

Lagging Behind Others?

An Exploration of Muslims' Educational Outlook in Modern Times

In this paper I explore how modern Muslims' educational outlook has been affected by colonial disruptions of the past and coloniality of the present. Focusing on the case of colonial India and modern-day Pakistan, I explore how the colonial intrusion in India dichotomized local Muslim education into two separate, divergent domains: religious and secular, a division that remains intact to date. When a contemporary Pakistani Muslim contemplates the purpose of education, he/she confronts two dominant discourses: 1) secular education discourses that advocate economic growth and catching up with the West as the ultimate purpose of education, and 2) dominant religious discourses that advocate salvation in the hereafter as the ultimate goal of education. Through semi-structured interviews of university students in Pakistan, I explored how students make sense of these divergent discourses. I found that students (with a mainstream secular educational background) tend to make a distinction between the purpose of life (which they associate with religion) and the purpose of education (which they associate with worldly pursuits). I argue that this outlook of a difference between the purpose of life and that of education undermines the cultivation of the self that can make a meaningful contribution to knowledge and society. Furthermore, I explore contemporary ideas and practices of knowledge contribution and question the rampant epistemic hegemony of the West in the academic publication enterprise. I point out that the prevailing coloniality of knowledge amplifies the disorientation of Muslims' educational outlook and hence injury to the modern Muslim self.

KEYWORDS: coloniality of knowledge, decolonizing higher education, epistemic hegemony, Muslim education, religious/secular divide

We (Love and Knowledge) are two tunes of one melody, we belong together, we were born together, let us get together again.

Muhammad Iqbal, *The Secrets of the Self*

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.

Rumi, Rumi: *Whispers of the Beloved*

Religion is either all or it is nothing; either it dwarfs all profane studies or it is dwarfed by them.

Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man*

. . . what if reason, critique, and reflexivity were not the sole properties of the Enlightenment and they existed much earlier than Enlightenment?

Irfan Ahmad, Religion as Critique: *Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to the Marketplace*

INTRODUCTION

Shāh Waliullah Dehlvi (1703–1762) has been described as “the last great theologian of Islam” (Iqbal 2012, 97). Before the advent of modernity in India, he felt the need to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past (ibid., 78). Abul Ala Maududi describes Shah Waliullah as a free thinker who broke the “yoke of imitative knowledge” and centuries old prejudices. He is described as “a man of such powerful reason that in some respects, his contributions surpassed Ghazali’s”¹ (Maududi 1940–1941, 84–86). Although the far-reaching religious reformation movement initiated by Shah Waliullah predates the advent of modernity in India (McCloud, Hibbard, and Saud 2013), it continued to inform religious, political, and anticolonial struggles of future Muslim generations inside and outside India. Delhi, home to Waliullah, remained a sought-after destination for Muslims seeking knowledge from around the world as his sons continued his mission after his death.

A traveler from Bukhara once described his son Abdul Aziz as “a great scholar from whom rivers of *shariat* (religious knowledge) would flow into all the world” (Hasan, Ahmed, and Metcalf 2007,

47). Early nineteenth-century Delhi was characterized by a culture of open dialogue and fearless debates on religious issues. Critical dialogues were a regular feature of public places, courts, and salons. Metcalf ([1892] 2014, 65) notes that “not only the royal family, but courtiers, poets, and gentlemen all took part in the religious debates of the time. When the poet Ghalib (1796–1869) arrived in the capital in 1810 he found ‘the radical reforming trend’ of Shah Waliyu’llah raging (Russell and Islam 1969, 30)” all over the place. But after the 1857 revolt, Delhi presented a different picture altogether. *Ulama* (religious scholars), who played a central role in the intellectual life of Delhi, left the city in order to save their lives and faith from the British rage. The culture of public debates and open intellectual discussions completely vanished as ulama sought to safeguard their core beliefs and practices in a new hostile environment. The inward-looking attitude adopted by ulama to adjust to the new colonial setting changed the character and culture of religious learning in India. This change had a far-reaching impact on Muslims’ learning outlook.

Ahmad (2017) reiterates that the purpose of religion and the mission of the prophets sent by God was to “enact reform (*Islah*) through critique.” After the prophets, “the task of critique and reform fell on *ulama*.” In this framework, based on Muslims’ core belief system, there is no room for dualism and separation between the secular and the religious, as meaningful critique is always situated in a sociopolitical context. The Islamic system views religion as a source of critique for reform rather than as an object of critique as conceived by the West. In this paper, I utilize this Islamic framework of religion as a critique to explore the problem of Muslims’ educational outlook in modern times. In this context, the term “Muslims’ educational outlook” refers to Muslims’ relationship with knowledge and attitude toward knowledge seeking.

I argue that Muslims’ educational outlook is affected by their perception of the purpose of knowledge seeking and its link to the purpose of life. Knowledge is sought with religious conviction (love, devotion, and passion) when it is perceived as having the purpose of transforming selves and transforming the world. Such knowledge leads one toward cultivating a higher self—a self conceived by Iqbal (1920) as *khudi*. However, if knowledge is perceived as having other aims, Muslims’ relationship with knowledge and knowledge seeking may be undermined. Colonial disruptions of the past and coloniality of the present has altered the perception of Muslims about the purpose of knowledge seeking.

