records show that during the period of Mamluk rule, there were schools in Cairo and Damascus for educating women and in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, education was provided for elderly, divorced, and widowed women.<sup>19</sup> At the time of Muslim rule in Spain, in Cordoba alone there are reported to have been 17 universities and 70 public libraries with hundreds of thousands of books.<sup>20</sup> During the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, there are reports that in Delhi alone there were close to a thousand *madaaris* and education was accessible to all classes of society, including slaves.<sup>21</sup> Many non-Muslims in India during the Mughal period would enroll in *madaaris* and *makaatib* (plural of *maktab*, a type of primary school for children).<sup>22</sup> One colonial official reported in 1857 his amazement at the number of Hindus who were attending Muslim-run schools in the Punjab region.<sup>23</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European tourists visiting places such as Cairo recorded their surprise at the huge percentage of the population that was literate.<sup>24</sup> Reports from French researchers in Algeria during the beginning of the French occupation of Algeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> century noted that the proportion of literate people in Algeria was higher than that in France.<sup>25</sup> These are just some examples of the vast

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>18</sup> Feyyat Gokce, "Minority and Foreign Schools on the Ottoman Education System," *e-international journal of educational research* 1, no. 1 (2010), 42 & Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilization* (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture IRCICA, 2002), 2, 371.

<sup>19</sup> Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, 244.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmed Basheer "Contributions of Muslim Physicians and Other Scholars: 700-1600AC" in *Muslim Contributions to World Civilization*, ed. Syed A.Ahsani, Ahmed Basheer, and Dilnawaz A. Siddiqui (United Kingdom: International Institute of Islamic Thought, Association of Muslim Social Scientists, 2005), 73.

<sup>21</sup> Kaur, *Madrasa Education In India*, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Kaur, *Madrasa Education In India*, 92 & Langohr, Vickie (2005) "Colonial Education Systems and the Spread of Local Religious Movements: The Cases of British Egypt and Punjab." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 1, p. 169.

<sup>23</sup> Vickie Langohr, "Colonial Education Systems and the Spread of Local Religious Movements," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 1 (2005), 168, 169.

<sup>24</sup> Ihsanoglu, *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilization Vol.2*, p. 247.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 247-248.

networks of schools that were prevalent in many parts of the Muslim world. However, the question arises: what exactly was being taught in these schools?

### ***Al-Ma'qul and Al-Manqul: The rational and the transmitted***

When discussing the curriculum of what was being taught and studied in the *madaaris* and other schools in the Muslim world, it is important to note that, unlike the division between religion and the secular that would eventually mark the Western world, traditional Muslim societies did not divide knowledge in this way. In Muslim civilization, religion was viewed as encompassing a holistic view of reality in which reason and rational thought were integrated with sacred knowledge. The curricula of *madaaris* and other schools in the Muslim world were generally divided between the *ulum al-ma'qul* (the rational sciences) and *ulum al-manqul* (the transmitted sciences).<sup>26</sup> Many subjects that would in modern times be classified as secular—such as math, medicine, and others—in traditional Muslim societies would generally fall under the *ulum al-ma'qul*.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that, although many of the *ulum al-ma'qul* (e.g., math, medicine, etc.) would in contemporary times be classified as secular sciences, these subjects were taught in the Muslim world within an Islamic paradigm. Muslim society never saw a need to divorce subjects from religion therefore the *ulum al-ma'qul* were considered a sub-branch of religious learning and Muslim thinkers regarded scientific research as a means of exploring religious truths<sup>28</sup> and contemplating God's creation.

While speaking of the study of medicine, astronomy, or other sciences as grounded in an Islamic paradigm might seem strange to some, it is important to note that no subject can be taught outside of a paradigm and a worldview. While many disciplines studied and taught in the West and secular universities often claim universality, deep analysis would find them grounded in a various array of

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<sup>26</sup> Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, XX & Francis Robinson, "Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (1997), 152.

<sup>27</sup> Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, XX & Kaur, *Madrasa Education In India: A Study of Its Past and Present*, 170.

<sup>28</sup> Cook, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, XX.



paradigms and worldviews, whether positivism, reductionism, relativism, historicism, etc.

Just glimpsing the lives and works of prominent thinkers who lived during the period when Muslim civilization flourished, one can find many instances that demonstrate how Muslim societies were established on an integrative approach to knowledge that combined religion, reason, science, ethics, and metaphysics.

