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BETWEEN ISLAMIC AND WESTERN EDUCATION THE EDUCATIONAL DICHOTOMY IN ‘ABD AL-RAḤMĀN AL- NAḤLĀWĪ’S THOUGHT

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Abstract

This research aims to invigorate the discourse on the educational thought of Al-Nahlawi, a figure frequently referenced yet seldom critically examined in Indonesia. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) Analyze the major ideas and ideological underpinnings of Al-Nahlawi's thoughts; (2) Trace the influence of the socio-political context of Syria on his work; and (3) Reveal the dichotomization of Western vs. Islamic education in his discourse. To achieve these objectives, this study employs the method of hermeneutic analysis to examine his major ideas and critical discourse analysis based on Fowler's model to investigate the diction and underlying ideology of his language. The research concludes that: Al-Naḥlāwī's thinking was significantly influenced by Syria's political dynamics and his concerns about the Islamic revival, which led him to adopt a stance of resistance against the West. His central idea focuses on returning humanity to its innate nature (fiṭrah) through the application of ideal Islamic educational principles, covering objectives, subject matter, curriculum, and methods. The primary conclusion of this study is that Al-Naḥlāwī's critique of Western education—which he describes with vocabulary such as "calamity," "disbelief" (kufr), and "non-integral"—not only constructs a sharp dichotomy but also affirms that his work is a form of ideological resistance, clearly represented in all its elements.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meramalkan diskursus tentang pemikiran pendidikan Al-Nahlawi, seorang tokoh Pendidikan Islam yang sering dirujuk namun jarang dikritisi secara mendalam di Indonesia. Secara spesifik, tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk: (1) Menganalisis gagasan besar dan relasi ideologi dalam pemikiran Al-Nahlawi; (2) Menelusuri pengaruh konteks sosio-politik Suriah terhadap karyanya; dan (3) Mengungkap dikotomisasi pendidikan Barat vs. Islam dalam wacananya. Untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut, penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis hermeneutika untuk mengulas gagasan besarnya dan analisis wacana kritis model Fowler untuk menginvestigasi diksi serta ideologi yang mendasari bahasanya. Hasil penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa: pemikiran Al-Nahlawi sangat dipengaruhi oleh dinamika politik Suriah dan kegundahannya akan kebangkitan Islam, yang mendorongnya pada posisi perlawanan terhadap Barat. Gagasan intinya berfokus pada pengembalian umat manusia kepada fitrah melalui penerapan prinsip-prinsip pendidikan Islam yang ideal, mencakup tujuan, materi, kurikulum, hingga metode. Simpulan utama penelitian ini adalah bahwa kritik Al-Nahlawi terhadap pendidikan Barat—yang digambarkannya dengan kosa kata seperti "musibah", "kufur", dan "tidak integral"—tidak hanya membangun dikotomi yang tajam, tetapi juga menegaskan bahwa karyanya merupakan sebuah bentuk perlawanan ideologis yang terepresentasi secara jelas dalam seluruh unsurnya.

Key Words: Al-Nahlawi; Hermeneutic; Critical Discourse Analysis; Ideology; Islamic Education.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, academics have been actively discussing the educational thought of Abd Al-Rahmān al-Nahlawī. His masterpiece, titled *Uṣūl al-Tarbiyah wa Asālibuhā fī al-Bayt wa al-Madrasah wa al-Mujtama'*, has been reprinted numerous times and massively translated into Indonesian.¹ Abd al-Rahman al-Nahlawi himself is a figure of Islamic education who is so productive in producing dozens of scientific works. All of those are the results of his writing, which are all related to education. Two of his works, entitled *Ibnu Taymiyah* and *al-Dzahabī*, which review their respective biographies, are able to correlate them with educational concepts.² Until al-Nahlawī had a collection of biographical works of figures and connected them with education. His educational thought has influenced a number of Muslim educational thinkers in Indonesia. For example, Azin Sarumpaet in *Pendidikan Wasathiyah* [Moderate Education] draws on the basic principles of Islamic education from Al-Nahlawi..³ Its also influenced the study of contemporary philosophy of education. In several chapters of *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam*, Zuhriyah (2017) cited Al-Nahlawī's views.

¹ E. Kuswaya, 'Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam Abdurrahman An-Nahlawy', *Online Thesis* 9, no. 3 (2014): 19–57.

² Abd al-Rahmān Al-Nahlawī, *Ibn Taymiyah* (Dar al-Fikr, 1986); Abd al-Rahmān Al-Nahlawī, *Al-Imam al-Dzahabi: Dirasah Mawdu'iyah Tabli'iyyah Tarbawiyah* (Dar al-Fikr, 1988).

³ Azin Sarumpaet, *Pendidikan Wasathiyah Dalam Al-Qur'an*, ed. Nurhadi (Guepedia, 2020), 18.

⁴ Jasmani, *Pendidikan Islam Egaliter (Membangun Pendidikan Feminim Atas Superioritas Maskulinitas)*, ed. Mukni'ah (Absolute Media, 2011), 140.

Zuhriyah defined Islamic Education by considering Al-Naḥlāwī's understanding that education is a process of arranging individual and social obedience.⁵ Apart from education philosophy, Al-Naḥlāwī's thoughts are also cited in the book religion psychology. Mulyadi and Adriantoni (2021) quoted Al-Naḥlāwī's view on human potential, which asserts that human intellect enables individuals to distinguish between good and evil, allowing them to remain steadfast in the guidance of the Almighty God.⁶ Al-Naḥlāwī's thoughts are also extensively cited by Middle Eastern scholars, including al-Muzāwadah in *al-Ta'ṣīl al-Islāmī li al-Tarbiyah* (Islamic Foundations for Education). Bahyah in *Ba'd al-Dalālat al-tarbawiyah fi al-Amthāl al-Nabawiyah* (Some Education Basics in the Book of the Example of Prophethood),⁷ in *Al-Madāris wa al-Katātīb al-Qur'āniyyah* by Al-Muntadā al-Islāmī.⁸ In addition to these concepts, one of Al-Naḥlāwī's most frequently cited and practically applied contributions is his classification of Islamic educational methods. In his seminal work, *Uṣūl al-Tarbiyah al-Islāmiyah wa Asālibuhā*, he systematically formulated three primary pedagogical methods: the method through exemplary modeling (*al-ṭarīqah bi al-quḍwāh*), the method through admonition and guidance (*al-ṭarīqah bi al-mau'izhah wa al-irshād*), and the method through punishment and reward (*al-ṭarīqah bi al-'iqāb wa al-tsawāb*). This taxonomy has been highly influential as it provides a clear and practical framework for educators to select contextually and developmentally appropriate approaches, thereby focusing not solely on knowledge transmission but also on the integral formation of character and conduct.

The widespread citation of Al-Naḥlāwī's work across diverse themes within Islamic education attests to his significant influence. While scholars often characterize his contributions as a revitalizing force an "oasis" of systematic thought that countered the stagnation of his era and explicitly resisted Western intellectual encroachment, this very characterization reveals a critical gap in the literature. The prevailing discourse tends to celebrate Al-Naḥlāwī's traditionalist stance and ideological resistance but fails to subject the internal coherence, ideological underpinnings, and latent consequences of his polemical framework to a rigorous critical analysis. Consequently, his thought remains positioned as a historical artifact of opposition rather than being critically examined as a complex intellectual system. This study posits that moving beyond this celebratory narrative is essential to fully comprehend his nuanced, and at times contentious, legacy in modern Islamic educational theory.

⁵ Lailatuzz Zuhriyah, *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam*, ed. Khabibur Rohman (IAIN Tulungagung Press, 2017), 14–15.