For Muslims, knowledge has been divided into two separate domains: the religious and the secular. Both of these domains are considered to be incompletely linked to the purpose of transforming the self and the world. With this perception, the contemporary coloniality of knowledge continues to hinder possibilities of change. Unlike the past, we find very few Muslims today who revere knowledge or excel in knowledge seeking, despite their frequently expressed concerns about “lagging behind” in the knowledge domain. For the revitalization of knowledge seeking for Muslims, the critical and transformative function of knowledge must be restored. Since devotion requires a single focus of all human faculties—a union of heart, reason, mind, and soul—the knowledge domain must be unified, holistic, and all inclusive.

In this paper, I use the term “Muslims” to refer to modern-day religiously inclined Muslims. This category admittedly includes extremely diverse people; nevertheless, they share common concerns, beliefs, and practices and identify with a common history that includes their troubling encounter with modernity, experiences of colonialism, and coloniality. With my study based in Pakistan, I explore modern Muslims’ perceptions about knowledge/education in the Pakistani context. My inferences about modern-day Muslims are therefore Pakistan-specific.

Khudi (literally meaning self) is a central concept of Iqbal’s (1877–1938) philosophy. Iqbal is another prodigious, highly influential scholar, philosopher, and poet born in British India. He is called “the poet of the East” and is credited for envisioning the idea of Pakistan. His work, *The Secrets of the Self* (*Asrar-i-Khudi*) that was first published in 1915, presents the idea of khudi, the higher self. Iqbal stresses that “knowing oneself is in fact an immediate perception of God. . . . The path of recognition of the self is the path that takes one to a contact with the Absolute” (Zeb and Qasim 2015, 203). The following extract from Iqbal’s *The Secrets of Self* explains his idea of khudi:

Physically and spiritually man is self-contained centre, but he is yet a complete individual. The greater his distance from God, the less is his individuality. He who comes nearest to God is the complete person. Nor that he is finally absorbed in God. On the contrary he absorbs God in himself. (Iqbal as cited by Zeb and Qasim 2015, 203)

Explaining Iqbal's key concept *khudi* requires a detailed discussion, which is beyond the scope of this paper. It seems suffice to note here that according to Iqbal the purpose of life is the cultivation of the self—a path that leads one toward God.

Karen Tucker (2018, 220) defines “coloniality of knowledge” as “*historically rooted and racially inflected* practices that routinely elevate the knowledge forms and knowledge generating principles of colonizing cultures, whilst relegating those of colonized cultures.” She suggests that decolonial research should begin with a focus on “*local constructions* of racialized, colonial power and knowledge relations”; it should be situated in a concrete site where historical legacies and contemporary practices reproduce “colonial hierarchies, erasures and struggles” (ibid.). In such a project, the researcher is part of the community examined instead of an “isolated pursuer of knowledge.” Using this framework, I begin with the acknowledgement that I am the subject I explore in this study. I am part of the community I examine, and this work is situated in the place I belong. My personal questions and those of my community are therefore my research problem.

As a Muslim researcher and teacher of social sciences from contemporary Pakistan, I ask myself the meaning and purpose of seeking knowledge. When I contemplate this question, I am bogged down by my surrounding academic community's pervasive anxiety that we somehow lag behind others in terms of knowledge and that there is an urgent need to catch up with the others. The lack of Muslims' contribution to contemporary knowledge production remains an oft repeated concern in academic and policy discourses on higher education in Pakistan. The following statistics (and many others) are highlighted as evidence of our collective lack, which were initially a cause of concern for me as well.

It is noted that at the turn of the century, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) collectively contributed only 1 percent of research produced in the world (World Bank Report 1999 as cited in Muborakshoeva 2012, 1). From 2000 to 2012, only a few Muslim countries tried to expand investment on Research and Development (R&D). Malaysia happens to be the only country in the Muslim world that spends 1.0 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on R&D. The world average is 1.78 percent, and most developed countries spend 2.5 to 3 percent of their GDP on research (Guessoum and Osama 2015, 15). It is reported that 57 Muslim countries

included in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) make up around 25 percent of the world's population. However, they make up only 2.4 percent of the world's research expenditure, 1.6 percent of its patents, and only 6 percent of its research publications (ibid., 28). A research impact study on 20 Muslim countries found that their collective citation by paper ratio is significantly lower than that of the developed countries of the world (ibid., 31).

Such discourses on the state of our knowledge are upsetting enough, but the distress is aggravated when one encounters the stories of Muslims' past glory. Franz Rosenthal's depiction of early Muslim civilization is a case in point. Rosenthal (1970) describes "*Ilm*"² as a defining characteristic of Muslim civilization—a supreme value for being Muslim that touched all aspects of Muslim intellectual, religious, and political life. A predominant veneration of knowledge prevailed in all levels in medieval Muslim civilization. Furthermore, he describes the rich diversity of ways in which ilm was conceptualized, practiced, and revered amongst elites and the common men in Muslim lands of the past.

Muslim civilization boasted of numerous intellectual luminaries in multiple fields of knowledge. From the eighth to thirteenth century, the greatest number of religious, philosophical, medical, astronomical, historical, and geographical works were produced in Arabic. Drawing on the rich knowledge base of the Greek, Roman, Indian, and Persian traditions, the Muslim civilization achieved a unique synthesis of ideas in all branches of knowledge. It was the liberating influence of the Muslim creative impulse that later fueled the European Renaissance (Anees 2011).