Ibn Sina, the famous Muslim polymath who lived in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, divided theoretical philosophy in relation to matter and motion into three types of science: natural, mathematical, and theological/metaphysical.<sup>29</sup> He did not see these sciences as secular and religious; rather, he saw them as divisions within a larger framework of knowledge. It is noteworthy that while Ibn Sina believed that theology/metaphysics was the highest of sciences and natural sciences was the lowest,<sup>30</sup> this did not hinder his approach to the natural sciences, with his work on medicine (*Qanun fi al-Tibb*) becoming the standard textbook on medicine in Europe for several centuries.<sup>31</sup>

The famous theologian Al-Ghazali, who lived just a generation after Ibn Sina, praised the study of medicine and math and claimed that it was a communal obligation for some people within a community to study these sciences. For Al-Ghazali, any field of study that was necessary for developing communities—such as medicine, math, agricultural, and others—was considered theologically a communal religious obligation and at least some members of every community needed to be skilled in such sciences.<sup>32</sup>

The 14<sup>th</sup>-century historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun wrote in his *Al Muqaddimah* about the various sciences that were being studied in the Muslim world at his time and noted that the sciences that were included amongst the *ulum al-ma'qul* were logic, physics, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, medicine, algebra,

<sup>29</sup> Al Zeera, *Wholeness and Holiness in Education*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>31</sup> Ahmed “Contributions of Muslim Physicians and Other Scholars,” 80.

<sup>32</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Kitab Al-Ilm*, 38.

optics, and others.<sup>33</sup> He noted that there existed a high regard for math in some Muslim communities and children were taught the subject at an early age.<sup>34</sup> It is also noteworthy that, in outlining the various sciences that were being studied in the Muslim world, Ibn Khaldun also observed that, throughout Muslim civilization, the Qur'an played a central role in the education of children.<sup>35</sup> One example of the centrality and impact of Qur'anic education in the Muslim world can be seen in an account of Francis Moore, an employee of the Royal African Company of England, who noted in the 1730s that, in the region of Senegambia, the local population was more learned in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, than Europeans were in Latin.<sup>36</sup> Ibn Khaldun's outline of the various subjects being taught in the Muslim world, along with recording the centrality of the Qur'an in the education system, shows that Muslim civilization saw no contradiction between religious faith and science, reason and revelation, and had developed a civilization that integrated knowledge into a unified system that was not bifurcated into a secular and religious divide.

The integrative approach to reason, science, and revelation that existed in Muslim societies facilitated the creation of educational institutes that advanced knowledge and scientific inquiry. Between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were more philosophical, medical, historical, astronomical, and geographic works written in Arabic than in any other language.<sup>37</sup> Under Abbasid rule, scientific research was often supported by the government<sup>38</sup> and the *Baytul Hikma* (House of Wisdom) was a famous observatory, research, and learning center.<sup>39</sup> During the Seljuk period, one could find hospitals and astronomical observatories adjacent to *madaaris*.<sup>40</sup> Under the Ottomans, *madaaris* dedicated to the study of medicine were established, such as the *Suleymaniye Medical Madrasa* set up by Suleiman

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<sup>33</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 370-390.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 422-424.

<sup>36</sup> Ware III, Rudolph T., *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), p. 106.

<sup>37</sup> Ahmed, "Contributions of Muslim Physicians and Other Scholars," 87.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>39</sup> Kaur, *Madrasa Education In India*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Ihsanoglu, *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilization Vol.2*, 373.

the Magnificent (1494-1566).<sup>41</sup> Under the Mughal ruler Akbar, it was decreed that every boy should learn arithmetic, agriculture, geometry, astronomy, medicine, and logic along with other subjects.<sup>42</sup> The *Dars-e-Nizami*, a curriculum devised by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century scholar Mullah Nizamuddin Sahlavi, which hundreds of *madaaris* associate with in contemporary times, originally had engineering, astronomy, and medicine in its curriculum.<sup>43</sup>

