In Conversation With Prof. Yusef Waghid

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INTRODUCTION

Yusef Waghid is a distinguished professor of philosophy of education at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He holds doctorates in education, policy, and philosophy from the University of the Western Cape and Stellenbosch University and is among Africa's leading philosophers of education today. He is a prolific author, with 379 publications to date, of which 43 are academic books and 73 invited contributions to edited volumes.

In recognition of his scholarly works and having published in many of the leading journals in his field, the National Research Foundation in South Africa rated him as an internationally acclaimed scholar who provides exemplary leadership in advancing philosophy of higher education in Africa. Concomitantly, he pioneered Africa's novel MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) on Teaching for Change, which was selected by the SDG Academy of the United Nations: Class Central as a free online international course to learn about the UN's sustainable development goals (2016–2020). He has been honored with the editorship of two prominent academic journals, *Citizenship, Teaching and Learning* (since 2018) and *South African Journal of Higher Education* (since 2005), through which he meritoriously supports scholars to publish their seminal works. During 2020–2021, he collaborated with renowned international scholars on a leading UNESCO-pioneered research project, *Education for Flourishing and Flourishing in Education,* initiated by the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development. His advancement of higher education in Africa is also acknowledged by the Council of Higher Education in South Africa, of which he has been a board member since 2019.

His most notable contributions in the field of African philosophy of higher education feature in significant international scholarly books, which include his *African Philosophy of Education Reconsidered: On Being*

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Human (Routledge, 2014); and *Towards a Philosophy of Caring in Higher Education: Pedagogy and Nuances of Care* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). He is coauthor (with Faiq Waghid and Zayd Waghid) of *Rupturing African Philosophy of Teaching and Learning* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); (with Nuraan Davids) of *Teaching and Learning as a Pedagogic Pilgrimage: Cultivating Faith, Hope and Wonder* (Routledge, 2018); (with Faiq Waghid and Zayd Waghid) of *Rupturing African Philosophy of Teaching and Learning* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); and (with Nuraan Davids) of *Tolerance and Dissent within Education: Towards Debate and Understanding* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017). He is coeditor (with Chikumbutso Herbert Manthalu) of *Education for Decoloniality and Decolonisation in Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); (with Nuraan Davids) of *African Democratic Citizenship Education Revisited* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); and (with Ian Davies, Li-Ching Ho, Dina Kiwan, Carla L. Peck, Andrew Peterson, and Edda Sant) of *Global Citizenship and Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

His most recent book, *Ta'arruf as a Philosophy of Muslim Education: Extending Abu Bakr Effendi's Pragmatism* (African Sun Media, 2020), *is now available in paperback.*

Alyaa Ebbiary: *Beginning with your most recent book,* Ta'arruf as a Philosophy of Education: Extending Abu Bakr Effendi's Pragmatism *(2020) . . . It is a slight departure from your body of work thus far, being more historical, and focusing on one thinker in particular. Why did you choose to write this book?*

Yusef Waghid: Thank you for the opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you, and possibly your readership. This book can be read in multiple ways. However, I would imagine that it can be read in a philosophical-historical way. As with most, if not all, of my scholarship my interest lies in expositing a coherent and lucid argument, drawing on relevant theoretical ideas that constitute and advance argumentation. My reason for drawing overwhelmingly on the seminal text of a Muslim luminary at the Cape in the first part of the book is to ascertain what erudition among Muslim thinkers prevailed at the Cape during the late 19th into the 20th century. Once one understood the paradigm of thinking that constitutes a particular historical moment in and about Muslim education, one would invariably have some grounding on the basis of which one could make particular truths claims about the form of education that impacted the lives, politically and socially, of people. I found Abu Bakr Effendi's work to be reasonably pragmatic and that provided a platform in terms of which I could proffer my own understanding of Muslim education as argued for in the second part of the book.

This book emanates, firstly, from an understanding that Muslim education is open, reflexive, and deliberative and articulating these constitutive notions of education could provoke further understanding. Unlike some notions of Muslim education that seem to be too parochial and restrictive, *ta'arruf* as "associational knowing" not only builds on existing notions of Muslim education, namely *tarbiyyah, ta'lim,* and *ta'dib,* but also expands on their inherently reflexive, critical, and transformative potentialities. Secondly, in many parts of the Muslim world, including Muslim minority nations like South Africa, such a form of education seems to prejudice a minimalist understanding of human engagement, and instead seems to advance a lack of autonomy, deliberative engagement, and connection with others in their otherness. Thirdly, as intimated previously, this book is grounded in a critical-pragmatic paradigm of philosophical thought that hopefully has the potential to enlarge one's imaginations in and about a plausible notion of Muslim education.

EA: *What motivated you to research educational philosophy? Please share a little about your intellectual journey and how it led you to this point.*

YW: My university encounters with notions of transformative education as a Muslim scholar confronted by dominant Anglo-Saxon understandings of education instigated my interest in educational philosophy. I became attracted to democratic notions of educational theory that have guided most of the enunciations and claims I have proffered over at least three decades, since my early encounters with educational theory and practice. Moreover, I also considered reading the Quran together with openness, reflexivity, and critique to the extent that my engagement with philosophy and education has been inspired by a commitment to critically scrutinize thought that I was initiated into. Conversely, I also found a way to connect my thinking about democracy, education, and justice to my reading of the primary text for Muslims. In the main, educational philosophy informed much of my thinking as a science teacher, academic, and intellectual activist—that is, having supported the scholarly aspirations of many learners and students I encountered throughout the years, especially on the African continent. It is this understanding of educational philosophy that contributed largely to the text having gained fruition.