My study initially began with a desire to understand and make sense of the transformation of Muslims' educational outlook in modern times. I wondered if in the past we were ahead of our time. If so, what makes us lag behind in the present? Have we lost the meaning and purpose of seeking knowledge?

At least two other discourses made me pursue this question further. First, I observed the prevalence of an education culture in universities that valued education largely for the material benefits and career prospects it offers. Mainstream education was rarely associated with any higher purpose of life. Moreover, Pakistan's Higher Education Policy Vision, entitled *HEC Vision 2025*,³ is largely informed by market oriented neoliberal values that amplify "catching up with the West" anxiety. The HEC Policy vision describes the purpose of higher education as "preparing knowledgeable, skilled and competent human capital that could compete internationally."⁴ It was difficult for me to

fathom this aim of education as the mere transformation of humans into capital. I was not sure if in their eagerness to catch up and compete with the world the policy makers realized the dehumanizing intent of our education vision. Putting education in the framework of economic competitiveness, comparison, and ranking has widespread implications for research in the Global South. Instead of focusing on indigenous needs and problems, the researchers are asked to make publication in high ranking international journals the ultimate goal of their pursuit of knowledge.

Second, I observed religious discourses in mainstream *madrasas* (religious seminaries) to search for the value and purpose of seeking knowledge for Muslims. I noted that the dominant religious discourses in Pakistan tend to endorse a dichotomous view of education that separates worldly and religious education. While worldly education is considered a means for survival in this world alone, religious education is considered a means for survival in the hereafter. The relentless pursuit of “worldly” knowledge is hence discouraged by mainstream Muslim scholars. I use the word “mainstream” to acknowledge the presence of a few scholars who promote a different, more informed opinion on this matter. However, dominant religious discourses continue to promote this worldly view on education. Eventually, it was my inner struggle to look for the religious value (if any) of “worldly” education that drove me to explore the current study. I found that deep-rooted and pervasive colonialism not only shapes contemporary secular education policies and practices in Pakistan (and probably in other parts of the Muslim world) but shapes religious discourses in madrasas as well.

MY ARGUMENT

As a Muslim, my inner drive to seek knowledge comes with the conviction that this is what God wants from me. But the dominant religious discourses around me do not offer me this satisfaction. They tell me I have to choose between two education paths with different goals, here or hereafter. Only one can be the priority. These dominant discourses affect contemporary Muslims’ relationship with knowledge and knowledge seeking. I aim to disrupt these discourses by focusing on the question of the purpose and meaning of seeking knowledge for Muslims. As a Muslim, my assertion is that the purpose of seeking knowledge cannot be separated from the purpose of life. If these two are put into separate categories, we shall be disoriented. It

is precisely this disorientation of modern Muslims that I highlight in this paper.

Since the phenomenon I am exploring is complex and multifaceted, this study points to different directions that require further exploration. I, however, shall focus on two particular developments that have affected Muslims' relationship with knowledge and attitude toward knowledge seeking (what I call Muslims' educational outlook): the colonial disruption of education in the past and coloniality of the present. My examination will offer only a glimpse of these wide-ranging and complex phenomena.

There are two parts of this paper. The first part discusses the epistemic rupture caused by the colonial intrusion of India and its persisting impact on the educational outlook of contemporary Muslim students in Pakistan. The term epistemic rupture refers to "a break from previously established ways of knowing," a disturbance in the prevailing system or structure that disrupts accepted epistemology (Kingsmith 2017). This section explains how British colonialism ripped the traditional education system in India and how it disrupted the concept and value of education for locals in the process. A phenomenographic study on contemporary Pakistani university students was carried out to assess the persisting impact of colonial disruptions and the students' ideas about the country's education system. An evaluation of the students' ideas about the purpose, value, and categories of the contemporary education system allow us to make sense of their attitude toward knowledge and knowledge seeking.

In the second part of the study, I probe the idea of knowledge contribution in contemporary times to expose pervasive coloniality of knowledge. I draw on decolonial perspectives of Walter D. Mignolo and Ramon Grosfoguel to point out the contemporary epistemic hegemony of the West. Using Grosfoguel's (2015) argument, I question Western claims about their knowledge contribution and ranking systems. I highlight the epistemic privilege of Western academia and the systematic marginalization of knowledge from other parts of the world. Mignolo (2009) terms such an interrogation of Western epistemic hegemony as "epistemic disobedience."

Before I proceed, let me elucidate on the education landscape of Pakistan. Also note that in the following sections, I may use the two terms "education" and "knowledge" interchangeably to refer to formal education or knowledge acquisition.

PAKISTAN'S EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

This study is based in Pakistan, an Islamic Republic created in 1947 when the British Empire left India. The hybrid education landscape of contemporary Pakistan represents the dilemmas and struggles of postcolonial Muslim societies. The wide spectrum of Pakistan's education system includes elite English medium schools that offer international curricula and assessment,⁵ a variety of private schools that cater to the middle class, some "Islamic" schools that offer a blend of contemporary education with religious instruction, government schools that offer a compulsory course in Islamic studies, and madrasas that only offer religious instruction but where successive governments have tried to introduce contemporary subjects such as math, science, English, and computer with limited success.

Higher education in Pakistan also reflects contemporary struggles of Muslims to simultaneously catch up with the world and hold on to their faith. There are 173 public and private universities and degree awarding institutes that offer a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs in diverse disciplines including Islamic studies and relevant fields.⁶ Universities in Pakistan share many conceptual issues and challenges with universities in other parts of the Muslim world (Muborakshoeva 2012, 4). The following section aims to examine how disruptions of education caused by the British intrusion of India affected Muslims' educational outlook. The effects of the intrusion in different forms last to this day.

