A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR ALTERNATIVE HUMAN SCIENTISM: APPLICABILITY, DEMYSTIFICATION, AND ADVOCACY

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Abstract

This paper delves into the intricacies of crafting relevant knowledge across various fields of study, emphasizing the avoidance of ethnocentrism, the liberation of thought, and the impactful advocacy towards the discussed subjects. By theorizing the notion of relevance and establishing sociological criteria, the paper introduces the problem of knowledge relevance and proposes a typology of irrelevance, including conceptual, value, mimetic, and topical categories. Conceptual irrelevance is dissected further into the inapplicability of theories and concepts, alongside their sophistry, perversion, and mystification, which render them irrelevant by obscuring reality with flawed reasoning. Through examples, the paper illustrates both irrelevant and relevant bodies of knowledge, using the study of religion and the critique of Islamic economics as cases of conceptual irrelevance and relevance, respectively. Additionally, it explores value irrelevance through the lens of disconnected knowledge from its political, economic, and cultural contexts, offering a discourse on sectarian persecution, specifically the persecution of Shi'ites in Malaysia, as an instance of value relevance. This exploration underscores the paper's commitment to establishing knowledge that is free from ethnocentrism, intellectually demystifying, and beneficially impactful.

Keywords: *Knowledge Relevance, Ethnocentrism, Conceptual Irrelevance, Value Relevance, Sectarian Persecution.*

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Relevance of Knowledge

Among the problems of the social sciences in the Third World which are peculiar to the state of post colonialism is that of the irrelevance of the social sciences. What is clear from the literature of the last forty years is the strong awareness of a lack of fit between Western theory and non-Western realities. Many examples of the irrelevance or non-applicability of Western concepts, theories and assumptions have been noted (Alatas 1974; 1972; Fahim 1970; Fahim and Helmer 1980; Parekh 1992; Pieris 1969; Uberoi 1968). Epistemological issues concerning the reliability of truth claims or the origin of knowledge are common to social sciences in both the countries of their origin as well as in postcolonial societies. The problem of irrelevance is not confined to epistemology.

Nevertheless, sociological or philosophical approaches concerned with the questions of objectivity or the social basis of knowledge, have generally not raised irrelevance as a problem. Objectivity and the social basis on knowledge are universal concerns while the problem of irrelevance is peculiar to the social sciences of some societies. It is necessary first to conceptualize irrelevance by way of presenting of a preliminary typology of the phenomenon.

A review of the vast literature on the state of the social sciences in various non-Western and postcolonial societies reveal a number of problems said to beset the social sciences in these areas, which we may understand as constituting various types of irrelevance. There are a number of theoretical perspectives that address the state of the social sciences in postcolonial societies, such as orientalism (Said 1978), academic dependency theory (Altbach 1977; Alatas 2003; Sinha-Kerkhoff and Alatas 2010), the theory of mental captivity (Alatas 1974; 1972), postcolonial theory, and other critiques the social sciences, which note problems in the application and practice of North American and European social science in postcolonial

contexts. Each of the problems identified can be understood as illustrating a type of irrelevance as follows:

i. From the theory of mental captivity we may derive an understanding of irrelevance as typifying social science that is defined by the inability to raise original problems and to devise original methods of problem-solving. This leads to the "unreality of basic assumptions, misplaced abstraction, ignorance or misinterpretation of data, and an erroneous conception of problems and their significance" in social science (Alatas 1972) and the alienation of the social science enterprise from its surroundings.

ii. The theory of mental captivity also discusses redundancy as a problem (Alatas 1972). The uncritical imitation of redundant propositions (that are already known) provides us with yet another aspect of irrelevance, that is, unimportance or triviality.

iii. Another aspect of irrelevance is that of unaccordance or disparity as, for example, between assumptions and reality, a point that has been made by all the theories of social science referred to above.

iv. Inapplicability, as in the inapplicability of a certain theory, is also an aspect of irrelevance. The theories of orientalism, eurocentrism and postcolonial criticism have tirelessly demonstrated how inapplicable theories are forced unwillingly on to data, which end up in the form of problematic constructions.

v. Irrelevance also connotes sophistry, perversion and mystification. Here we speak of social science as irrelevant when it mystifies through false and vicious reasoning while being sophistic and sophisticated. The irrelevance lies in the ability of the social sciences to make attractive truth claims which are illogical, unsound, or groundless.

vi. Irrelevance also implies inferiority. Here we refer to inferior, mediocre or shallow social science that gains respectability

in the non-Western outback that far outweighs its ideal powers.

vii. The irrelevant, servile (alien, other-empowering) commitments of many social scientists to social science agendas originating from without are another type of irrelevance.

