An exploration of Naquib al-Attas' theory of Islamic education as *ta'dib* as an 'indigenous' educational philosophy

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Abstract

This paper explores the 'indigenous' philosophy of education of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a Malay Muslim scholar. Al-Attas' theoretical work culminated in the establishment of a counter-colonial higher education institution. Through presenting al-Attas' life and philosophy and by exploring the arguments of his critics, I aim to shed light on the challenges and paradoxes faced by indigenous academics working at the interface of philosophy and education.

Introduction

In her ambitious survey of non-western social science, *'Southern Theory',* the Australian scholar Raewyn Connell (2007, pp. 111–137) includes a chapter on three Iranian intellectuals who challenged 'western' dominance of Muslim intellectual thought in the 19th and 20th centuries. In doing so, Connell explores a number of issues that arise whenever Islamic intellectual resistance is considered as a form of 'indigenous' thought. Central to these issues is the question of whether Islam deserves to be included in an overview of sociological theories originating in what Connell calls the 'Global South'. Similarly Reagan (2005) qualifies his decision to include a chapter on Islam in his book on indigenous educational traditions, with a lengthy discussion of perceived non-liberal Islamic teachings. Despite their misgivings, both

writers nevertheless see it as important to include Islamic thought within the scope of the indigenous field because ultimately it is 'non-western' and is engaged in the kind of cultural and intellectual resistance that is characteristic of 'indigenous' research. Connell recognizes the long historical roots of Islamic sociological thinking, nevertheless she argues that it is misguided to turn to so called 'founding fathers', i.e. classical Muslim scholars such as Ibn Khaldun (d.1406), regarded as a forerunner of sociology (Alatas, 2006)[1]; and Al-Biruni (d.1048) regarded as a forerunner of anthropology (Ahmed, 1986). Connell argues that this approach fails to produce social thought about the modern world and that further work, regarding the connections and the contrasts between this kind of work and that of the mainstream 'western' discourse, is required. There is additional irony here, in that, possibly because her focus is sociology, which is a relatively new discipline in the western academy, Connell does not identify Ibn Khaldun and Al-Biruni as polymaths who have influenced the development of 'western' thought in other ways. Even better known in Europe were scholars such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna d.1037) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes d.1198), through whose writings renaissance scholars revived Greek medicine and philosophy. There is little doubt that Islamic intellectual advances influenced the western academy and educational thought to some degree (Makdisi, 1981). It has even been argued that the work of Ibn al-Haytham (d.1040) was the forerunner of the 'western' scientific method. Where does this interwoven intellectual history leave the claim of current Muslims who decry 'western' intellectual hegemony and call for 'Islamization' of knowledge and education? Advocates of Islamization would argue that far from being recognized, the very suppression of this intellectual history in the current educational systems is essential to western intellectual and cultural hegemony. Furthermore, from their perspective, secularization of the western academy and education systems means that they are now far removed from the principles of Islamic thought. These systems are corrupting the minds of the Muslims, who have little knowledge of their own intellectual history; this is precisely why there is a need for Islamization.

However, is a call for Islamization really a call for indigenization, as claimed by Dangor (2005)? This paper aims to explore this claim through analysis of the work of

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[1] Syed Farid Alatas is the nephew of Syed Naquib al-Attas, who is the subject of this paper.

one of the original scholars behind the Islamization of knowledge movement, namely the Malay-Muslim philosopher, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. This paper is not concerned with the wider Islamization of Knowledge project, for example the theory of the Palestinian-American philosopher Ismail al Faruqi. Although al-Faruqi collaborated with al-Attas in conferences during the late 1970s and 1980s, al-Attas sought to distinguish his thought from that of al-Faruqi and other scholars who were involved in the wider movement, such as Ali Ashraf (Abaza, 2002; Ahmed, 2014). Al-Attas saw his project as quite distinct. He sought to devise an 'Islamic educational philosophy' and establish an alternative university, as efforts towards a counter-colonial movement. This paper focuses on the internal and external challenges he faced in realizing this project.