1857 EPISTEMIC DISRUPTIONS

The advent of colonial modernity in Muslim lands was an unprecedented predicament as it tore the very fabric of Muslim society and shook its ways of being and knowing. Colonial penetration came with a critique of Islamic society. It was the first time Islam was being questioned; "what so far went without saying, was now on trial" (Malik 1996, 16). In an instant, the prevalent worldview of Islam that was based on a deep-rooted belief system was termed as the "traditional view" and later "the reactionary view" (Allawi 2009, 28). Ahmad (2017) points out the power of category-making at the disposal of modernity. While the meanings assigned to these categories may change, what remains constant is the boundary-making power of the categories. Western modernity is characterized

by the “construction of the category of the category” (Ahmad 2017, 44). The divisions and boundaries thus enacted have the power to alter the perceptions of people about their individual and collective self and about the world around them. The boundaries and binaries enacted by modernity “crucially inform” modern Western critique (ibid.). Education in Muslim lands was most directly affected by the category-making power and critique of modernity.

The pride Muslims took in their traditional knowledge and critique began to dwindle as their ways of knowing were challenged. Their most cherished subjects for religious and cultural growth were rendered useless and subsequently marginalized. One key disruption was a gradual change in the concept of knowledge as a means to attain both worldly gain and ultimate salvation (Muborakshoeva 2012, 27). With the introduction and spread of new knowledge, knowledge came to be seen as a means to ensure survival in this world alone. The reception of new knowledge came with a tendency to treat this knowledge as “a purely material or pecuniary asset” (Seth 2007, 17).

In the Indian subcontinent, the 1857 revolt against the British, its decisive failure, and the cruel aftermath was a defining moment in history. British revenge was extensive, but it was particularly harsh on Muslims: The Mughal throne was abolished. The old king was exiled in disgrace. The entire population of Delhi was expelled for a time. Mosques were occupied. Madrasas were razed. Many well-known and highly respected religious and intellectual families among Muslims were displaced or killed. In only one such neighborhood, the British shot almost fourteen hundred people (Hasan, Ahmed, and Metcalf 2007, 85). For Muslim ulama who upheld traditional knowledge, the harsh reality of 1857 defined their future options. Most of them left their beloved Delhi and moved to their ancestral towns. Small towns like Deoband, Saharanpur, Kandhla, Gangoh, and Bareilly were relatively safe from British presence. In their chosen towns, the ulama now dedicated all their energies to safeguarding and preserving their traditional religious knowledge. They went out of their way to avoid conflict with the overwhelming British presence surrounding them. Hence, they adopted an inward-looking attitude, primarily concerned with the protection and preservation of tradition (Hasan, Ahmed, and Metcalf 2007).

Darul ulum Deoband is a school founded in 1867 by Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanauavi. The school followed a deliberate strategy of isolation from the outside

world, a separation from the new knowledge and an exclusive focus on preservation and propagation of the divine revealed knowledge.⁷ Darul ulum Deoband very quickly turned into a popular educational movement among Muslims with far reaching impact. Muslim families from all corners of India would send their children to Deoband for their religious, ethical, and moral training. However, the growing influence of Deoband disrupted the traditional understanding of education among Muslims. Increasingly, religious education began to be regarded as separate from worldly affairs. In the realm of education, “this worldly” was detached from the “otherworldly.” According to Fazl ur Rahman (1984), this duality was problematic as it led to the development of a “secularist” state of mind (i.e., a division of loyalty between religion and worldly affairs).

Zaman (2010) notes that because of the colonial administration’s enactment of a sharp distinction between religious and secular domains, especially in the field of law and education, Muslim scholars began to see themselves only as “religious experts.” They cultivated an exclusively “religious” domain for themselves that catered to moral and ethical concerns of the Muslim community. Further disruptions followed this trend. Those who excelled in practical “worldly” education became powerful and influential in this world and those who pursued “otherworldly” education remained in a subordinate position. With the decline in religious education’s worldly value, a new social set up emerged. Those who sought social status and financial security in changing times had to acquire the new knowledge, and those who chose religious education had to detach from this world. Consequently, they began to take a reactionary position against “this worldly” (Rahman 1984, 57–60).

Fazl ur Rahman notes two basic approaches of Muslim scholars toward modern knowledge. The first approach maintained that the acquisition of modern knowledge should be limited to the practical, technological realm (i.e., learning practical skills and professional knowledge). According to this view, Western science and intellectualism may create doubt and disruption in the minds of Muslims; hence this type of knowledge should be avoided. This view was characteristic of the Deoband school of thought in India. Early Turkish modernization was based on a similar view of education. Acquisition of modern professional knowledge such as medicine or engineering, called *fann* (plural *fannun*), was considered acceptable as long as madrasas continue to impart ilm, the higher form of knowledge for the cultivation of Muslims’ mind and spirit. This

approach to education shaped Muslims' perceptions and attitudes toward modern education for generations to come. As a result, the religious value of what was characterized as worldly education declined in popular Muslim perception.