⁶ Mulyadi and Adriantoni, *Psikologi Agama* (Kencana, 2021), 23.

⁷ Bahyah, *Ba'd al-Dalālat al-Tarbawiyah Fi al-Amthāl al-Nabawiyah Min Khilāl Kitāb (Amthāl al-Ḥadīth) Li Abī Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Khalād al-Rāmahurmuzī* (Umm al-Qurra, 1996), 80.

⁸ al-Muntada al-Islāmī, *Al-Madāris Wa al-Katātīb al-Qur'āniyyah: Waqafat Tarbawiyah Wa Idariyyah* (AL-Muntada al-Islami, 1996).

The aforementioned book is a cornerstone of Al-Naḥlāwī's thought, inspiring his subsequent writings, such as *al-Tarbiyah bi al-Targhib wa Tarhib* (Education with Encouragement and Threat) (2006), *al-Tarbiyah bi ḍarb al-Amthāl* (Education Using Role Models) (2010), and *al-Tarbiyah bi al-Qiṣṣah* (Education with Stories) (2012). Consequently, his book *Asalib al-Tarbiyah* is the primary reference for his other works. However, amid the enthusiastic discussions of Al-Naḥlāwī's ideas by scholars, there is a noticeable gap. The critical space is entirely absent in this discourse. Yet, criticism plays a crucial role in intellectual discourse as it is one of the main ways through which ideas can develop and be refined.⁹ The role of criticism is evident when we consider the significant impact of Ibn Rushd's critique on the philosophical thoughts of Ibn Sina and Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī. This criticism played a substantial role in the subsequent development of philosophical thought.¹⁰

This study is designed to address the identified research gap by pursuing two primary objectives: (1) to uncover the grand ideas of Islamic education within Al-Naḥlāwī's works, and (2) to critically analyse the underlying ideology embedded in his discourse. To achieve this, a dual methodological framework is employed. Firstly, theoretical hermeneutics will serve as the primary tool to interpret and reconstruct Al-Naḥlāwī's grand ideas from his texts. Secondly, critical discourse analysis (CDA) from Roger Fowler's perspective will be utilised to deconstruct the language and ideological assumptions present in his writings. Through this combined approach, the research aims to provide a comprehensive and critical examination of Al-Naḥlāwī's contributions to Islamic educational thought.

In this research, the researcher uses theoretical hermeneutics as a tool to achieve the grand ideas Al-Naḥlāwī desired in his works.¹¹ More specifically, this study employs Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutic theory. Dilthey's hermeneutic theory emphasises the importance of interpretation in understanding human experience and culture. He believed that interpretation is not merely about decoding texts or artefacts but involves understanding the context in which they were produced. Dilthey argued that interpretation requires empathy, or *Einfühlung*, on the part of the interpreter, who must try to enter the perspective of the author or creator of the work being interpreted.¹² In revealing Al-Naḥlāwī's ideology, this

⁹ Carol Atheron, *Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarship, Authority and the Possession of Literary Knowledge, 1880-2002* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 125.

¹⁰ Muhammad Atif Al-Iraqi, *Metode Kritik Filsafat Ibnu Rusyd*, ed. Rusdianto, trans. Aksin Wijaya (Diva Press, 2020), 270.

¹¹ See the differences between this hermeneutic and negotiative hermeunetic in Dini Arifah Nihayati, 'Studi Fatwa Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an Menggunakan Hermeneutika Negosiatif', *Muslim Heritage: Jurnal Dialog Islam Dengan Realitas* 8, no. 1 (2023): 22, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v8i1.2883>.

¹² Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, ed. Rudolf A. Makkareel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton University Press, 1996), 17.

research employs the critical discourse analysis theory proposed by Roger Fowler.¹³ This choice is not without reason. The researcher will examine the vocabulary that shapes language and its subsequent meanings. According to Fowler, ideological practices can be discerned from vocabulary and grammar. Fowler¹⁴ views language as a medium for visualising a perceivable reality, through which an individual can control and organise experiences within the social reality.¹⁵

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Abd Al-Raḥmān Al-Naḥlawī in Context

Abd al-Raḥmān al-Naḥlawī always introduced himself in his works as a Professor of Education at the Islamic University of al-Imām Muḥammad b. Sa’ūd, Saudi Arabia. Al-Naḥlawī was born in Damascus, Syria, in 1927. He worked as a lecturer at various universities, such as the University of Damascus, the Islamic University of Imam Muhammad b. Sa’ūd,¹⁶ and as a Professor at the Damascus Scientific Institute, as well as a researcher and supervisor at the Arab and Middle Eastern Educational Institute. Besides teaching, Al-Naḥlawī also had responsibilities in the economic field, including serving as the Executive Director of the Sa’d b. Muḥammad b. Laden Trading Foundation. Al-Naḥlawī is known for his numerous scholarly works, including theses, dissertations, and other significant contributions.¹⁷ Al-Naḥlawī passed away in 2001, as mentioned in one of his works, *al-Tarbiyah bi al-Targhib wa al-Tarhib*.¹⁸

Among the works produced by Al-Naḥlawī are: *Uṣūl Al-Tarbiyah Al-Islāmiyah Wa Asālibuhā fī al-Bayt wa al-Madrasah, wa al-Mujtama’* (Principles and Foundations of Islamic Education at Home, School, and Society); *Al-Tarbiyah Al-Ijtima’iyah Fī Al-Islām* (Social Education in Islam); *Al-Tarbiyah Bi-Al-Targhib Wa Al-Tarhib* (Education with Motivation and Threat); *Al-Tarbiyah Bi-Al-Qiṣṣah* (Education with Stories); *Al-Tarbiyah Bi-Al-Tbrah*

¹³ See the another work of using CDA Lukman Hakim et al., ‘Stereotip Perempuan Dan Budaya Patriarkal Berlatar Islam Dalam Novel Religi Best Seller Tahun 2000-2021’, *Muslim Heritage* 8, no. 1 (2023): 153–65, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v8i1.6918>; Lukman Hakim and Aris Nurbawani, ‘Media Framing in The 2024 Presidential Election Contestation and Its Relevance to Critical, Tolerant, and Moderate Learning in Islamic Higher Education’, *Muslim Heritage* 10, no. 1 (2025): 154–68, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v10i1.10864>.

¹⁴ Eriyanto, *Analisis Wacana: Pengantar Analisis Teks Media*, 2nd edn (LKis Group, 2012), 15.

¹⁵ Roger Fowler et al., *Language and Control* (Routledge, 2019).

¹⁶ Abd al-Raḥmān Al-Naḥlawī, *Min Asālib Al-Tarbiyah al-Islāmiyyah: Al-Tarbiyah Bi al-Ḥimār* (Dar al-Fikr, 2000), i.

¹⁷ Anonymous, ‘Abd Al-Rahman al-Nahlawi’, Fikr.Com, https://fikr.com/blogs/-عبد-الرحمن-الناحلاوي/المؤلفون?_pos=1&_sid=26c814349&_ss=r.

¹⁸ Artini binti Haji Timbang, ‘The Principles of Islamic Education According to Abdul Rahman AlNahlawi in “Uṣūl Al-Tarbiyah Al-Islāmiyyah Wa Asālibuha Fī Al Bayt Wa Al Madrasah Wa Al Mujtama’”, *AJoBSS: Academic Journal of Bussines & Social Sciences* 4, no. 2 (2020): 1–19.