## The impact of colonialism on the educational system in the Muslim world

The flourishing of Muslim civilization did not occur in isolation from the rest of the world; rather, interactions between various cultures helped shape Muslim civilization and, in turn, Muslim civilization also impacted the broader world. The impact was felt in Europe and much cultural and intellectual exchange had occurred prior to colonialism. An example of this can be seen in the development of universities in medieval Europe through the influence of events occurring in the Muslim world, particularly in Muslim Spain. The medical schools established in Europe in places such as Montpellier, Padua, and Pisa were founded on the pattern of Muslim medical schools in Cordoba.<sup>44</sup> The research and writings of many Muslim scientists were translated and studied in Europe for many centuries. The 8<sup>th</sup>-century works on chemistry of Jabir ibn Hayyan;<sup>45</sup> the writings on medicine of Ibn Sina;<sup>46</sup> the 10<sup>th</sup>-century writings on surgery by Al-Zahrawi;<sup>47</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup>-century work on pharmacology of Al-Baytar<sup>48</sup> are just a few examples of works of Muslim scientists that were translated and became influential in Europe for several centuries. The colonial experience, however, changed the environment

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 391, 405.

<sup>42</sup> Kaur, *Madrasa Education In India*, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 52 & Hamid Mahmood, *The Dars-E-Nizami and the Transnational Madaris in Britain* (Queen Mary: University of London, 2012), 9, 10, 78 & Qasmi, *Madrasa Education Framework*, 49, 55-57.

<sup>44</sup> Ahmed, "Contributions of Muslim Physicians and Other Scholars," 77.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 82.

of mutual exchange into one of dominance and imposition, with colonialism being a cause of major shifts in the educational systems in the Muslim world.

## Colonialism and epistemicide

In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Al-Andalus/Muslim Spain was in the final stages of conquest by the Catholic Monarchy<sup>49</sup> and accompanying the physical genocide of the population of Al-Andalus was intellectual genocide, or what Grosfoguel has referred to as epistemicide.<sup>50</sup> Along with murdering and suppressing an entire population of Muslims and Jews, mass burning of libraries was undertaken.<sup>51</sup> The mass burnings of libraries in Al-Andalus signaled the early stages of intellectual colonization that ran parallel to the political conquests of the colonial era.

As Western Europe moved towards secularization, it would eventually become a global homogenizing force, imposing its intellectual tradition on cultures and societies throughout the world in the name of progress. The secular epistemology that lay at the heart of the Enlightenment era became a driving force for the destruction of knowledge systems of other cultures and societies, such that occurring parallel to political imperialism was a process of intellectual colonization. Science, as it was being secularized and developed in the Western world during the Enlightenment era, along with naturalist philosophy, was projected as universal and the only valid way of analyzing the world. The Western scientist became as integral to the colonial project as the military official.<sup>52</sup> The claim that the Western world had developed a knowledge system superior to all other knowledge systems in the world was one of the justifications used for the great political conquests and subjugation of the rest of the world.<sup>53</sup> While knowledge production and science from other cultures and societies were being mythologized, science coming from the West was claimed to be universal; hence,

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<sup>49</sup> Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities," 78.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>52</sup> Thésée, "A Tool of Massive Erosion," 29.

<sup>53</sup> ElMessiri, "The Gate of Ijtihad," 17 & Hamed Ibrahim "Reflections on Technology and Development: A Cultural Perspective," in *Epistemological BIAS in the Physical & Social Sciences*, ed. Abdelwahab M. ElMessiri (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), 259.

science became a means of intellectual colonization.<sup>54</sup> In the Muslim world, intellectual colonization gradually led to the replacement of an integrative and holistic approach to knowledge with a secularized knowledge system that was fragmented, reductionist, and materialistic.

Under the veil of progress, colonialism justified not only conquest of other societies but the reductionist and materialistic science that was being produced became a means for the exploitation of nature and the destruction of entire ecosystems.<sup>55</sup> The famous intellectual and poet Muhammad Iqbal succinctly described the disastrous nature of science that was being produced by Europe and exported to the rest of the world in analogy of the natural sciences:

*like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh. Nature as the subject of science is a highly artificial affair, and this artificiality is the result of that selective process to which science must subject her in the interests of precision.*<sup>56</sup>

This understanding of science and secular knowledge was imported into the Muslim world through the creation of new education systems in the Muslim world that were secular. These systems were implanted in the Muslim world by colonial officials and also adopted by Muslim statesmen who desired to use education as a tool for state building.