The second approach encouraged acquisition of Western technology, science, and intellectualism as it saw no harm in any form of knowledge. The Aligarh College established by Syed Ahmad Khan in 1875, which became a university in 1920, championed this approach as it embraced new knowledge and modern disciplines taught by British and European professors. But Fazl ur Rahman points out that despite Syed Ahmad Khan's efforts to integrate religious beliefs with a modern scientific outlook, the two never really met even at Aligarh. Syed Ahmad could not implement his own radical views in his institution and handed over religious instruction to traditional religious scholars who had no modern education whatsoever. Religious education continued to run parallel to, yet segregated from the modern education at Aligarh.

Rahman lists a number of other experiments by Indian Muslims aimed at combining both religious and modern learning, namely Osmania University in Hyderabad founded in 1918, All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference founded by Syed Ahmad Khan in 1886, Nadwatul Ulama founded by Shibli Nomani in 1894, and Jamia Millia Islamia founded in 1920 near Delhi. Each of these efforts developed a different emphasis on either modern or traditional Islamic learning while accommodating the other. Unfortunately, none of these were able to effectively integrate the traditional with the modern.

As a result of epistemic disruptions caused by British colonialism, being Muslim in British India meant being a divided self. The choice of religious education meant a compromise in your financial security and social status, while the pursuit of new knowledge meant a compromise in your religious conviction. Pursuit of both types of knowledge meant struggling to reconcile the two.

HOW PAKISTANI STUDENTS MAKE SENSE OF THEIR STILL DIVIDED EDUCATION SYSTEM

I conducted interviews in January 2019 to assess the impact of nineteenth century colonial disruptions on the educational outlook

of contemporary students in Pakistan. I used phenomenography to collect, examine, and organize the data gathered from a total of 236 university students (109 male and 127 female) in Pakistan.

THE PARTICIPANTS

I selected a non-proportional heterogeneous sample of students to represent the diverse Pakistani student population. As such, students from different regions of Pakistan in different universities, academic disciplines, and ethnicities were included. In total, 38 public and private universities from 8 different regions were represented: Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (or KPK), Sindh, Balochistan, Kashmir, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (or FATA), Gilgit-Baltistan, and Islamabad. These 38 universities (out of a total of 173 universities/degree awarding institutes in Pakistan) represent popular mainstream public and private institutions from all regions of Pakistan.

Both graduate and undergraduate students from 40 different academic disciplines were represented: namely history, sociology, international relations, English literature, Islamic studies, electrical and architectural engineering, chartered accountancy, aviation, fashion design, physics, biochemistry, computer science, business, and medicine. Almost 90 percent of students who reported their religious affiliation were Muslims. They included Sunni, Shia, and Bohra sects. Other religious affiliations reported included 1 Christian, 2 Hindu, and 4 agnostic students.

COLLECTING DATA

For the pilot study, I interviewed students directly. Later on, student teams were trained to collect data and report their findings. To collect Pakistani students' perceptions on the purpose of life and education for Muslims in modern or contemporary times, I conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. I asked the students four questions to explore different dimensions of their sense of self/ways of being and another four to explore their concept and value of education/knowledge for contemporary Muslims (see table 1). In case the students are Muslims, an additional question asked them to specify the sources of their religious education. They were given

multiple choices and were asked to specify all that apply in their case (see table 2). The respondents were also asked to identify up to three sources that have been most influential in terms of shaping their religious knowledge.

Student's Sense of Self/ Ways of Being	The Concept and Value of Education/Knowledge for Contemporary Pakistani Students
1. What is the purpose of life in your view?	1. How important is education/knowledge for contemporary Muslims?
2. What is the purpose of education? In your view, how is it connected to the purpose of life?	2. What in your view is the difference between religious and worldly education? Do they have the same or different values?
3. What is your vision of an ideal self and an ideal society? What are the specific ways to achieve it?	3. In your opinion, what is the religious value of worldly education (i.e., how important is worldly education from a religious point of view)?
4. What helps us and what stops us from achieving these ideals in present times?	4. In your view, what is the worldly value of religious education (i.e., do you think religious education in present times offers promising careers or other worldly benefits)?

Table 1. Interview questions exploring Pakistani students' views of the self and education

Where did you get your religious knowledge from?

- Mother/Father/Family Elders
 - Mosque in your neighborhood
 - Your Quran teacher (please specify)
 - Formal madrasa (please specify)
 - Regular School (please specify)
 - Islamiat teacher/lessons at school
 - Islamic studies courses at university/college
 - TV program/News (please specify)
 - Internet/Social Media (please specify)
 - Formal or informal association with a religious organization (please specify)
 - Reading books, magazines, articles (please specify)
 - Other (please specify)
-

Table 2. Source of students' religious education/knowledge

THE RESULTS

Due to the complexity of the phenomenon under study, I cannot draw simplistic conclusions from the data. However, a few observations do indicate the extensive impact of colonial disruptions on the educational landscape of contemporary Pakistan. Among the thirty-eight institutions accessed for this study, only two explicitly aim to reconcile modern education with Islamic values: Riphah International University and International Islamic University Islamabad. The thirty-six other universities included in our sample offer regular secular educational programs that offer career benefits and social status. Islamic studies courses or programs are offered in some places as parallel courses or as entry level compulsory general subjects.