(Education with Learning); *Al-Tarbiyah Bi-Al-Āyāt* (Education with Verses); *Al-Tarbiyah Bi-Al-Hiwār* (Education with Dialogue); *Al-Tarbiyah Bi-Ḍarb Al-Amthāl* (Education with Examples); and a series of books on Islamic Education Figures in Islam: Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, Ibn Taymiyah, Yusuf b. Abd. al-Barr, al-Imām al-Zahabi, with each name being a separate book. Other works include: *Usus Al-Tarbiyah Al-Islāmiyah Wa Uṣūl Tadrisuhā* (Foundations of Islamic Education and Teaching Roots); *ʿIlm Al-Nafs Bi-Al-Musāhamah* (Participatory Psychology); *ʿIlm Al-Ijtimaʿ Bi-Al-Musāhamah* (Participatory Social Science); *Al-Tarbiyah Al-Khaṣṣah Wa Ṭuruq Al-Tadris Bi-Al-Musāhamah* (Special Education and Teaching Methods with Participation); *Al-Gharāʾiḥ Wa Al-Dawāfiʾ Wa Taʿdiluhā* (Instincts, Motives, and Their Modification); and *Manʿiḥ Al-Qulūb* (Advice of the Heart).¹⁹

Damascus, Syria in the Lifetime of al-Naḥlāwī

The history of Syria during the early Islamic era is filled with significant events that shaped its character within the Islamic world. In the 7th century, Syria was under the rule of the Byzantine Empire before being conquered by Muslim forces during the period of expansion under the leadership of Caliphs Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab. One of the key moments in this conquest was the Battle of Yarmuk in 636 CE, where the Muslim forces led by Khalid ibn Walid defeated the Byzantine army, ending Byzantine dominance in Syria and paving the way for Islam in the region. After the conquest, Syria became part of the Rashidun Caliphate, with cities like Damascus and Homs becoming administrative centers. During this time, Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan was appointed as the governor of Syria and played a crucial role in managing the region.²⁰

Throughout the 20th century, Syria underwent complex political, social, and economic transformations.²¹ After centuries under Ottoman rule, Syria became a French mandate territory following World War I, based on the Sykes-Picot Agreement.²² This transition marked the beginning of a long struggle for independence. The Syrian nationalist movement grew rapidly during this period, and after World War II, Syria finally gained independence in 1946.²³ However, post-independence did not immediately bring stability. The country experienced a series of military coups and political instability throughout the 1950s and 1960s, highlighting the fragility of Syria's early civilian government. In 1963, the

¹⁹ Timbang, "The Principles of Islamic Education According to Abdul Rahman AlNahlawi in "Usūl Al-Tarbiyah Al-Islāmiyyah Wa Asālibuha Fi Al Bayt Wa Al Madrasah Wa Al Mujtamaʿ".

²⁰ Shihab al-Din Al-Hamawi, *Muʿjam al-Buldan Vol. 3* (Dar Sadir, 1977), 280; Al-Balādzurī, *Futuh Al-Buldan Vol. 1* (Lajnah al-Bayan al-ʿArabi, n.d.), 162.

²¹ James L. Gelvin, "The Social Origins of Popular Nationalism in Syria: Evidence for a New Framework", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 4 (1994): 645–61.

²² Paul K. Huth and Todd L. Allee, *Teh Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 347.

²³ Robert G. Rabil, *Syria, The United States, and The War on Terror in The Middle East* (Praeger Security International, 2006), 15.

Ba'ath Party, with its ideology of Pan-Arabism and socialism, seized power through a military coup, marking a new chapter in Syrian history. The Ba'athist ideology, emphasising Arab unity and social reform, influenced national policies but failed to create a broad national consensus. Internal coups within the Ba'ath Party eventually brought Hafez al-Assad to power in 1970 through the Corrective Movement.²⁴ Under Assad's rule, Syria transformed into a nation with a strong authoritarian government, where the military and the Assad political dynasty played central roles. Hafez al-Assad's era was characterised by political stability maintained through the repression of opposition, as well as a foreign policy focused on Syria's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and its regional influence in Lebanon and the Middle East.²⁵

Suriyah and the Problems of Revival (*Nahḍah*)

The Islamic world experienced a prolonged period of decline, particularly from the 17th to the 19th centuries.²⁶ This setback encompassed various aspects of life, including political, economic, social and intellectual.²⁷ One of the main factors that led to this decline was the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, which for centuries had been considered the political and military stronghold of the Islamic world. At the height of its glory, the Ottoman Empire controlled vast territories, but in the 18th and 19th centuries it began to lose important territories to external invasions and internal rebellions. Western invasion and colonialism exacerbated this situation, resulting in the political and economic control of many Muslim territories, such as Egypt, Syria and India, coming under foreign rule.

Economically, the Islamic world also faced significant challenges due to falling behind the West in terms of technology and industrial innovation.²⁸ The Industrial Revolution that began in Europe brought significant changes to the methods of production and distribution of goods. Yet, Muslim regions, particularly in the Middle East, failed to keep pace with these developments. The traditional economic systems, which relied on agriculture and trade, became uncompetitive when faced with cheaper and more efficient Western industrial products. This inability exacerbated the socio-economic conditions in many

²⁴ Peter Hinchcliffe and Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Conflicts in the Middle East since 1945* (Routledge, 2007), xiv.

²⁵ Marwa Daoudy, *The Origins of The Syrian Conflict: Climate Change and Human Security* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 111.

²⁶ Anang Sholikhudin, 'MEREBUT KEMBALI KEJAYAAN ISLAM ANALISIS INTERNAL DAN EKSTERNAL PENYEBAB KEMUNDURAN ISLAM', *Jurnal Al-Murabbi* 3, no. 1 (2017): 135–48.

²⁷ 'Abd al-Hamid Al-Jilasi, 'Madaniyyah Harakah Al-Nahdah Bayn al-Darurah Wa al-Muraja'ah Wa al-Khiyar: Ta'ammulat Dzatiyyah Fi Masirah Fikriyyah Jama'iyyah', in *Al-Islam Wa al-Masibiyah Wa al-Dimuqratiyyah: Dirasat Muqaranah Shargh Wa Gharban*, ed. Munir Al-Kishw (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2024), 332; Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri, *Nahn Wa Al-Turath: Qiraah Mu'asirah Fi Turathina al-Falsafi*, 3rd edn (Al-Markaz Al-Thaqafi al-Arabi, 1993), 12–13.

²⁸ Kishore Mahbubani, 'Goals of Universal Primary and Secondary Education in The 21st Century: Reviving The Spirit of Socrates', in *International Perspectives on the Goals of Universal Basic and Secondary Education*, ed. Joel E. Cohen and Martin B. Malin (Routledge, 2010), 68.

Muslim regions, creating a widening gap between the ruling class and the general populace. The lagging infrastructure and technology also contributed to the decline of traditional trade centres like Baghdad and Damascus, which were once the cultural and intellectual hubs of the Islamic world.²⁹

The Islamic Renaissance, or *Nahḍah*, in the Middle East, which took place from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, was an intellectual, cultural, and social reform movement aimed at modernising the Arab world while preserving Islamic identity.³⁰ This movement emerged as a reaction to Western colonialism and the backwardness perceived by many Arab and Muslim thinkers. Intellectuals such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida played crucial roles in promoting the idea that the Islamic world needed to reform itself through a more progressive reinterpretation of Islamic teachings and the adoption of modern technology and science. They sought to unify traditional Islamic values with modernity, with the hope of building a more just, prosperous, and self-reliant society.³¹

Yet, the *Nahḍah* faced significant obstacles. One of the main barriers was Western colonial dominance, which not only undermined political sovereignty in the Middle East but also controlled educational and cultural institutions. Colonial powers, such as Britain and France, often supported local elites who were more pro-Western and opposed Islamic reformists, who were seen as a threat to colonial stability. Additionally, efforts to merge Islam with modernity frequently encountered differences in religious interpretation, creating tension between traditionalists who resisted change and reformists who advocated for renewal in Islamic thought. For instance, the more conservative Wahhabism movement in Saudi Arabia opposed the more moderate Islamic reformist vision of the *Nahḍah* intellectuals.