## Colonial educational policies

In 1835, Thomas Babington Macauley, a British educationist, prepared a syllabus for educational institutes all over India, which contained ‘modern sciences’ and English. The colonial government supported Macauley’s curriculum and worked to undermine the curriculum being taught in schools that had been established in

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<sup>54</sup> Rafik Habib, “Modernizing vs. Westernizing the Social Sciences: The Case of Psychology” in *Epistemological BIAS in the Physical & Social Sciences*, ed. Abdelwahab M. ElMessiri (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), 130 & Thésée “A Tool of Massive Erosion,” 33.

<sup>55</sup> Al Zeera, *Wholeness and Holiness in Education: An Islamic Perspective*, 86.

<sup>56</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 2010), 44.



pre-colonial India.<sup>57</sup> This curriculum was taught until a famous uprising in 1857,<sup>58</sup> after which new policies were put in place to put education under complete control of the colonial regime.

In Egypt, during the three years of occupation under Napoleon, plans were made to build a primary school for Egyptians to teach them elements of the arts and sciences in French in order to prepare them to enter into a French-run school of medicine.<sup>59</sup> There were also plans to establish a military training school for Mamluk elites to create a modern military<sup>60</sup> that would act as a proxy for French rule in Egypt.

In the Ottoman Empire, a growing number of countries from Europe began to establish schools in the empire through the system of capitulations as the empire was decreasing in power.<sup>61</sup>

In West Africa, the French colonial government sought to control and reduce the influence of Islamic education on the population. Starting in 1857, the French colonial administrator and general Louis Léon César Faidherbe initiated a series of legal decrees and educational policies that were followed for decades by other colonial officials who sought to systematically curb Islamic education in the Senegambia region and to diminish the influence of Qur'anic schools that had been central to the region for 900 years.<sup>62</sup>

This process of new school systems being introduced occurred throughout the Muslim world and had significant outcomes. The first significant outcome was that secular education and schooling as a tool for building the nation-state and extending government control began to gain currency in the Muslim world.

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<sup>57</sup> Qasmi, *Madrasa Education Framework*, 69-70.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>59</sup> James Dunne-Heyworth, *An Introduction to The History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Frank Cass & Company Ltd, 1969), 98.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>61</sup> Gokce, "Minority and Foreign Schools on the Ottoman Education System," 48.

<sup>62</sup> Ware III, *The Walking Quran: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, 164, 191, 203.

Secondly, the introduction of schools set up by colonial regimes began a process of slowly undermining the autonomy and influence of schools run and established by Muslims prior to the colonial period as well as pre-colonial knowledge systems developed by Muslims. Finally, these schools were often intended to co-opt indigenous elite and train them as colonial functionaries, thereby creating a new elite in the Muslim society who were sympathetic to the colonial project. In this respect, where the colonial officials stopped in their intellectual colonization, reformers, often coming from the indigenous elite, would pick up on the project of modernization.

## Reformers, the military, and modernization

The project of modernizing the education system in the Ottoman Empire began as early as 1734 when Sultan Mahmud I established the first modern military schools.

<sup>63</sup> More schools would follow in the years to come, mostly linked with the desire to produce a modern military, which would later culminate in the establishment of secular schools under the *tanzimat* reformation beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>64</sup>

Major changes in education in the Ottoman Empire came in full force when Sultan Selim III initiated the program of the *Nizam-i Cedid* in 1789.<sup>65</sup> The blind imitation of the West that characterized many of these educational reforms was criticized by thinkers such as Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani.<sup>66</sup>

In West Africa, the Médersa of Saint-Louis established in 1908 marked an attempt of the French colonial state to create educational institutes that integrated elements from the French educational system with Islamic education. The rationale behind this type of school was to create an indigenous elite that would act as proxies for *la mission civilisatrice* of the colonial state.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Kemal Cicek, *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation* (Ankara: Yeni Turkiye, 2000), p. 657.

<sup>64</sup> Vernon O. Egger, *A History of the Muslim World Since 1260; The Making of a Global Community*. (Upper Saddle: Pearson: Prentice Hall, 2008), 309, 339.

<sup>65</sup> Ihsanoglu, *History of the Ottoman State, Society & Civilization Vol. 2*, 424.

<sup>66</sup> Adel Hussein "Bias in Western Schools of Social Thought: Our Heritage as the Starting Point for Development" in *Epistemological BIAS in the Physical & Social Sciences*, ed. Abdelwahab M. ElMessiri (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), 95.