According to the information available on the institutions' websites, Riphah International University (a private university) vows to produce professionals with Islamic moral and ethical values. How it does so is not stated clearly. The university offers a long

list of career oriented professional programs including Business, Accounting, Pharmacy, Medicine and Surgery, Dental Surgery, Applied Psychology, Media Studies, Film Production, Broadcast Journalism, etc. If there is a moral or ethical training on campus, their website does not mention whether this training will be facilitated through the university's educational programs. However, the site does mention that Riphah is the country's first university that has been certified under a United Kingdom (UK) based organization's standard called ISO 9001:2008,⁸ indicating that the university meets all the requirements, expectations, or needs of the customers and the stakeholders.⁹

International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) is a public university established in 1980. IIUI was a result of an educational movement to "Islamize" knowledge in the twentieth century. Led by two Muslim philosophers, Muhammad Naquib al Attas from Malaysia and Ismail Faruqi from Palestine, the movement sought to challenge the epistemic hegemony of Western secular knowledge and to reorganize modern knowledge with an Islamic vision (Tamimi, n.d.). In Islamabad and Kula Lumpur, IIUI represents the struggle of modern Muslims to resist the epistemic hegemony of the West in the twentieth century. IIUI aims "to produce scholars and practitioners, imbued with Islamic learning, character and personality, and capable to meet [*sic*] the economic, social, political, and intellectual needs of modern times."¹⁰

A majority of students clearly identified the family (i.e., mother/father/family elders) as the most influential source of religious knowledge. Other influential sources include a Quran teacher and Islamiat lessons at school. TV programs and the internet and social media are also identified as popular sources of religious information. This identification of the family as the most important source of religious knowledge may indicate a close connection between one's religious beliefs and personal and social identity.

The following data that emerged regarding the students' sense of self/ways of being along with the purpose of education appear to be in conflict. On one hand, the highest number of respondents identified self-discovery/self-fulfilment/fulfilment of one's dreams/being a good person as the purpose of life. Almost an equal number of respondents identified serving humanity/helping others as life's main purpose. A smaller but substantial number identified obedience to God/fulfilment of religious obligations as the purpose of life. On the other hand, a majority identified the purpose of education to

either be a career/material success/better lifestyle or “fitting in the world”/survival in the world/becoming civilized. Many students do identify self-awareness/self-exploration/self-improvement as the aim of education. However, they largely see the worldly benefits of education to be its main purpose.

For many respondents, the vision of an ideal self is a free self/ an educated and independent person. Others consider the following as qualities that an ideal person should possess: great self-control, having a connection with God, a profound understanding of faith/ high spirituality, being kind/thoughtful, and being someone who continuously strives to improve him/herself. A large number of respondents envision an ideal society wherein equity, justice, care, love, Islamic values, and public welfare exist. For others, they described an ideal society based on the Quran and Sunnah/morality. A substantial number consider an ideal society to be non-judgmental.

The students’ opinions on what hinders them from achieving these ideals are quite revealing. A large number blame themselves or their collective self, referring to the Muslim nation as a whole (*ummah*) in general and the Pakistani nation in particular. Many respondents identify our religious extremism, unawareness/ignorance, laziness, being away from religion, self-indulgence, self-pity, and selfishness as factors that stop us from achieving this ideal self and society. Another substantial number blames the West as the source of all problems, being termed as “the biggest threat.” Contemporary Western education and social media are considered a source of multiple social problems. Yet another group sees religious clerics/rigid traditional norms to be hurdles in achieving an ideal self and society. A large number of students have also identified factors that may be helpful in achieving an ideal self or society namely an attachment to religion, an Islamic education, and a scholarly Islamic discussion. Others suggest self-realization and introspection. The identification of the self, the West, and religious clerics as hurdles and scholarly Islamic discussions and/or intellectual Islamic education as key influences in achieving an ideal self and society indicate that while students see both the West and religious clerics as problematic influences, they make a distinction between rigid traditional norms/ clerics and scholarly/intellectual Islamic discussions.

The exploration of the students’ concepts and values of education/knowledge led to interesting findings. An overwhelming majority considered education important for contemporary Muslims because it “helps them fit in the world.” Being a Muslim in a post-

9/11 world with rampant Islamophobia, contemporary Muslims feel a sense of being cornered by Western powers. By being subjected to the colonialism of the past and coloniality of the present, there is a sense of being wronged by the West. Most of the students resonate with this and thought that through education, Muslims can “avoid being cornered.” This line of thinking is a continuation of initially introduced local attitudes toward Western education during colonial times.

Sanjay Seth (2007, 31), a renowned postcolonial scholar, notes how Indians from the very beginning saw English education as a means to advance one’s career and make money:

‘The English learning is universally considered as an *Arthakari vidya* or learning that enables one to earn money’ (Chanda 1917, 316).

. . . [Education] was being compartmentalized or quarantined into the slot of ‘that which enables us to go ahead in life,’ (quoted in Chaturverdi 1930, 174) instead of ‘refashioning the understanding of what constitutes a good life.’

This resonates with how a majority of the students in the study at hand saw a difference between religious and worldly education. Many thought that religious education is meant for our inner self, while worldly education is meant for making a living. A few however thought that both types of education are similar as they teach us humanity and wisdom. Very few thought that the two systems are interconnected.

The idea of Muslims “lagging behind” others and Muslims needing to catch up with the world was a dominant theme in the students’ responses. Education was considered important because it would help Muslims catch up with the world. However, when asked about the religious value of worldly education, an overwhelming majority pointed out that knowledge acquisition is a religious obligation in Islam. Interestingly, despite recognizing this religious obligation, students consider education to be important for Muslims because of its worldly benefits and not its religious value. This compartmentalization of education since colonial times has led to a fragmented thinking about the value of education. In some ways, the

higher value and purpose of education has been sidelined by its social and material benefits.