The Mayor Idea of Abd Al-Rahman Al-Nahlawi

In the mid-20th century, during which Al-Naḥlāwī was still alive, technological advancements progressed rapidly, and the social sciences and humanities also experienced significant developments.³² Yet, amidst various advancements and global modernisation, Al-Naḥlāwī noted that something was disappearing in the midst of this rapid progress, *al-ṭufūlah al-ḍā'i'ah* (the lost childhood). This loss of children does not mean literal disappearance, but

²⁹ 'Adnan 'Uwayd, *Ishkaliyat Al-Nahdah Fi al-Watan al-'Arabi: Min al-Tawabul Ila al-Nafit: Dirasat Fi Qadaya al-Nahdah* (al-Takwin, 2007), 74.

³⁰ Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri, *Problematisa Pemikiran Arab Kontemporer*, trans. Aksin Wijaya (Pustaka Pelajar, 2015), 127–30.

³¹ Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1997), 2.

³² Hale Barbara M., 'The Subject Bibliography of The Social Humanities: Recent Developments', in *The Subject Bibliography of The Social Humanities* (1970), <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-015791-7.50006-1>.

rather a metaphor for the condition of children that is not in accordance with their nature. Al-Naḥlāwī asserted that this was due to education that provided too much for children. This model of parenting, which overly indulges children, results in children no longer having the enthusiasm to seek out something they do not know or merely strive to achieve something they desire.³³

Al-Naḥlāwī assessed that the excessive provision of facilities to children is a consequence of modern education. He accused America of being the origin of modern education that no longer places children in accordance with their nature. According to Al-Naḥlāwī, America, with its liberal democracy, has granted full freedom in its educational methods for the younger generation. Al-Naḥlāwī interpreted this phenomenon as excessive freedom and indulgence. To support his argument, Al-Naḥlāwī cited American child expert Benjamin Spock, who himself stated the chaos occurring in education, particularly in parental education towards children.

“In my opinion, the chaos and uncertainty in child education, as well as parenting that stifles their creativity, are seen as consequences of excessive indulgence and freedom. These impacts usually lead to tendencies in children towards immoral behaviour, disobedience to parents, quick temper even with slight provocation, disregard for their own matters as well as others', and being highly emotional and aggressive towards others during play.”³⁴

The erosion of identity is further evidenced by the diminishing emphasis on women's natural roles as women. Modern education today, in Al-Naḥlāwī's view, forces women to abandon their noble nature. Women start to bear the same burdens as men, with the same duties and obligations. At the same time, they are encouraged to prove that they are superior to men. Ultimately, women become free, free to follow their desires. The slogan "My body is mine" asserts that women are free to make their own choices. In Al-Naḥlāwī's view, women become trapped in the illusion of this freedom and are dragged into the abyss of desire, losing their original nature.³⁵

Modern education now prepares women to take on the roles of men. This continuous education results in the loss of essential feminine qualities. Places such as women's beauty care centres become escapes for their idle time, adding nothing but increasing men's desires for them. Due to such freedom, some men become reluctant to choose the opposite sex, and women experience the same. This leads to the rampant phenomenon of homosexuality and lesbianism.³⁶

In recent decades, Western-style modern education has dominated various education systems worldwide, including in majority Muslim countries. This education, generally focused on materialistic and individualistic aspects, is considered successful in enhancing intellectual abilities and professional skills. However, behind this success, there are profound

³³ Abd al-Raḥmān Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'* (Dar al-Fikr, 1996), 7.

³⁴ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 6.

³⁵ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 8.

³⁶ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 9.

concerns regarding the negative impacts, particularly in moral and spiritual contexts. Modern Western education, with its more secular orientation, often sidelines ethical dimensions and moral values that should be the primary foundation in shaping students' character.³⁷

Al-Naḥlāwī also lamented how easily Western educational models spread among Middle Eastern and Islamic world youth. Western education has permeated the Islamic world and influenced the education systems in many Muslim countries. This process often occurred through colonialism, globalisation, and modernisation driven by technological and economic development. The education system adopted from the West, with its focus on rationalism, science, and technology, indeed brought progress in several aspects. However, along with it, there has been an erosion of religious values and spirituality that previously formed the strong foundation of Islamic education. The impact of applying Western education is not only seen in the moral degradation among the younger generation but also in the cultural changes within Muslim societies as a whole. Materialistic and hedonistic lifestyles have increasingly infiltrated, replacing Islamic traditions that emphasise simplicity, devotion, and moral responsibility. Muslim societies, which once placed religion at the centre of life, now face a dilemma between modernity and the effort to maintain religious identity.

Islamic Education: The Cure (ʿIlā) for Losing Identity

From the explanations above, the loss of identity afflicting humanity is caused by several factors as follows: (a) Excessive freedom and indulgence given to the younger generation; (b) Lack of control in educating children; (c) Excessive indulgence in instinctive desires leading to numerous extramarital sexual relationships; (d) Excessive freedom for women to mix with men in various fields, causing women to lose their natural roles, and currently leading to the breakdown of family structures and the loss of children.³⁸

Al-Naḥlāwī stated that there must be a breakthrough for a better direction, to keep humanity returning to its natural state, returning to a healthy life, and the most potent and fundamental remedy is education, specifically Islamic education. However, did Al-Naḥlāwī reveal a new aspect of Islamic Education? Or did he merely reiterate the thoughts of his predecessors in Islamic education?

Return to Fitrah: Al-Naḥlāwī's Goal in His Islamic Education Project

The concept of fitrah in the Quran refers to the basic nature, potential, or natural state that God has instilled in every human being.³⁹ One of the verses most often associated with the concept of fitrah is Surah Al-Rūm (30:30):

“So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fitrah of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know.”

³⁷ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuba Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 9.

³⁸ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuba Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 11.

³⁹ Ibn Kathir Al-Dimasyqi, *Tafsir Al-Quran al-'Azim Vol. 6*, ed. Sami bin Muhammad Salamah (Dar al-Taybah, 1999), 313; Ibn 'Aṭīyah Al-Andalusī, *Al-Muḥarrar al-Wajiz Fi Tafsir al-Kitāb al-'Aziz Vol. 5* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 251.

Another verse related to the concept of fitrah is Surah Al-A'raf (7:172), where Allah states that He took testimony from the descendants of Adam before they were born, declaring Him as their Lord, and they acknowledged it. This indicates that the recognition of Allah's existence and divinity is part of human fitrah. Human fitrah in Islam refers to the original state, innate nature, and potential that Allah has instilled in every individual since their creation. This fitrah includes the inclination to know, worship, and submit to Allah, as well as the potential to do good, uphold truth, and practice justice.⁴⁰ In addition to spiritual inclinations,⁴¹ human nature also includes intellectual, emotional, and physical potential that must be developed and utilised properly. This is also reinforced by the hadith, 'Every child is born with a state of fitrah until their parents make them Jews, or Christians...'⁴² Through education and guidance, this fitrah can be directed so that humans can fulfil their purpose in life as servants of Allah ('abd) and caliphs on earth.⁴³ 'Aṭīyah al-ʿAbrāshī holds a different opinion, stating that the true purpose of education is morals.⁴⁴ In contrast, Khāld al-Ḥāzimī emphasises that the goal of Islamic education is the enhancement of several aspects: knowledge, creed, worship, morals, and physical well-being.⁴⁵

Ideal Curriculum (*Manhaj*) from al-Naḥlāwī's Perspective

The Islamic education curriculum is designed to align with human fitrah.⁴⁶ This means that education must develop the natural potential of each individual granted by Allah. The curriculum does not impose something contrary to human nature but instead strives to maximise the inherent abilities of each student optimally, both intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Islamic education also has a curriculum structured according to the main goals of Islamic education, which are to produce individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble character. All components of the curriculum are directed to achieve these goals, so every aspect of learning provided contains deep spiritual values and encourages students to become obedient servants of Allah and beneficial to society.⁴⁷

The Islamic education curriculum is structured periodically or hierarchically. This means that learning is planned gradually, starting from basic to advanced levels, in

⁴⁰ Ibn Kathir Al-Dimasyqi, *Tafsir Al-Quran al-'Adzim Vol. 1*, ed. Sami bin Muhammad Salamah (Dar al-Taybah, 1999), 500.