<sup>67</sup> Ware III, *The Walking Quran: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, 196.

In Egypt, written documents of Azhari *ulema*, such as al-Jabarti and Hassan al-Attar, showed a fascination with the military and intellectual achievements of the French when they were ruling Egypt.<sup>68</sup> It was in this respect on the basis of establishing a strong military that Muhammad Ali would establish a parallel system of government-controlled schooling to exist alongside Egypt's *maktab* and *madrasa* system.<sup>69</sup> To help with the creation of a new educational system, Muhammad Ali sent students to Europe, primarily to France,<sup>70</sup> and in 1844 the Egyptian Military School was established in France for the students he sent to study military science.

After Muhammad Ali, Ali Mubarak, another famous Egyptian reformer, also worked to transform and modernize the education system in Egypt after travelling to France and studying the education system there.<sup>71</sup> Mubarak criticized older schools such as Al-Azhar, Egypt's longest standing institute of higher learning, by stating: "*They take no cognizance of history and geography and philosophy,*"<sup>72</sup> referring to new modes of knowledge developed out of interactions with the education system and educational theories coming from France. Another important figure and contemporary of Mubarak was Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi, who had also spent time in France; he stated that in every village that there should be a government teacher to teach the villagers "*the principles of government,*"<sup>73</sup> to teach them *hub al-watan* (love for the state).<sup>74</sup> That Al-Tahtawi's notion of education was directly

<sup>68</sup> Abdur-Rahman Al-Jabarti, *Napoleon in Egypt: Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the First Seven Months of the French Occupation of Egypt, 1798*, trans. Schmucl Moreh (Princeton: M. Weiner Pub., 1993), 36, 38, 185, 186, 195, 198.

<sup>69</sup> Jeffrey C. Burke, "Education," in *The Islamic World*, ed. Andrew Rippin (London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Franchis Group, 2008), 313 & Bayad Dodge, *Al-Azhar: A Millennium of Muslim Learning* (Washington: The American International Printing Company, 1961), 114 & Mona Russell, "Competing, Overlapping, and Contradictory Agendas: Egyptian Education Under British Occupation, 1882-1922," *Africa and the Middle East, Comparative Studies of South Asia* XXI, no. 1-2 (2001), 50.

<sup>70</sup> Dunne-Heyworth, *An Introduction to The History of Education in Modern Egypt*, 105 & Ghulam N. Saqib, *Modernization of Muslim Education in Egypt, Pakistan, and Turkey: A Comparative Study*. (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1983), 84.

<sup>71</sup> Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 64 & Paula Sanders, *Creating Medieval Cairo: Empire, Religion, and Architectural Preservation in 19th Century Egypt* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2008), 33.

<sup>72</sup> Michael J. Reimer, "Contradiction and Consciousness in 'Ali Mubarak's Description of Al-Azhar," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (1997), 62.

<sup>73</sup> Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 109.

<sup>74</sup> John W. Livingston, "Western Science and Educational Reform in the Thought of Shaykh Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 4 (1996), 552.

linked to state building shows how influential the Western model of education became in certain elite sectors of Muslim society; his idea of using schools to consolidate national identity bears striking similarity to policies adopted by the French in its own rural population at the time.<sup>75</sup>

In the Indian subcontinent, there was the establishment of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAO) (later known as Aligarh University) in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who used Cambridge University as a model for his school.<sup>76</sup> Ahmed Khan had been greatly impressed with the system of higher education in Britain. He once said to a colleague in regards to Britain: “*If you came here...you would see how education is carried on and how children are taught, how knowledge is acquired and a community attains honor.*”<sup>77</sup> As far as MAO College’s curriculum was concerned, it replaced the subsection of the *ma’qul* that dealt with topics such as philosophy, astronomy, and medicine that were studied in pre-colonial *madaaris* by their European counterparts.<sup>78</sup> This move was relevant in that it triggered a new stage of Muslim educational institutes in India adopting discourses of knowledge that were developed in Europe and that came to replace pre-colonial discourses of knowledge. Such a move was predicated on the belief that sciences as they were developed in Europe were more advanced than the understanding of science that existed in the Muslim world and other societies.