Interestingly, al-Attas rejects the term indigenization, arguing that localizing Islam through the use of terms such as Indigenization (*pribumisasi* in Malay) is a form of sophism, which fails to recognize the right of non-western scholars to claim that their thought can be universal. Al-Attas in the tradition of classical Muslim thought sees Islam as a universal truth that can be applied to all local situations without taking away from their 'localness' and particularity (Wan Daud, 1998). This has been an important principle in Islamic tradition, which has enabled the flourishing of diverse, yet unified Muslim cultures and societies. This principle bears a similarity to the ongoing layers of identity discourse in indigenous research expressed in relation to being and embodiment, as explored in the work of Kovach and colleagues (2013; 2010). Al-Attas' personal embodiment of the complexities of being and identity is a particularly interesting case study of an indigenous philosopher. This is because his personal history is so closely tied to the anti-colonial struggle and the postcolonial reality that frames the Islamization/indigenization projects. Al-Attas was born in Bogor, Java, Dutch East Indies (pre-independence Indonesia) in 1931. His genealogical tree is complex but he traces his roots over a thousand years to the Ba'Alawi *sayyids*[2] of Hadramaut, Yemen, as well as claiming descent from Turkish, Sundanese and Johore (Indo-Malay) aristocracy (Wan Daud, 1998). As in many indigenous communities, genealogy is an important science in the Arab-Islamic world and al-Attas' standing as a representative of the Islamic cause is elevated by his links

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[2] *Sayyid* (also spelt syed) is a term denoting descent from Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him).

to Arab, Turkish and 'indigenous' Indo-Malay families. However his standing is more importantly heightened by the claim of having had a traditional Islamic and 'indigenous' education that he draws on in his academic career.

"From the family in Bogor he obtained his education in Islamic sciences, while from his family in Johore he developed the foundations for Malay language, literature, and culture." (Wan Daud, 1998 p2)

Al-Attas has written extensively in Malay and one strand of his philosophical work is deeply concerned with philology; he traces the cultural, literary roots of the Malay language and the Islamic history of the Indo-Malay archipelago. An example is his work on the dating of the Terengganu inscription. Al-Attas argued extensively for the importance of the Malay language in nation building in the early years of Malaysian independence. During his tenure as Dean of the Faculty of Arts, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur (1968-1970), he initiated and led the establishment of Malay as an intellectual and academic language. Paradoxically, despite al-Attas' emphasis on the Malay language in his later academic career, his academic writing on important Muslim-Malay scholars such as Fansuri and al-Raniri was completed using the English language. This took place during his time as a student in the orientalist heart of the western academy, the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK and McGill University, Canada (1959-1964). This was not al-Attas' only exposure to 'western' education; in the colonial period prior to Malaysian independence (1951-1955), he was a Cadet Officer in the Royal Malay regiment and received training at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, England. Ironically, during this time, having been attracted to the metaphysics of the Sufis whilst in the library at Sandhurst, al-Attas, travelled through Europe, Spain and North Africa seeking out Sufi Mystics and meeting Moroccan and other North African independence leaders. Drawing on both the Malay and English intellectual traditions, al-Attas has published over twenty books in Malay and English. Interestingly he has not written in Arabic, the language of classical Islamic learning. However al-Attas' educational philosophy centres on the importance of Qur'anic Arabic to Islamic education, because it is the language that gives access to Islam's core texts. His most enduring influence has been in the field of reviving an Islamic educational and

intellectual movement in Malaysia to counter western hegemony in the Malay education system.

Following the above preliminary comments, I now intend to examine the interface between philosophy and education for indigenous people by exploring al-Attas' educational philosophy. In so doing, I firstly give a brief and basic outline of al-Attas' epistemology, ontology and pedagogical philosophy. I then explore the critique of his work by a range of scholars. I identify both the potential 'western' bias in the arguments of his critics and the complexity of the layers of identity embodied in al-Attas as an 'indigenous' scholar, who is grappling with the challenges of generating indigenous education in the modern world.