⁴¹ Abd al-Raḥmān Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usus Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Turuq Tadrisuha* (Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 7.

⁴² Ahmad bin al-Husayn Al-Bayhaqi, *Sunan Al-Bayhaqi al-Kubra Vol. 6*, ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata (Maktabah Dar al-Baz, 1994), 202; Muhammad Ibn Hibban, *Sahib Ibn Hibban Bi Tartib Ibn Bilban Vol. 1* (Muassasah al-Risalah, n.d.), 336.

⁴³ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Min Asālib Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah: Al-Tarbiyah Bi al-Hiwar*, 11; Muharir Alwan and Himayatul Izzati, 'Dialog Sebagai Metode Pembelajaran: Studi Kitab al-Tarbiyah Bi al-Hiwar Karya Aburrahman an-Nahlawi', *E-Tsaqafah* 22, no. 2 (2023): 209–30, <https://doi.org/10.20414/tsaqafah.v22i2.7313>.

⁴⁴ Muhammad Athiyah Al-Abrasy, *Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah Wa Falalsifatuba* (Isaal-Bab al-Pabi wa Syurakah, 1975), 22.

⁴⁵ Khalid bin Hamid al-Hazimi, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah* (Dar 'Alam al-Kutub, 2000), 74–80; Hannisa Wandan Sari and Hakmi Wahyudi, 'Islamic Education Methods (Comparative Study of the Thoughts of Abdurrahman An-Nahlawy and Khalid Bin Hamid Al-Hazimi)', *Aurelia: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengabdian Masyarakat Indonesia* 3, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.57235/aurelia.v3i2.2682>.

⁴⁶ Bashār 'Awd Jidūrī and Ziyād 'Abd al-Karīm Al-Najm, *Al-Taṭawwur al-Dalāli Li Maḥmūm Falsafah al-Tarbiyah: Ishkalīyah Wa Naqd* (Yazouri Group, 2019), 111.

⁴⁷ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asālibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 192.

accordance with the intellectual and spiritual development of students. With this organised division, students can acquire knowledge and skills step by step without feeling burdened by material that is inappropriate for their age. Additionally, the Islamic education curriculum is designed to meet the needs of society. Education does not only focus on individual aspects but also considers the social and cultural needs surrounding the students. Therefore, students are taught to apply the knowledge they have gained for the benefit of all, actively contributing to improving and advancing society.⁴⁸

All materials within the Islamic education curriculum are designed to align with Islamic morals. This means that the curriculum not only imparts knowledge but also teaches how that knowledge should be applied correctly and appropriately in accordance with noble ethics. Every lesson underscores the importance of ethics, morals, and good behaviour in everyday life. The Islamic education curriculum is also realistic, meaning it can be implemented according to existing real-world conditions. This curriculum considers the challenges and realities faced by students in the real world, making learning relevant and applicable to life. Consequently, students do not only learn theoretically but are also prepared to face situations they encounter in society.

Besides being realistic, the Islamic education curriculum is also flexible. This curriculum is not rigid and open to adaptation according to the needs of the times and the environment.⁴⁹ This flexibility allows for adjustments in teaching methods and materials to remain relevant and effective in various contexts. Effectiveness is another important characteristic of the Islamic education curriculum. This curriculum is designed to achieve optimal results efficiently. The teaching methods and materials ensure that students can understand and master knowledge well without going through convoluted or burdensome processes. Lastly, the Islamic education curriculum is designed according to the students' development. Each material and teaching method is designed in accordance with the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development stages of students. This makes the learning process more easily accepted by students, as it is tailored to their abilities and capacities at each age stage.

The ideal curriculum in al-Naḥlāwī's perspective apart from the above criteria, the school curriculum is more appropriate to use an integrated curriculum or correlated curriculum.⁵⁰ Thus, Islamic education materials will be more integrated and interconnected. An integrated curriculum is an educational approach that combines several subjects or disciplines into a single, cohesive learning experience. In this curriculum, a specific theme or topic is chosen, and various subjects are linked to support students' understanding of that theme. The goal is to create a more holistic and meaningful learning experience, where students can see the connections between different fields of study, such as mathematics, science, language, and art, in real-life contexts.

On the other hand, a correlated curriculum is a slightly different approach. Here, different subjects are not fully combined as in an integrated curriculum but are taught

⁴⁸ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuba Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 193.

⁴⁹ Muḥammad Munir Mursi, *Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah: Uṣūlūhā Wa Taṭawwūruhā Fi al-Bilād al-'Arabiyyah* (Alam al-Kutub, 1977), 261.

⁵⁰ Abu Yasid, *Paradigma Baru Pesantren* (IRCiSoD, 2018), 111.

separately while still seeking connections or correlations among them. Subjects are taught independently, but teachers or curriculum developers strive to show the relationships between topics discussed in various subjects. This correlation is intended to reinforce students' understanding by emphasising that knowledge does not stand alone but is interrelated.⁵¹

Islam and West: A Prelude to the Emergence of Dichotomy

The dichotomy between Islam affiliated with the East and the West is a concept that has developed in academic studies, philosophy, and world history since the 19th century.⁵² Its origins can be traced back to the colonial era, when Western powers (Europe) began to dominate Eastern regions through colonisation and trade. This distinction was reinforced by Orientalist views, as critiqued by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. Said argued that the East was constructed as "the other," different from the West, which was considered more rational, modern, and civilised, while the East was viewed as exotic, primitive, and backward. This perspective is deeply rooted in colonial power relations, where the West defined itself as superior and the East as inferior.⁵³

In the historical context, this dichotomy was further reinforced by the development of Enlightenment thought in Europe during the 18th century, which emphasised rationality, science, and progress as the hallmarks of Western civilisation. The East, particularly the Islamic world, was viewed as stagnant and trapped in ancient traditions. This thinking was perpetuated through the works of Orientalists such as Ernest Renan, who in *L'Avenir de la Science* claimed that Islam hindered scientific progress. This perspective reinforced the narrative that the East was a region that needed to be tamed and saved through Western intervention.⁵⁴

According to Huntington, the fundamental differences in values between these civilisations are set to be the primary source of conflict in the 21st century (Huntington, 1996). He highlights that these differences not only involve religion but also views on life, politics, and social order. For example, Huntington identifies Islamic and Confucian civilisations as the two most likely to clash with the West, due to differing views on democracy, human rights, and individual freedoms (Huntington, 2003). Huntington's theory posits that these civilisations will coalesce into large blocs that will compete with one another in various domains, including politics, economics, and military.