Parallel to Ahmed Khan’s educational reform, in 1866, a group of Indian *ulema* established the *Darul Uloom Deoband*.<sup>79</sup> The curriculum of the *Darul Uloom Deoband* was largely influenced by a reformed version of the *Dars-i-Nizami*

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<sup>75</sup> Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen*, 307.

<sup>76</sup> Egger, *A History of the Muslim World since 1260*, 342.

<sup>77</sup> David Lelyveld, “Disenchantment at Aligarh: Islam and the Realm of the Secular in Late Nineteenth Century India,” *Die Welt des Islams* 22, no. 1 (1982), 86 & Syed Mahmood, *A History of English Education in India (1781-1893)* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1895), 86, 87.

<sup>78</sup> Lelyveld, “Disenchantment at Aligarh,” 86 & Mahmood, *A History of English Education in India (1781-1893)*, 89.

<sup>79</sup> Kaur, *Madrassa Education In India*, 55 & Mahmood *The Dars-e-Nizami and the Transnational Madaris in Britain*. 11 & Barbara Metcalf, “The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (1978) 111 & Qasmi, *Madrassa Education Framework*, 38, 41.

curriculum.<sup>80</sup> The *Dars-i-Nizami* curriculum dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century scholar Mullah Nizamuddin Sahlavi.<sup>81</sup> The contents of *Dars-i-Nizami* were quite expansive and the original intention of Nizamuddin was to develop a curriculum that incorporated both *ulum al-manqul* and *ulum al-ma'qul*; engineering, astronomy, and medicine were part of the original curriculum.<sup>82</sup> The Deobandi reform of the *Dars-i-Nizami* curriculum removed major parts of the *ma'qul* subjects that were initially found in earlier versions of the curriculum<sup>83</sup> and narrowed the focus primarily to *ulum al-manqul*. The justification for this by some of the founders of the Deobandi movement was that those who wanted a 'modern' education could go to schools and colleges outside the *madrasa* system.<sup>84</sup> This attitude demonstrates how Muslims began to bifurcate their own tradition of unified knowledge, giving way to the secularized frames and subjects coming from colonial systems. The superiority of western knowledge and science was no longer simply a claim of the colonialists but became internalized within the minds of the colonized population.<sup>85</sup>

One can see from the examples cited above of the Ottoman Empire, West Africa, Egypt, and Indian subcontinent how colonialism greatly affected the education system in many parts of the Muslim World. There was first direct imposition by the colonial regimes of secular schools that were foreign to Muslim culture and that undermined the pre-colonial education system. Then Muslim reformers continued the process of establishing schools that were based on a western secular paradigm. The new schools also helped introduce into the Muslim world conceptions of science and discourses of knowledge that were developed in a secularizing Europe, which would eventually undermine and replace scientific discourses and knowledge systems that had developed within Muslim society through an integrated framework. While there were reformers trying to develop

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<sup>80</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military*, (Islamabad/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2002), 5 & Kaur, *Madrasa Education In India*, 121 & Qasmi, *Madrasa Education Framework*, 67-68.

<sup>81</sup> Muhammad Farooq, "Objectification of Islam: A Study of Pakistani Madrassah Texts," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 31, no. 1 (2010), 36.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 36 & Kaur, *Kuldip Madrasa Education In India*, 52 & Mahmood, *The Dars-e-Nizami and the Transnational Madaris in Britain*, 9, 10, 78 & Qasmi, *Madrasa Education Framework*, 49, 55-57.

<sup>83</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG). *Pakistan*, 6 & Metcalf, "The Madrasa at Deoband," 117-118.

<sup>84</sup> Qasmi, *Madrasa Education Framework*, 44.

<sup>85</sup> Thésée, "A Tool of Massive Erosion," 34.

educational institutes based on western secular paradigms, other influential Muslim reform movements, such as the Deobandi movement, established *madaaris* with a narrowed-down curriculum, focusing only on *ulum al-manqul*. This narrowing of curriculum signaled an acceptance that *madaaris* should have a more limited role in society and intellectual development than their pre-colonial predecessors.

In the post-colonial period, educational reform continued in the direction of imitation of Western secular schools, both in terms of structure and content, and parallel to this has been a limiting of the role of *madaaris* in society. These trends have ultimately led to an educational crisis in Muslim societies.