The question on the worldly value of religious education gave further insights into the colonial footprint on contemporary education, thinking, and system. There were multiple responses to this question ranging from the view that religious education does not offer a promising career/worldly benefits to the view that it does offer career options. Many considered religious education in itself even when it does not offer a career. Some believe it is important because being close to God means having a greater chance of worldly success.

For the shape of modern Muslim education, a large majority thought that both Islamic and contemporary worldly education should go hand in hand. Some suggested that modern Muslim education should tackle unexplored areas of our religion. An overwhelming majority wanted formal schooling to provide religious instruction. However, many pointed out that it should be done in an open and inclusive environment. Some suggested comparative religion and interfaith dialog lessons along with regular schooling. A minority expressed concern that religious instruction may confuse students as religious plurality cannot be accurately represented in school curricula.

These observations reveal some inner conflicts of being a “modern” Muslim student. The modern Muslim self and its educational outlook remain ruptured and fragmented. The deeper meaning of life and the higher purpose of education is either consciously or unconsciously associated with Islamic/religious education, but religious education as it exists is generally seen as limited and problematic. Moreover, the pursuit of this type of education may have a higher purpose and value, but it may entail a compromise in one’s social status and values. The normal worldly education on the other hand may or may not have a higher purpose; it may even be a source of many social evils. Nevertheless, it is considered a necessity. What is lost in this inner conflict is a love for learning, which generally comes with a conviction of indulging in a pursuit of something of far greater value. The colonial legacy of two detached parallel systems of education continue to shape the contemporary education landscape of Pakistan and both the worldviews and attitudes of Pakistani students toward education.

WHAT COUNTS AS KNOWLEDGE CONTRIBUTION?

My original concern for the lack of Muslims' contribution to contemporary knowledge led me to probe deeper into the idea of knowledge contribution itself. The question "What counts as knowledge contribution in contemporary contexts?" has important implications for contemporary Muslims, who live with the idea that they are somehow "lagging behind" the world and that they have to catch up with it.

In this section, I shall draw on the decolonial perspective that places the concerns about the body political (who is speaking), geopolitical (from where), and theo-political (to what end) at the center of enquiry (Mustafa Ali 2017, 3). An exploration of these basic questions reveals the prevailing coloniality of knowledge that normally remains hidden in plain sight. As Mignolo (2009, 160) opines, "The question is: who, when, why is constructing knowledges? Why did eurocentred [*sic*] epistemology conceal its own geo-historical and bio-graphical locations." I point out that the prevailing coloniality of knowledge affects Muslims' self-image and educational outlook as it continues to remain concealed, while the "lagging behind" and neo-liberal discourses remain highly visible in academic and policy discussions. I shall attempt to identify and disrupt the epistemic hegemony of the Western academia by questioning their idea of knowledge contribution.

Knowledge contribution in contemporary academia is often regarded as publication in top ranking journals from a variety of disciplines. A researcher's performance is acknowledged and evaluated based on one's list of publications in top journals. Muslims or other contributors from the developing world show very little contribution to knowledge on these ranking charts. This results in the assumption that they are lagging far behind the rest in terms of knowledge production. If we focus on biopolitics and geopolitics of the corpus of contemporary knowledge instead of the absence of Muslims from these lists, we find in plain sight facts that fail to catch our attention otherwise.

Centralizing the question of who speaks and from where, I examine two lists of top ranking scientific journals as per the most widely recognized journals' ranking system, Scimago Journal and Country Rank (2017)¹¹: 1) the list of top 1,000 journals of all subject areas and 2) the list of top 500 journals in the social sciences. For the first list, out of the top 1,000 journals in all subject areas 483 are from

the United States alone. This is followed by the UK with 310 journals and then the Netherlands with 136. A total of 993 out of 1,000 top journals are from the West: US (483), UK (310), Netherlands (136), Germany (43), Switzerland (14), New Zealand (2), Italy (1), Sweden (2), France (1), Canada (1). There are only 7 from the non-Western world: Egypt (1), China (1), Japan (1), India (1), Bulgaria (1), Singapore (2). Notably, Egypt is the only contributor of the non-Western world that comes from the Muslim world. For the second list, among the top 500 journals in the social sciences category, there is no journal from the non-Western world. A total of 441 out of 500 journals are from the UK and US alone. The geopolitics of knowledge production reveals the epistemic privilege of the West in contemporary times. The aforementioned statistics raise multiple questions about the composition of contemporary knowledge and the process of knowledge production. The domains of social science and humanities remain especially problematic as these deal with context-bound questions, issues, and perspectives.

Ramon Grosfoguel (2013, 74) raises the following questions:

How is it possible that the canon of thought in all the disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the *Westernized university* (Grosfoguel 2012) is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA)?

How is it possible that men from these five countries achieved such an epistemic privilege to the point that their knowledge today is considered superior over the knowledge of the rest of the world? How did they come to monopolize the authority of knowledge in the world?