Al-Attas' educational philosophy

Al-Attas is deeply concerned with re-examining the philosophical foundations of the Muslim educational endeavour in the post-colonial world. He seeks to reclaim education and learning through a non-western i.e. Islamic, way of being in and knowing the world, a way of being that differs fundamentally from the secular and 'technological[3]' educational systems that he is critiquing. Although al-Attas uses the words 'system of education' in his writings (al-Attas, 1980, p. 1), I feel the term indicates a practical manifestation and thus does not properly elucidate his intended meaning. Al-Attas is firstly concerned with a conceptual reframing of our understanding of education and gives much more importance to a proposed conceptual 'system' than a practical 'system' that may emerge from his philosophy. Al-Attas' philosophy is concerned with a spiritual ontology and epistemology. He takes great care in developing his philosophical position on being and knowing, particularly because he identifies a postcolonial loss of understanding of these fundamentals in Islamic societies. Al-Attas identifies the weakness in Muslim understanding as what he calls the loss of *adab;* an Arabic word that he uses both ontologically and pedagogically. Al-Attas' exacting use of the word *adab* is true to his insistence that there has been a loss of meaning of Islamic concepts, in that he is seeking to revive an original use of the word *adab*; a use that differs from the

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[3] I use the word 'technological' here in the Heideggerean sense, see for example (Peters, 2002, p. 9)

common contemporary use of the term, which is usually literature or urbane social etiquette (Wan Daud, 1998, p. 134). For Al-Attas attaining *adab* is authentically becoming through knowing and recognizing the 'proper place of things'. Muslims have become entrenched within a secular western worldview and are looking to understand their problems through this inauthentic lens. For al-Attas only through a regeneration of *adab* through *ta'dib* (authentic education), will Muslims be able to faithfully address the needs of their societies. He further argues that this loss of *adab* is due to a loss of understanding of the *ma'na* (meanings) of Qur'anic terms and concepts, which in turn leads to inauthenticity and injustice to the self and society (al-Attas, 1980, p. 13). Al-Attas begins with a thorough exposition of the dangers of secularism for Muslim society per se and the separation of religious and secular scholarship in Muslim higher education in particular. For al-Attas, this separation leads to a loss of *ma'na* (meaning) and thus impacts the being of the Muslim scholar or academic. He goes on to discuss the mistake that the newly independent Muslim nation states made; in imitating the secular colonial powers they conceived education as educating the citizen as opposed to holistically educating the human being (Wan Daud, 1998, pp. 128–133). Al-Attas' solution is to devise a neo-Ghazalian approach to ontology and epistemology in order to establish a metaphysics of Islam which recognizes non-empirical and non-rational being and knowing. According to Daiber (2011) he is further influenced by al-Farabi and Ibn Qutayba and is thus drawing in a diverse and rich tradition of classical Islamic scholarship. Al-Attas draws on the widely accepted Islamic definition of the human being as having a range of interdependent faculties incorporating the *'aql* (intellect), *nutq* (speech/reason), *nafs* (self), *qalb* (heart) and *ruh* (spirit). For al-Attas, these are interdependent strands of a holistic understanding of the human being. However, he argues that the spiritual dimension of human self-awareness and knowledge was lost in the Greek separation of the terms *ratio* and *intellectus*. The Qur'anic term *'aql*, which is linked indelibly to *nutq* (speech/reason), incorporates both meanings.