Furthermore, Huntington observes that civilisational conflicts will be more intense in regions he terms "fault lines" of civilisations, where different civilisations meet, such as in the Middle East, the Balkans, and South Asia. In these regions, the convergence of profound cultural and religious differences, coupled with prolonged histories of enmity, is poised to

⁵¹ Al-Nahlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 190–200.

⁵² Allaine Cerwonka, 'Higher Education "Reform," Hegemony, and Neo-Cold War Ideology: Lessons from Eastern Europe', in *Cultural Studies of Transnationalism*, ed. Handel Kashope Wright and Meaghan Morris (Routledge, 2012), 34.

⁵³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books, 2003), xixx; Mohammad Samiei, 'Neo-Orientalism? The Relationship between the West and Islam in Our Globalised World', *Third World Quarterly* 31 (2010): 1145–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.518749>.

⁵⁴ Tamim Ansary, *Dari Puncak Bagdad: Sejarah Dunia Versi Islam*, trans. Yuliani Liputo (Zaman, 2009), 424.

ignite conflicts with greater ease. According to Huntington's theory, these confrontations transcend mere political or military dynamics, instead reflecting the fundamental discord inherent in each civilisation's values.⁵⁵

This dichotomy has been the subject of considerable criticism from postcolonial theorists, with Edward Said providing a notable example of this. In his work, Said contests the East-West dichotomy as a social construct serving the interests of colonial political agendas. He contends that the concept of the "East" is not an objective reality, but rather a Western conceptualisation employed to justify political and economic domination. This critique has influenced academic studies in history, anthropology, and postcolonial studies, opening up discourse on how power, culture, and knowledge are produced and maintained through these dichotomous narratives. Hasan Hanafi, in his *Muqaddimah*, also engaged in this dichotomy debate, explaining that although the era of colonialism has ended and the colonisers have returned to their homeland, they have come back to their former colonies in a new form of hegemony. Rather than exercising direct domination over the land, these powers have assumed a more insidious role, seeking to influence culture and civilisation. They have returned with the presumption of bestowing a positive influence on their former colonies. In collaboration with anthropologists, they regard these "new colonies" as peripheral to civilisation, while perceiving themselves as occupying its vanguard. However, Hanafi contends that the pursuit of knowledge from the West should not entail uncritical emulation of the Western model. He emphasised the necessity of "authenticity" in the establishment of a modern Islamic civilisation that remains firmly anchored in tradition. In essence, Hanafi's position calls for a form of "selective assimilation," entailing the acceptance of beneficial elements from the West, such as science and technology, while concurrently rejecting those aspects that do not align with Islamic values, including materialism and extreme secularism.⁵⁶

Another figure equally fervent in the East-West dichotomy debate is Ali Shariati. Ali Shariati, an Iranian thinker and Muslim intellectual, held critical views on the West, particularly regarding what he termed "Western modernity" and the influence of colonialism. Shariati believed that the West had achieved extraordinary technological and economic progress but at the cost of sacrificing spiritual and moral aspects in the process. According to Shariati, Western modernity, which emphasises secularism, materialism, and individualism, has created a society alienated from true human values.⁵⁷ One of Syariati's main criticisms of the West is that Western civilisation is based on ideologies he termed "istihlak" (consumerism) and "istismar" (exploitation). Syariati believed that Western colonialism and

⁵⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and The Remaking of World Order* (Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2003), 90.

⁵⁶ Efraim Barak, 'Hanafi, Hasan', in *African American Studies Center* (Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.48893>.

⁵⁷ Eko Supriadi, *Sosialisme Islam: Pemikiran Ali Syari'ati* (Rausyan Fikr Institute, 2012), xi.

economic imperialism had resulted in the extraction of natural resources and exploitation of nations in the Muslim world and other developing countries. He viewed the West as a hegemonic force that imposed its culture, politics, and economy on Eastern countries, thereby undermining their cultural and religious identities.⁵⁸ In Syariati's view, the solution is a return to authentic and revolutionary Islam, which he called "red Islam" – Islam rooted in values of social justice, resistance against oppression, and solidarity with the oppressed. The Islam he envisioned is not just a spiritual religion but also a socio-political movement capable of challenging the global injustices resulting from Western domination.⁵⁹

From Bosnia, there is Aliya Ali Izetbegovic, a Bosnian Muslim leader and intellectual, who held deep and critical views of the West. In his famous work *Islam Between East and West* (1984), Izetbegovic explored the relationship between Islam, the West, and the East, offering philosophical reflections on modern civilisation. Izetbegovic did not entirely reject the West, but he clearly highlighted the fundamental differences between the Islamic and Western worldviews, particularly in terms of spirituality and materialism. Izetbegovic argued that Western civilisation, with all its achievements in science and technology, has a strong materialistic tendency.⁶⁰ He observed that the West prioritises physical and worldly aspects, such as economic progress, science, and technology, but often neglects the spiritual dimension of humanity. In his view, this leads to a moral and spiritual crisis in Western society, despite its material success.⁶¹

Western Education in Al-Naḥlāwī's Eyes

The “war” over Western thought does not only take place in the realm of ideas and thinking. In the world of education, this ideological battle also occurs. Abd. al-Raḥmān al-Naḥlāwī is an expert who strives to reintroduce Islamic education as an ideal educational concept not just for the Muslim world, but for the entire world. However, what he promotes becomes ideological. Al-Naḥlāwī exalts Islamic education while belittling other forms of education. In the introduction to his book *Uṣūl al-Tarbiyah al-Islāmiyyah*, al-Naḥlāwī states:

“It seems that the symptom of ‘excessive freedom and indulgence’ is the main consequence that has revealed the veil of excess in giving attention to children. This symptom clearly emerged in America, a country that glorifies liberal democracy within the family and government.”⁶²

As an introduction, al-Naḥlāwī explains the reasons for writing his book. The phenomenon of children losing their identity occurs due to the education conceived by

⁵⁸ Supriadi, *Sosialisme Islam: Pemikiran Ali Syari'ati*, 94.

⁵⁹ Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

⁶⁰ Lejla Delagic and Thameem Ushama, ‘Alija Izetbegović's Contributions to Socio-Political and Religious Thought’, *Hamdard Islamicus* 45, no. 4 (2022): 29–52, <https://doi.org/10.57144/hi.v45i4.501>.

⁶¹ 'Aliya 'Ali Izetbegovic, *Islam Antara Timur Dan Barat*, trans. Ahsin Mohamad (Penerbit Pustaka, 1993).

⁶² Al-Naḥlāwī, *Uṣūl Al-Tarbiyah al-Islāmiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 7.

America or the West. With this introduction, al-Naḥlāwī positions the West as the target of his criticism. Both children and women experience a loss of identity with the same "culprit". Al-Naḥlāwī cites the opinion of ‘Ammarah Najib in *Makanat al-Mar’ah fī al-Islām* to reinforce his views. Ammarah explicitly identifies Europe as the root cause of the emergence of sexual freedom.

“Now, examine the secret behind the emergence of homosexuality in several European societies, such as England, which has lost its feminine nature. Women have lost their dignity from a noble guidance, men have sidelined them and turned to fellow men. Consequently, sexual deviations have spread widely. Ultimately, Western society, which once ruled the world's seas, has now sunk to second place. Who knows, they might soon be in third or even fourth place.”⁶³

The diction employed by al-Naḥlāwī indicates that he endeavored to systematically marginalize Western education. From his perspective, the West, in a manner consistent with postcolonial views, is positioned as the "center" of the world. Conversely, those who do not align with them are relegated to the periphery, occupying the status of the Third World. Consequently, knowledge systems originating from outside the Western paradigm are also subjected to discrimination and marginalization in his discourse.