According to Grosfoguel, theories emerge out of social or historical experiences and outlooks of certain spaces and bodies. The idea that knowledge produced by men from a limited space somehow has a universal effect, that theories put forward by them are sufficient to explain social or historical realities of the rest of the world is a façade. The issues, ideas, theories discussed in the domain of contemporary social science knowledge remain oblivious to the experiences of a majority of the world, and yet it claims to be universal. The other side of this academic privilege is epistemic inferiority as “Westernized universities” consider knowledge from other parts of the world as

inferior and hence not a part of the canon of thought. The rest of the world either remains silent or attempts to “catch up” and be included in the “superior” domain of Western knowledge. Grosfoguel uses the term Westernized to refer to all universities (especially the ones in the non-Western world) that follow the Western forms of education.

Mignolo (2009) advocates epistemic disobedience against epistemic hegemony of the West. He calls for the decolonial option, which he terms as “the singular connector of a diversity of decolonials.” According to Mignolo (2009, 3), “the colonial wound” (i.e., the people and regions being categorized as “economically and mentally underdeveloped”) is the one common thing in the decolonial path. Mignolo (ibid.) explains the decolonial option as “the definite rejection of *being told* from the epistemic privileges of the zero point what ‘we’ are, what our ranking is in relation to the ideal of *humanitas* and what we have to do to be recognized as such.” The geopolitics of knowledge unveils the carefully veiled epistemic privilege of the West. The decolonial option shows us a way to delink from the “web of imperial/modern knowledge” (ibid., 20) and reclaim our own ways of knowing and being.

CONCLUSION

The problem of Muslims’ “lagging behind” others in knowledge’s domain therefore requires deeper introspection. The problem is intrinsically linked to colonial disruptions of the past and the colonality of the present. How can one “catch up” with the others when one is not sure about the purpose or direction of the race one is getting into? For Pakistani university students, the purpose of education is identified as economic growth and material success, while madrasa students must only focus on salvation in the hereafter. The modern Muslim self remains divided between these conflicting purposes of life and education. The cultivation of a higher self (*khudi*) becomes a lost cause as Muslims remain perplexed between the divided discourses of knowledge. Both religious and secular education discourses do not engage in a meaningful dialogue or in immanent critique that has a transformative effect on individuals and their world. In the absence of critique and the promise of transformation, knowledge acquisition becomes a banal activity devoid of love and devotion. In the absence of love and devotion, it becomes unlikely to produce luminaries like Shah Waliullah or modern-day reformers

like Iqbal or Maududi who continue to inspire Muslims around the world to this day.

Through this exploratory study I wanted to disrupt dominant discourses that impair Muslims' relationship with knowledge and initiate a debate on the purpose of knowledge acquisition for Muslims with the intent of reviving Muslims' intrinsic connection to knowledge seeking, which seems to be lost in modern times. I therefore invite Muslim scholars to reflect on the relative position of Muslims in the domain of contemporary knowledge and rethink Muslims' relationship with knowledge in present times. I particularly ask religious scholars to address the following questions, keeping in view that the pursuit of knowledge is a religious obligation in Islam.

1. What kind of knowledge can be harmful for Muslims? Why?
2. Can Muslims learn and adopt Western skills, professional knowledge, and technology without being affected by the canon of thought behind all this? If so, how is such a disconnect possible or desirable?
3. What is traditional Islam's idea of knowledge contribution?
4. If religious education is the higher form of knowledge that Muslims must attain, can Muslims contribute to it in some way?

The Western or "Westernized" scholars on the other hand, must address the following questions regarding the current knowledge system.

1. How can all knowledge claims, evaluation of knowledge claims, and criteria of evaluation of knowledge claims all belong to the West?
2. How is the question of what counts as knowledge intrinsically linked to the question of whose knowledge counts?
3. How seriously is Westernized knowledge willing to engage with alternative knowledge claims?

The Muslims' relationship with knowledge and their attitude toward knowledge seeking may be significantly altered if they can find clear answers to these questions.

NOTES

- 1 Ghazali (c. 1056-1111) is widely regarded as “one of the most prominent and influential philosophers, [scholars,] theologians, . . . and mystics of Sunni Islam.” See <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/al-ghazali/>.
- 2 *Ilm* is an Arabic word that literally means knowledge, but it is a concept broader and deeper than knowledge.
- 3 HEC stands for Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. See <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/HECAnnouncements/Documents/Announcement/HEC-Vision-2025.pdf>.
- 4 See HEC Policy Vision 2025, 2, <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/HECAnnouncements/Documents/Announcement/HEC-Vision-2025.pdf>.
- 5 Cambridge International O and A Level is the most popular program in Pakistan.
- 6 See Higher Education Commission Pakistan's Recognized Universities and Degree Awarding Institutions, <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/pages/recognised.aspx>.
- 7 Divine revealed knowledge based on Quran and Sunnah i.e., sayings and practice of the Prophet Muhammad (*Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*).
- 8 See the Mission Statement of Riphah International University, accessed September 20, 2019, <https://www.riphah.edu.pk/admission/why-riphah>.
- 9 For more information on ISO 9001 see <https://www.lr.org/th/iso-9001/>.
- 10 See IIUI website https://www.iiu.edu.pk/?page_id=30.
- 11 See <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php>.

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FATIMA WAQI SAJJAD is an Assistant Professor of International Relations at the University of Management and Technology, Lahore. She is also a researcher in the field of Critical Peace Studies and Peace Education in Pakistan. Her work questions contemporary education structures inside and outside of Pakistan and explores ideas for building peace through education. <fatima.sajjad@umt.edu.pk>