EA: *You have made a contribution with works on Islamic philosophy and African philosophy, both considered "peripheral" philosophies in the Western academic world. Why have you focused on these two interests? Also, do you see them as reconciling, and if so, how?*

YW: Muslim and African philosophies of education are real and legitimate genres of educational philosophy and theory. They are real as they do exist in the life experiences of many humans. What makes these philosophies of education significant is that they not only accentuate the importance of conceptual and pragmatic rigor and argumentation but also firmly exposit the contextual relevance of theory and practice. The understanding of philosophy of education that resonates with my own thinking is that major ideas and problems need to be highlighted and articulated about a specific philosophy of education, be it it Muslim *or* African or Muslim *and* African. Then once these underlying thoughts, practice, and problems have been identified and critically scrutinized, their educational ramifications ought to be examined for all humans. For instance, when a human vice such as autocracy is identified and explored conceptually, the implications of such analyses—that is, whether the analysis was done interpretively, existentially, pragmatically, hermeneutically, phenomenologically, or deconstructively—are then concomitantly considered for education. This is where Muslim and African philosophy of education are commensurate on the grounds that their implications for educational theory and practice in the contexts of Muslimness and Africanness respectively are scrutinized.

EA: *You are a South African Muslim scholar who grew up during apartheid. What was it like coming of age as an academic in this context? And how has education changed in South Africa during your career?*

YW: I am privileged to have been appointed as an academic at least five years after the demise of formal apartheid legislation. I gained this privilege on the grounds of having been initiated into philosophy of education through postgraduate studies, in particular a PhD, under the mentorship of leading South African philosophers of education. Yet, even during my nascent years as a post-apartheid academic I felt excluded because higher education was predominantly the domain of the privileged and white academics. When I joined one of the Ivy League universities, where I currently work, I confronted both hospitality and hostility: my treatment was hospitable on the grounds that I felt welcomed by my colleagues considering that I was the first Muslim and nonwhite scholar to have been appointed in the faculty for more than one hundred years. The intellectual environment for the cultivation of democratic citizenship education—my primary academic interest—was made conducive by transformative agents of change in the faculty. Parodoxically, another group of academics resisted our appointment to the extent that my promotion was seemingly delayed

due to an objectionable voice prevalent at the time. Nevertheless, it was this notion of "hostipitality" (a combination of hospitality and hostility) that has been reconceptualized to inspire my scholarly pursuit: I engage hospitably with thought and people and concomitantly treat their work with care, precision, and honor. Simultaneously, I proffer my arguments in a conceptually rigorous way even if it means taking issue with existing scholars and their philosophical erudite works—a matter of treating works in a hostile, perhaps, deconstructive way.

EA: *How do you position yourself as a South African scholar in Anglophone academia dominated in the Global North?*

YW: Modestly, I have published my seminal contributions in most of the leading journals in my field of education and philosophy and even serve on the advisory and review boards of some of these leading journals as a corroboration that my work as an African philosopher of education has gained some recognition in the hegemonic Global North. Concomitantly, I have advanced the notion of knowledge glocalization that implies that knowledge has both a contextual (indigenous) and universal significance. Inasmuch as indigenous understandings of knowledge can inform the Global North, so universalist understandings of knowledge can equally impact the Global South. My advocacy is for a fusion of knowledge that integrates both the local (indigenous) and the global (universal). Knowledge ought to be privileged on the grounds of the credibility of the argument and not on a pseudo divide between the Global North and Global South.

EA: *There are a lot of accusations that "decolonizing scholarship" is an extension of left-wing activism rather than a rigorous academic project. How would you respond to critics of this movement?*

YW: The decoloniality of scholarship is a necessary and an enabling condition for substantive change in the academe. Decoloniality is an act of resistance against forms of prejudice and exclusion and in the academe such an approach is necessary because the latter cannot function without critique and dissonance. Yet, for substantive change to occur in the academe, one also requires a project that lends itself to the democratization of knowledge in the sense that autonomous and deliberative understandings of knowledge can only manifest in our academic institutions on the basis of encounters that are real, engaging, reflexive, open towards what is new and other—a matter of decolonizing the academe. Simply put, decoloniality of knowledge is an affirmation for inclusion, more specifically democratic

inclusion where dissonant voices do not remain in the margins but are actually reasonably considered as relevant and defensible.

EA: *What impact or contribution do you hope to make with your work?*

YW: As a scholar one remains in becoming: One cannot lay claim to contribute to expanding the realm of educational theory and practice, as that would imply that one's work has erroneously been actualized. To lay claims to such assertions borders on the edge of the academically impossible and, dare I say, the illogical. Similarly, to claim that one's work has a significant bearing on scholarship is to be too presumptuous about the plausibility of one's arguments. Rather, arguments are contextually relevant and may alter as time elapses; therefore, one's contributions should be considered as modest and not impactful, as implied. My potentiality as a scholar is linked to the conceptual rigor that ought to underscore my arguments with an openness to think anew. My seminal thoughts can contribute towards an expansion of human thought, and more specifically, that things be seen with a renewed interest; then my contribution would be sufficient, I think.

EA: *Do you have any final remarks or takeaway for the reader?*

YW: My focus on associational knowing is, firstly, a culmination of my autonomous and deliberative engagement with thinking that remains in becoming; secondly, associational knowing (ta'arruf) is a recognition that understandings ought to remain subjected to openness and reflexivity; and thirdly, associational knowing is a recognition that thoughts and practices do not occur independently but are both intra-actionally and inter-actionally contrived and therefore open to further critical scrutiny by others.