"Man is possessed of an inner faculty that formulates meaning (i.e. dhu'nutq) and this formulation of meaning, which involves judgment and discrimination and clarification, is what constitutes his 'rationality'. The terms natiq and nutq are derived from a root that conveys the basic meaning of 'speech', in the sense of human speech, so that they both signify a certain power and capacity in man to articulate

words in meaningful pattern. He is, as it were, a 'language animal', and the articulation of linguistic symbols into meaningful patterns is no other than the outward, visible and audible expression of the inner, unseen reality, which we call 'aql. The term 'aql itself basically signifies a kind of 'binding' or 'withholding', so that in this respect 'aql signifies an innate property that binds and withholds objects of knowledge by means of words. 'Aql is synonymous with qalb in the same way as qalb, which is a spiritual organ of cognition called the 'heart', is synonymous with 'aql." (al-Attas, 1980, p. 2)

Al-Attas thus frames his metaphysics in opposition to secularism and in accordance with the classical Sufism of al-Ghazali who sees the human being as having the capacity of a spiritual recognition that scaffolds both his understanding of meanings, and his self-awareness as a being whose purpose is to turn to God. Ultimately for al-Attas all knowledge comes from God and the human being is the active receptor and interpreter of this knowledge; but this interpretation is about understanding the true meaning as given by God.

"Knowledge, with reference to God as being its origin, is the arrival (husul) in the soul of the meaning of a thing or an object of knowledge; and that with reference to the soul as being its interpreter, knowledge is the arrival (wusul) of the soul at the meaning of a thing or an object of knowledge." (al-Attas, 1980, p. 5)

Further this knowledge gives an understanding of being that involves *re-cognition* of the *'proper place of things within a certain order',* which is attained through *ta'dib* i.e. the drawing out of self-awareness and the inculcation of *adab*. This sense of hierarchy comes from the Islamic mystical tradition of Sufism. The Sufi seeks to know the ultimate reality, that is God and to achieve this knowledge s/he needs to attain a state of being by passing through various hierarchical cycles of submission to God, which involves the movement of the *nafs* (self) towards meaning. The Sufi engages in theological, moral and spiritual training at the hands of a Sufi master/teacher to attain an understanding of his *nafs* (self) and the relation of his self to God. Ultimately this leads to a state of being that attains knowledge of a transcendental level of existence. This is attained through being at one with God.

The classical Islamic theological and mystical position on 'worldly' or scientific knowledge is complex, so-called secular knowledge was part and parcel of the scholarly life of the classical Muslim civilization (Lettinck, 2011, p. 151). As he draws on al-Ghazali, al-Attas is within an epistemological tradition that recognizes empirical and rational knowledge as well as imaginary and analogous knowledge. (Wan Daud, 1998, p. 107)

"By 'proper place' al-Attas means not the man-made and generally unjust socio-economic place, but the various real levels of human existence encompassing ontological, cosmological and psychological domains." (Wan Daud, 1998, p. 107)

According to al-Attas this approach, which draws on one distinctly Islamic intellectual tradition, will restore order and justice not only to the human self but also to society and environment. It is a holistic approach that recognizes man's spiritual nature and relationship with others, his environment and most importantly God. The above is a very simplistic rendition of al-Attas' basic ideas, which are extensively developed in his many writings, particularly in the *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Al-Attas, 1995) and *Islam and Secularism* (al-Attas, 2002). He writes persistently about how the implementation of his approach would transform the Muslim understanding of research methodology and 'development', writing both about de-westernization and Islamization of knowledge (al-Attas, 2002, pp. 133–169; al-Attas, 1980, p. 5). His writings provide the theory concerning the integration of classical Islamic education with contemporary higher education in the Muslim world and devising an Islamic university for the contemporary era (Wan Daud, 1998, pp. 169–224). In 1987, al-Attas implemented his theory through the establishment of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), based within the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). For over two decades the Institute flourished under his personal directorship. The experiment was however, to be short lived; in 2015 all courses run by ISTAC and the institute itself were amalgamated into IIUM. Although, the institute's work remains within the 'Islamization of knowledge' paradigm, because IIUM also broadly subscribes to this theory, it could be argued that, al-Attas' personal vision and contribution have been diminished by this merger, in that IIUM has not sought to sustain the very specific project that he had begun. Nevertheless, this translation of theory into a fully

functioning counter-colonial higher education institution has rare parallels and therefore provides a rich opportunity for critical evaluation and analysis from both sociological and philosophical perspectives.