“The social sciences are founded upon principles of disbelief (*kufr*). Western nations are viewed as the axis and source of world historical events. Furthermore, they also establish historical periodization based on this disbelief. This perspective is profoundly contradictory to historical facts.”⁶⁴

The next diction used by al-Naḥlāwī is "tools for committing crimes". This is evident from his comments on Social Education, where al-Naḥlāwī reveals John Dewey's educational perspective. Dewey asserts that human behaviour will develop based on the experiences that have shaped it. The author quotes al-Naḥlāwī's comment as follows:

“However, not all experiences are the same in realising the goodness of humanity. Furthermore, not every development can be used to achieve goodness. Criminal gangs in America, for example, use their experiences and intellectual development as well as their skills to commit crimes such as robbing banks and kidnapping prominent figures or the children of wealthy individuals.... However, in essence, such methods are merely tools for committing crimes. This is because development, experience, and skills are not goals in themselves but rather tools for achieving other goals, such as instant wealth or seeking freedom from certain social strata and so on.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 8.

⁶⁴ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 87.

⁶⁵ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 115.

Next, the term used by al-Naḥlāwī is *taqlid a'mā* (blind imitation). Al-Naḥlāwī uses this term to describe the social conditions of non-Muslim societies. He states:

“Members of non-Muslim societies acquire their traditions and social conceptions through blind imitation and unreasoned enthusiasm. In contrast, Islamic education requires each individual to: firstly, think logically, and then maintain group cohesion in worship and festivals, based on rationality, clarity of shared goals.... All of these (acts of worship performed collectively [socially]) must be conducted in a communal manner.”⁶⁶

Al-Naḥlāwī used the term "serving the nation" to criticise the concept of being a good citizen. Western education teaches that being a good citizen means serving the state. Al-Naḥlāwī expressed a negative sentiment towards this concept. He stated:

“A good citizen in the Western concept is one who serves the goals of their nation, even if these goals require colonisation, destruction, and the plundering of weaker nations' wealth. In communist societies, citizens must become tools of production operated by the ruling party leaders. These citizens glorify and make them into arbāban min dūn Allah (lords besides Allah).”⁶⁷

In his critique of modern schools, al-Naḥlāwī portrayed that schools today had followed Western culture and philosophy, which he perceived as being rooted in disbelief. Al-Naḥlāwī stated:

“... however, Western scientists had altered all the foundations of research laid by our ancestors. They then used methods that were purely logical and empirical, devoid of religious and idealistic principles. Thus, Western sciences had an ideological foundation that contradicted the monotheistic creed that lived in the heart of every Muslim and was protected by every person who loved Islam dearly. Western science started from a flawed concept of existence as a whole and conflicted with the principles of Islamic teachings.”⁶⁸

Al-Naḥlāwī depicted the Western cultural and philosophical interference in modern education as a significant catastrophe faced by the Muslim community today. This major catastrophe profoundly impacted the continuity of the Muslim community and its religious teachings. Al-Naḥlāwī explicitly stated that this calamity was greater than war, even greater than the Crusades.

“This is the disaster that modern schools have inserted into the body of our community and our generations throughout the Islamic countries. It was the greatest

⁶⁶ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 121.

⁶⁷ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 122.

⁶⁸ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 164.

disaster known to Muslims in history and the worst. Worse than the Tartar calamity, the Crusades, or even the war against colonialism. In fact, all the political, social, economic, and educational problems we experienced were branches of this fundamental problem.”⁶⁹

One of the fundamental issues in contemporary education, according to al-Naḥlāwī, is the fragmentation of children's personalities. This phenomenon, he argues, stems primarily from the uncritical adoption of Western culture and philosophy. Western societies, in general, do not equip themselves with religious creed and faith in the existence of God, the Afterlife, and similar metaphysical principles. Instead, they base their lives on secular values that separate knowledge, religion, and the church from governance.

al-Naḥlāwī stated:

“Western education has detached itself from the principle of integrality and has instead succumbed to a dualistic philosophy that divides the soul into two conflicting parts: the first acknowledges God as the Creator and Sustainer, while the second attributes power and natural laws to nature itself. This philosophy has, often unconsciously, cast a shadow over many schools in Islamic countries today. This is evident, for instance, when a student asks a science or geography teacher about the divine wisdom behind a particular natural phenomenon, only to be redirected to a religious studies teacher on the grounds that such matters are unrelated to their field. This recurring attitude fosters in students the belief that Islamic theology and concepts about the natural world are disconnected from subjects like science, geography, or even history. Instead, they come to see religious knowledge as confined solely to books on theology (tauhid), jurisprudence (fiqh), Hadith, the Qur’an, and Tafsir. Perhaps these teachers assume that Islamic sciences are incapable of explaining natural phenomena with the same clarity as modern science and geography. However, such a view overlooks the fact that positivistic interpretations of natural laws are inherently limited in their scope.”⁷⁰

Al-Naḥlāwī’s choice of vocabulary shapes his narrative with a constrained perspective, limiting how readers perceive both Western and Islamic education. Roger Fowler argues that vocabulary plays a crucial role in restricting viewpoints because language does not function as a neutral tool of communication; instead, it carries ideological weight. In his book *Language and Control* (1979), Fowler highlights how word choice in communication reflects a particular worldview and shapes people’s perceptions of reality. Language inherently selects and frames reality, influencing how individuals understand the world every time they use specific words.⁷¹ Certain vocabulary directs our attention to

⁶⁹ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama’*, 8.

⁷⁰ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuha Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama’*, 165.

⁷¹ Fowler et al., *Language and Control*.

specific aspects of reality while ignoring others. Word choice can shape how people perceive a conflict and the parties involved. A clear example of this appears in political discourse. When politicians use the term "reform" instead of "radical change," they frame a policy as gradual and acceptable, even if its impact is substantial. This variation in vocabulary subtly limits how the public perceives the extent of the proposed change. Fowler argues that our understanding of the world, events, and other people is inseparable from the language we use. In many cases, the vocabulary we choose unconsciously influences how we interpret and restrict our understanding of reality.⁷²

In the context of Islamic education, al-Naḥlāwī's perspective creates its own binary through his choice of vocabulary. He portrays Islamic education as a system aimed at servitude to Allah, aligned with human nature, and as a remedy for a generation suffering from a loss of identity. In contrast, he depicts Western education as secular, detached from divine revelation, and even as a calamity responsible for the identity crisis afflicting the younger generation. From al-Naḥlāwī's perspective, Islamic education possesses distinct characteristics that fundamentally differentiate it from Western education. He emphasizes that the primary goal of Islamic education is servitude to Allah (*ta'abbud*).⁷³ This education is not merely a process of knowledge transmission but also a spiritual transformation aimed at guiding individuals toward their ultimate purpose—knowing and worshipping their Creator. This understanding is rooted in the concept of *fitrah*, which holds that humans are naturally inclined to believe in Allah and follow His teachings. Consequently, Islamic education serves to strengthen and direct this innate disposition, restoring individuals to their true nature as responsible servants of Allah, accountable both in this world and the hereafter.

Al-Naḥlāwī views Islamic education as a "medicine"⁷⁴ for the identity crisis afflicting the current generation. He identifies that a generation increasingly influenced by secular education—rooted in the Western worldview—has undergone a "loss of identity" or spiritual alienation. Secular education tends to separate worldly life from transcendence and revelation, leading to a disconnection between humans and God, as well as the higher values derived from religion. In al-Naḥlāwī's view, this disconnection serves as the root cause of various moral and social problems faced by modern society.⁷⁵

From al-Naḥlāwī's perspective, Western education stands in opposition to the principles of Islamic education. He argues that secular education focuses solely on materialistic and rationalistic aspects, pursuing worldly goals while neglecting the spiritual

⁷² Dan McIntyre, *Point of View in Plays: A COgnitive Stylistic Approach to Vienpoint in Drama and Other Text-Types* (John Benjamins Publishing, 1975), 41.