## An exploration of educational reform in the Muslim world

Ibn Khaldun, writing centuries before European colonialism, observed that it is in the nature of conquest that the conquered imitate those who conquer them. This occurs because the conquered are either impressed by the conqueror or erroneously attribute their own subservience to the perfection of the conqueror, failing to analyze the nature of their defeat.<sup>86</sup> This diagnosis of conquered people precisely describes the defeatist attitude that has existed in the Muslim world since their loss of political power due to colonialism and continues on with the blind imitation of the Western world that has marked much development in the Muslim world in the post-colonial era.

The rationale behind the blind acceptance of school systems coming from the West by reformers and governments was a fascination with the economic and political power of the West and it was hoped that importing secular schools would lead to the economic growth and political strength of nation-states. Not only did this fail to occur, but it would be no exaggeration to state that the secular education system created in the Muslim world has led to the *disintegration* of local communities, loss of culture, and destruction of traditional knowledge systems.<sup>87</sup> The detrimental

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<sup>86</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 116.

<sup>87</sup> El-Mously, "Reflections on Technology and Development," 250-251.



effects of importing western secular education systems into the Muslim world have been noted by Al Zeera:

*The dilemma of Islamic societies lies partly in the fact that they imported secular education systems and planted them in the heart of Islamic traditional societies. To me this is like planting a palm tree in Alaska and expecting it to grow naturally and give fruit as well. The mismatch between the religious foundation of Islamic societies and the secular building of the Western education system is a major cause of the problems encountered by our universities.*<sup>88</sup>

The mismatch between a western secular education system and Muslim societies often resulted in producing an educated class that was culturally alienated from their own society and intellectual heritage and, in the worst case, comprised harbingers of neo-colonial policies that sought to legitimate their societies by imitating and making the West the standard for everything that was real, beautiful, and acceptable.<sup>89</sup> The extent of this intellectual colonization even reached to the point where Islam itself was given legitimacy only if it could be justified through methodologies of research that were based on a secular epistemology and at the cultural and political level Islam could only have validity if it could be seen to fit within the norms of a paradigm developed by Western intellectuals.<sup>90</sup> The secular education system not only undermined the holistic and integrative understanding of knowledge coming from an Islamic worldview but, at best, placed religion as a separate subject within school curricula, isolating it from its relationship to economics, politics, science, culture, and other fields. In the Islamic paradigm, religion is seen as encompassing all forms of knowledge, being integral to every subject and every aspect of the educational process.<sup>91</sup> Iqbal described such an understanding of religion from an Islamic worldview: “*Religion is not a departmental affair; it is neither mere thought, nor mere feeling, nor mere action;*

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<sup>88</sup> Al Zeera, *Wholeness and Holiness in Education*, 139-140.

<sup>89</sup> AbdulHamid A. Sulayman, *Revitalizing Higher Education in the Muslim World* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), 10 & Al Zeera, *Wholeness and Holiness in Education*, 55, 134-135.

<sup>90</sup> Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge and the Role of the University in the Context of De-Westernization and Decolonization* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit UTM Press, 2013), 7 & ElMessiri “The Gate of Ijtihad,” 19, 20, 50, 51.

<sup>91</sup> Abdul Haq, *Educational Philosophy of the Holy Quran*, 183.

*it is an expression of the whole man.*”<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the notion that the world can be divided between the secular and religious, sacred and profane, that has marked the Western world for centuries and has characterized the secular education system and production of knowledge is antithetical to Islam. Iqbal alludes to this point poetically: “*There is no such thing as a profane world. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for self-realization of spirit.*”<sup>93</sup>

Unless serious steps are taken to address the educational crisis in the Muslim world and conscious efforts are made to counter the secularization of knowledge that has been an homogenizing force in the world, then the Muslim world will remain a shadow of its former self with no real substance.<sup>94</sup> Blind imitation of the Western world has prevented the Muslim world from continuing to develop its own models of science and knowledge systems that reflect Muslim cultural identity,<sup>95</sup> serve the needs of their societies, and are true to an Islamic worldview. The project of state building through the use of a secular school system is foreign to Islamic teachings since a true and just society cannot be created without reference to God, prophetic teachings, and understanding the dimension of the next life (*al-akhira*). The fallacy of a secular understanding of knowledge comes from the fact that the human “self” can never be the sole means of measuring reality.<sup>96</sup> The first verses revealed of the Qur’an highlighted the fact that the source of all true knowledge comes from God; hence, knowledge acquisition that is not connected back to God will ultimately lead to loss and misguidance for human beings.