Al-Attas' critics

Al-Attas' ability to translate his ideas into an educational institute raises questions about power and the Islamization project. First, for some, al-Attas' has allowed his thought to be appropriated by the Malaysian state for it's own purposes (Noor, 2009, p. 214). Secondly, can Muslim intellectuals who have access to state power in Muslim nation states equate their project with indigenous peoples who have no such power? The answer to this important question is complex and multilayered in that, although Muslim nation states have the potential of challenging western intellectual hegemony, they are, according to al-Attas and other Muslim thinkers, mesmerized by supposed western progress and technology; a condition that Aal-e-Ahmed calls 'westoxication', cited in (Connell, 2007). It is this very condition that al-Attas identifies as the loss of *adab* and that he is working to redress. In working with the government, al-Attas was seeking to reform society through education. Furthermore, the Islamization project is not unique in working to set up institutions, supported by state actors. There are other proposals and attempts to establish indigenous higher education institutions, some of which have government support, for example a National Maori university in Aotearoa (Hook, 2010) and the International Research Institute For Maori And Indigenous Education at The University of Auckland, New Zealand. Other examples are the First Nations University in Canada, which opened in 2003, and the Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development at the University of Melbourne. These indigenous movements and institutions all face challenges; it can be argued that al-Attas faced very similar challenges and these are discussed below.

Some western and/or indigenous scholars argue that indigenous movements are futile attempts to demonstrate that 'western' thought is not universal. For these scholars, rational and scientific thought is the pinnacle of human achievement and indigenous scholarship is a reversal of hard fought efforts to remove subjectivity from scholarship. From this basis, indigenous scholarship is sometimes seen as not worthy or capable of generating thought equivalent to the western academy; or in a more

sophisticated alternative, as falsely claiming to generate original thought. Thus these critics claim that so-called 'indigenous' research is actually dependent on the norms and models of the western academy.

Farid Panjwani, for example, has heavily critiqued the Islamization of Knowledge project with these sorts of arguments. Panjwani (2004, p. 2) argues that the critique of western education, drawn on by scholars advocating an Islamization project, is almost exclusively drawn from western sources. This he sees as a weakness, presumably because it demonstrates an inability to develop 'Islamic' arguments. Panjwani does not recognize this approach as a strategy by Muslims to critique 'western' education, by arguing that on it's own terms 'western' education is wanting. Panjwani does not acknowledge that for indigenous scholars to enter the discourse in the western academy, it is often necessary to cite western sources, because established academics are unlikely to recognize arguments that do not sit within a western methodology. Simultaneously, Panjwani argues that despite using western sources, Muslim scholars fail to demonstrate a shared concern with western educators, presumably because they do not ally their project with these other educational critiques. Panjwani does not accept that identification of the aims of the Islamization project as distinct from internal critiques within the western academy is necessary. That without illustrating this distinction, there is little point in arguing for the need for an alternative approach to education that draws on non-western epistemologies and ontologies.

Conversely, in critiquing 'western' science and presenting an 'Islamic' alternative, Panjwani goes on to argue that Muslim scholars are essentializing Islam and failing to present the diversity of Muslim interpretations of 'Islamic' thought. In Panjwani's eyes this is creating two problems, firstly a false dichotomy between Islam and the west and secondly the proclamation of a divinely ordained education system with no room for human interpretation. In relation to the first problem, any non-western scholar will naturally identify the difference of the worldview from which they are presenting their argument in order to demonstrate its uniqueness in relation to the dominant paradigm, it seems to me strange to point this out as a criticism. Upholding this distinctness does not preclude openness to acknowledgement of shared values and concerns. Certainly in my reading of al-Attas, I sense such openness to engaging with 'western' ideas, and recognition that 'classical' Islamic thought was itself influenced

by Greek philosophy and other cultures. It stands to reason that a scholar like al-Attas, who is educated in the western academy, who liberally refers to English translations of Greek philosophers in his works, clearly recognizes that Muslim intellectuals need to engage with western thought. Panjwani's main concern is the claims of Muslims that Islamic thought originates from a divine source. In his view, this is no more than an idealized apologetic due to the dominance of western thought and the inability of Muslim scholars to confront it (Panjwani, 2004, pp. 4–5). From Panjwani's perspective, claiming a divine origin of any particular belief system is asserting the superiority of this particular worldview and he is uncomfortable with this approach.