⁷³ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usus Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Ṭuruq Tadrisuhā*, 107.

⁷⁴ Mājid 'Arsān Al-Kaylānī, *Abdāf Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Fi Tarbiyah al-Fard Wa Ikbraj al-Ummah Wa Tanmiyah al-Ukhuwah al-Insaniyyah* (al-Ma'had al-'ālamī li al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1997), 139; Abd al-Wahhab Al-Wāsi', *Al-Ummah al-Islamiyyah Wa Qaḍāyā al-Mu'aṣirah* (Maktabah al-'Ubaykān, 2001), 43.

⁷⁵ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuhā Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 11.

and moral dimensions that should be integral to the educational process. Western education deliberately detaches itself from divine revelation, resulting in a generation that prioritizes technical knowledge and pragmatic skills but remains spiritually empty. Al-Naḥlāwī perceives this as a great misfortune for civilization, as it produces individuals who not only lose their sense of identity but also become disconnected from their ultimate purpose in life—servitude to Allah.⁷⁶

A narrative that rigidly positions Islamic and Western education in binary opposition, as expressed by al-Naḥlāwī, may present challenges to the holistic development of education. By portraying Islamic education as a system grounded in *fitrah* and aimed at servitude to Allah, while framing Western education as a secular system that leads to the loss of identity, this perspective risks reinforcing a rigid dichotomy. Such a dichotomy could hinder dialogue and synergy between the two educational systems, which, in reality, have the potential to complement each other. This binary opposition,⁷⁷ even though perceived as an asymmetrical conclusion,⁷⁸ on one hand, reinforces the belief that Islamic education is the sole solution to the moral and spiritual crises faced by society. On the other hand, the outright rejection of Western education as secular and materialistic may overlook the potential positive contributions from various aspects of Western education, such as the development of science, technology, and modern pedagogical methods oriented toward innovation and progress.

If this binary narrative continues to be reinforced, there is a risk of fostering views that alienate individuals or groups attempting to integrate positive elements from both systems. This could lead to an exclusive attitude, where educators and learners may feel compelled to choose one system in an extreme manner, even though an ideal education should remain open to diverse approaches, as long as the ultimate goal remains directed toward the development of individuals who are balanced intellectually, spiritually, and morally.

Furthermore, this binary opposition can create a divide between Islamic education and the dynamic global landscape.⁷⁹ In the era of globalization, an educational system that is

⁷⁶ Al-Naḥlāwī, *Usul Al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah Wa Asalibuba Fi al-Bayt Wa al-Madrasah Wa al-Mujtama'*, 165–66.

⁷⁷ Ahmad Natsir, 'Lahirnya Oposisi Biner Antara Hukum Islam Dan Hukum Positif', in *Islam Moderat: Merengkuh Kedamaian Mengatasi Perpecahan* (IKAS, 2018).

⁷⁸ Rezga Zahraa Rezga Zahraa, 'Islam and the West: A Controversial Dichotomy', *Traduction et Langues*, ahead of print, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.52919/translang.v18i2.430>.

⁷⁹ This narrative can develop in learning books, which can lead to the emergence of a radical narrative that has the potential to give rise to a radical narrative. Lukman Hakim and Rahmi Faradisya Ekapti, 'PENGUATAN PENDIDIKAN PANCASILA SEBAGAI JATIDIRI, REFLEKSI, DAN TANTANGAN DALAM MEMBATASI PAHAM RADIKALISME MAHASISWA DI PERGURUAN TINGGI ISLAM PONOROGO', *Muslim Heritage* 4, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v4i2.1850>.

adaptive and open to change becomes crucial.⁸⁰ Islamic education that closes itself off from the innovations and advancements offered by Western education may struggle to address contemporary challenges, while, on the other hand, Western education could also benefit from the strong spiritual and moral values inherent in Islamic education. Thus, a narrative that overly emphasizes the fundamental differences between Islamic and Western education risks creating an unhealthy dichotomy. A more inclusive and dialogical approach, one that seeks common ground and balance between tradition and modernity, may prove more productive in developing an educational system capable of comprehensively addressing the needs of future generations.

Hamid Dabashi is a scholar critical of the binary opposition between 'Islam' and 'the West' in global discourse. He argued that this rigid categorisation not only limits our understanding of historical complexity, but also creates illusions that lead to unnecessary conflict. Dabashi emphasised that the dualism that has developed between the two entities is the result of European colonisation and modernity, which has created a narrative that positions the West as a symbol of progress and Islam as a symbol of decline. This narrative, reinforced by media and academic discourse, has shaped harmful stereotypes and led to one-dimensional representations that create tension rather than understanding. It is important to note that the division between 'Islam' and 'the West' does not reflect the more complex reality of the relationship between the two entities.⁸¹ Through this perspective, Dabashi creates a space for the formation of a more harmonious identity between the Islamic world and the West, rejecting the notion that either side should be positioned as an opponent. In a changing global context, it is important that we shed the ideological ties that entangle our views and seek interactions that promote dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect. As such, Hamid Dabashi's thinking offers not only a critique of existing divisions, but also a vision for a more open and inclusive future.⁸² Appiah (2012) explains that the way to defend against extremists is through an alliance of religious communities, regardless of whether they are from the West or the East, Islam, Christianity, or other religions.⁸³

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that al-Naḥlāwī's educational thought cannot be fully understood outside its socio-political context; it is fundamentally a project of ideological resistance. The analysis demonstrates that his grand idea of returning humanity to its fitrah through "ideal" Islamic education was a direct response to the political dynamics of Syria and his anxieties about Western cultural hegemony.

⁸⁰ I Gusti Ngurah Darmawan et al., *Indonesian Education: Past, Present, and Future* (Routledge, n.d.), 1954.

⁸¹ Hamid Dabashi, *The End of Two Illusions: Islam after the West* (University of California Press, 2022), 76; Joseph N. Evans, 'The End of Two Illusions: Islam After the West by Hamid Dabashi (Review)', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 46 (2023): 90–92.

⁸² Hamid Dabashi, 'Islam and the West: The Entire Binary Is False', *Middle East Eye*, 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/islam-west-entire-binary-false>.

⁸³ Kwame anthony Appiah, 'Misunderstanding Cultures: Islam and the West', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 38 (2012): 201–10, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-41821-6_19; Kwame anthony Appiah, 'Misunderstanding Cultures', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 38 (2012): 425–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453712441153>.

Crucially, this resistance was articulated through a deliberate discursive strategy. By systematically framing Western education with a lexicon of "catastrophe," "infidelity," and "non-integrality," al-Naḥlāwī constructed a rigid binary opposition that portrays Islamic and Western education as monolithic, mutually exclusive entities. The primary finding of this research is that this polemical framework, while powerful in its critique of secularism, ultimately results in a reductive and ahistorical narrative. It overlooks the complex historical interactions and potential complementarities between the two traditions where Western education has advanced science and technology, and Islamic education offers profound spiritual and ethical foundations. Therefore, this study's major contribution lies in moving beyond a mere exposition of al-Naḥlāwī's ideas to a critical deconstruction of his ideological discourse. It opens a pathway for future scholarship in Islamic educational thought to transcend such dichotomies and explore the possibilities for a more integrative and holistic paradigm that synergizes the strengths of diverse intellectual traditions.

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