In this respect, the re-Islamization of knowledge is not simply the process of glorifying the heritage of great Muslim thinkers that lived many centuries ago; rather, it is the development of an Islamic epistemology that creates a unity of knowledge,<sup>97</sup> where all branches of learning connect back to the fundamental reality of the Oneness of God (*tawhid*). Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud best defined the

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<sup>92</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>94</sup> Abdelwahab M. El-Messiri, “Introduction,” in *Epistemological BIAS in the Physical & Social Sciences*, ed. Abdelwahab M. El-Messiri (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), p. xix.

<sup>95</sup> Habib, “Modernizing vs. Westernizing the Social Sciences,” 127.

<sup>96</sup> El-Mously, “Reflections on Technology and Development,” 258.

<sup>97</sup> Al Zeera, *Wholeness and Holiness in Education*, xxv.

Islamization of knowledge as: “...*fundamentally a process of returning to the metaphysical worldview, epistemic framework, and ethical and legal principles of Islam.*”<sup>98</sup>

During the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much discussion has occurred about developing educational systems that would be conducive to the needs of Muslim society and developed within a genuine Islamic framework. Intellectuals such as Naquib Al-Attas, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Ismail al-Faruqi have written about the need for a process of re-Islamization of knowledge and educational systems. In 1977, the first international conference was held in Makkah to discuss the issues and problems surrounding education in the Muslim world, followed by several conferences on the topic in other parts of the Muslim world.<sup>99</sup> While much discussion has occurred and quite a few Islamic universities have been established since then, such as the International Islamic University of Malaysia, much work still needs to be done to establish leading educational institutes that will bring relevant change to the Muslim world. Not only in the Muslim world but globally the impact of centuries of knowledge produced within the context of colonization will take many generations to analyze and understand.<sup>100</sup>

## Conclusion

While discussions on the Islamization of knowledge have helped spark debates about knowledge production, education, and the role of Islam on epistemology, they have also been critiqued for certain limitations in the current literature on the topic. It has been noted that much of this literature has been reactionary, focusing on polemics against the West instead of providing tangible means by which

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<sup>98</sup> Daud, *Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge*, 18.

<sup>99</sup> Ashraf, Sayyid Ali, “Islamic Education: Evaluation of the Achievements of Previous Conferences,” ed. Hussein Abdul-Fattah and Fathi Malkawi, in *The Education Conference Book: Planning, Implementation, Recommendations, and Abstracts of Presented Papers: A Conference on “Towards the Construction of a Contemporary Islamic Educational Theory”* (Amman: Islamic Studies and Research Association, 1990), 73-74.

<sup>100</sup> Thésée, “A Tool of Massive Erosion,” 35.

conceptual frameworks of Islamization can be implemented within knowledge production and education.<sup>101</sup>

The secularization of knowledge, society, and individuals has created immense problems in the world in multiple ways: environmental, political, social, psychological etc. A successful project of the Islamization of knowledge would address problems facing our world today and would bring back a much-needed holistic approach to knowledge, integrating spiritual realities and metaphysical truths to fields of knowledge that have been stripped of their spiritual significance. Iqbal's statement in this regard in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century best signifies the project of the Islamization of knowledge, although he lived before the term came to be used:

*Humanity needs three things today—a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis.*<sup>102</sup>

By shedding light on transformations that took place during the colonial era, it is hoped that current and future generations of educationists understand their importance and contribute to the process of reintegrating an Islamic worldview, epistemology, and ethics into educational curricula. Furthermore, it also hoped that this paper will begin to inspire students and experts in various disciplines such as psychology, business, art, etc. to rethink the paradigms within which their own fields of discipline exist and contribute towards integrating an Islamic ethos within their own fields of knowledge. We ask that God guide us to that knowledge which leads us back to Him and which allows us to benefit our souls in this life and the next insha'Allah.

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<sup>101</sup> See Sahin, Abdullah. 2018. "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Religions* 9, no. 11: 335. & Henzell-Thomas, Jeremy & Sardar, Ziauddin *Rethinking Reform in Higher Education: From Islamization to Integration of Knowledge* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2018).

<sup>102</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 156.