Other Muslim scholars have expressed a similar unease at al-Attas' emphasis on *adab,* which can be read as an insistence on hierarchies and the 'proper place of things'. Sahin (2013, p. 178) for example sees this as 'a set of coercive moral practices and training', arguing that al-Attas is overly concerned with the esoteric nature of Islamic education. Considering that Sahin is arguing for a holistic view of education from an Islamic perspective, it is striking that Sahin does not give importance to al-Attas' centering of spiritual awareness within a holistic Islamic epistemology. Al-Attas, in drawing on the Ghazalian hierarchy of knowledge, fully recognizes empirical and rational knowledge; however he subsumes these into an approach to knowledge that also recognizes intuition and spiritual awareness which is as much tied up with being, as with knowing (Al-Attas, 1995, p. 148; Wan Daud, 1998, pp. 107–8).

Noaparast (2012, p153) argues that al-Attas is casting the concept of *adab* too widely. He argues that al-Attas' insistence that all knowledge is essentially an *ayah* (sign) towards knowledge of the existence of God reduces all disciplines to theology. According to Noaparast, al-Attas' insistence on the role of the divine undermines the methodologies of a range of disciplines especially those of the sciences. Noaparast does not accuse al-Attas of being dogmatic; he recognizes the hermeneutic dimension of al-Attas' philosophy. However his concern is that subsuming all other disciplines within such an epistemology brings the sciences under the realm of hermeneutics, which to him is not desirable. It could be argued that Noaparast is failing to see beyond the dominant rational-scientific paradigm in this critique. Elsewhere in the same paper (2012, pp. 164–170), Noaparast applies a different critique, focusing on

al-Attas' definition of education as *ta'dib* by drawing on Islamic sources that use the term *tarbiyah* for education. Noaparast is attempting to broaden the Islamic concept of education to resolve the weaknesses he identifies in al-Attas' approach. Sahin also presents a similar argument. Both scholars draw upon western and Islamic theory to present a way forward for Islamic education that recognizes al-Attas' contribution, although addressing what they perceive as weaknesses. This internal discourse, it could be argued addresses Panjwani's concern that Islam is somehow seen as monolithic by those who call for a de-westernization of knowledge. Panjwani however has a further criticism, namely that alternatives to western education presented by Islamic scholars are either no different to western models, or that they are lacking in creativity (Panjwani, 2004, pp. 5–6), they have not presented a real alternative, only a critique of the west which is taken from the west itself.

Abaza (1999, 2002) concurs with Panjwani's argument and also brings forward a further criticism on the ethos of ISTAC and al-Attas' insistence on religious ceremony, symbols and performance, and architecture that conveyed the spirit of his project. Rather than seeing this as an embodiment of Islamic being and a revival of spiritual ceremony, she perceives it as empty inflated gestures without meaning and intellectual substance. For Abaza these are the outward manifestations of al-Attas' vainglorious obsession with hierarchy which she argues is influenced by his British military training and a neo-Sufi reading of Islam leading to a "refeudalization and institutionalization of an Islam of power" (2002, pp. 92–95), which, according to her served the interests of Malaysia's ruling elites some of whom were students of al-Attas. Instead of seeing substance in al-Attas' extensive theoretical work, which is realized in a flourishing educational institution that has become home to respected scholars with innovative output such as Mohammad Hashim Kemali, Abaza sees only failure. Instead of seeing the cross-cultural position of ISTAC scholars as straddling the Islamic educational tradition and western disciplines as a strength, Abaza argues that this led to a lack of grassroots following as most Muslim Malays still hold on to traditional Islamic scholars. Instead of al-Attas influencing Malay policy and successfully infusing his intellectual work into the structures and work of government; according to Abaza, Al-Attas' elite background and western education made him a hostage to political interests who used him to gain 'Islamic' credibility with the masses. Abaza fails to recognize that this argument itself demonstrates a

desire amongst Malay Muslims to see Islam as part of their public life and to build their society on an Islamic intellectual tradition. It can be argued that this applies both to the grassroots who according to her are not represented by al-Attas, or the elites who she claims use al-Attas.

Like Panjwani, ultimately Abaza is wary of the entire project and completely skeptical of the capacity of Islam to generate knowledge appropriate for contemporary society. Panjwani argues that the only way for this to happen is for Islamic scholars to drop the term 'Islamic'. Further, scholars must recognize weaknesses and discord in what they, according to Panjwani, assume is a purely successful intellectual heritage. According to Panjwani, Muslims must read 'Islamic' sources through a modern lens, as only this approach will allow them to understand the subjectivity of their worldview. Whilst Panjwani's and Abaza's critiques are not as damning as Tibi who outright refers to al-Attas as a fundamentalist (1995), nevertheless Panjwani and Abaza betray a strong attachment to the 'western' academy and it's worldview. Through this lens, the efforts of Islamic scholars to draw on their own tradition to generate educational projects will be seen as futile and lacking in intellectuality or creativity. Any intellectuality and creativity Islamic scholars may generate is unlikely to be recognized or accepted by the western paradigm. Al-Attas' focus on spirituality and being is too alien to be given credence in an academy steeped in the rational and scientific.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to explore al-Attas' life and work, and the arguments deployed by his critics to shed light on the numerous challenges faced by indigenous scholars. I have also sought to contextualize al-Attas' work as a postcolonial indigenous philosophy of education. I close with an apt quotation from al-Attas where he highlights the preoccupation with doubt in the 'western' academic paradigm.

"It is like the thirsty traveller who at first sincerely sought the water of knowledge, but who later, having found it plain perhaps, proceeded to temper his cup with the salt of doubt so that his thirst now becomes insatiable though he drinks incessantly,

and that in thus drinking the water that cannot slake his thirst, he has forgotten the original and true purpose for which the water was sought."

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam: The Concept of Religion and The Foundation of Ethics and Morality* (2013)

According to al-Attas the preoccupation with doubt, and lack of emphasis on purpose, has led to the current crises in the western academy and in postcolonial non-western societies, which are also now plagued with doubt. The need for critique and questioning that characterizes Western higher education has paralyzed a true search for knowledge and self-awareness. For al-Attas critique and doubt have become the purpose of Western academia and the purpose of knowledge and education of the pre-colonial period has been lost in western disciplines and academic structures.

However in my reading of this quotation, it also applies to those who are seeking to quell that doubt by regaining a sense of purpose that draws on previous ways of being and knowing. Al-Attas also manages to identify the indigenous scholar's inherent problem in attempting to reinvigorate non-western or indigenous knowledge and education. What is it that we as indigenous scholars, actually seek to do? What is our purpose in being? These are not an expression of doubt, but questions of ontology and epistemology. They illustrate the importance of philosophy in indigenous education and scholarship.

For al-Attas, purpose itself has been lost; and in losing a sense of purpose, we have thrown ourselves into a purposeless, yet insatiable quest for knowledge and understanding. The Muslim, in al-Attas' view, in response to the insatiable doubt of the western academy, must locate purpose at the core of his being. This awareness of purpose and one's proper relation to all other beings and things, especially God, is the true goal of education. The purpose of education is achieving a sense of *adab* in our being, knowing intuitively though our tradition how to be. How to be authentic in the modern world.

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