Each of these types of irrelevance, that is, empowerment of others, alienation, triviality, discordance, inapplicability, mystification and inferiority, can be seen to plague the social sciences at different levels.

i. Conceptual irrelevance—The study of the history and logic of concept formation in the social sciences reveals how concepts derived from one cultural language are elevated to the level of universal concepts and comparative dimensions, the application of which veils discrepancies between text and reality (J. Matthes 1992). An example would be the use of concepts from the sociology of religion such as church, sect and even religion itself to talk about Islam. Durkheim was possibly guilty of this. The manner in which he treated magic, for example, was according to the self-understanding of Christianity (Joachim Matthes 1997). Irrelevance types iv and v are found in this category.

ii. Value irrelevance—As mentioned earlier, the role of values in prioritizing research according to extra or non-academic criteria must be taken into account in understanding the establishment and perpetuation of research agendas in the social sciences. An example of this problem comes from Egypt where researchers complain of funds being spent on surveys to find out what people think of the veil, a topic deemed to be of low priority (Hegazy 1997). Often value commitments not rooted in the immediate surroundings of the researcher prevail. Irrelevance type viii is found in this category.

iii. Mimetic irrelevance—This refers to the uncritical adoption of theories, concepts and methods from external sources,

which due to the uncritical and imitative treatment, results in redundancy, mystification and mediocrity. Included in this category are irrelevance types iii, vi, and vii.

iv. Topical irrelevance—This arises when what is deemed to be problematic does not stand out but rather remains in the midst of expected familiarity, in the "field of the unproblematic" (Schutz 1970). Irrelevance type ii comes under this category.

It follows that what must be regarded as relevance is the reversal of all that has been presented above as irrelevance. Relevant social science would then refer to an original, significant (non-redundant), concordant (referring to concordance between assumption and reality), applicable, demystifying, and superior tradition which can be seen to exist at all the levels of sociological activities. The sociological criteria of relevance can be derived by putting into reverse the four categories of irrelevance which can be worked out as follows:

i. Conceptual relevance—This requires rethinking the universality of concepts and comparative dimensions, by first of all, establishing non-dominant cultural languages as sources, and then working to develop truly universal or canopy categories. What would an anthropology or sociology of religion look like if its concepts were derived from Islam rather than Christianity? The classification of religion may not include Catholicism and Protestantism under the same category of Christianity, because their doctrines and rituals differ too greatly to warrant their inclusion under one religion. Such an approach to religion would be equally ethnocentric as the Eurocentric study of religion that it sets out to correct. The task would be to move beyond such one-sided constructions.

ii. Value relevance—This refers to the selection of values that we establish as a criterion or standard for the selection of research topics, the drawing up of research agenda, and for policy-making and advocacy.

iii. Mimetic relevance—Mimesis can be turned into a virtue in the context of endogenous intellectual creativity which requires self-consciousness of the problem of irrelevance at both the individual and institutional levels.

iv. Topical relevance—This requires the ability to discover problems, unfamiliarity, in the midst of the familiar or the "field of the unproblematic". An example is a Khaldunian theory of the stability of the Syrian state, or a Khaldunian theory of elite circulation in 19th century Sudan.

In what follows, I present examples of different types of relevant knowledge. As stated above, included under conceptual irrelevance are two types, that is, the inapplicability of theories and concepts, as well as their sophistry, perversion, and mystification. Here I speak of social science as irrelevant when they are inapplicable or they mystify through false and vicious reasoning, or by veiling reality. An example of a sociology that is conceptually relevant is one that critiques the Eurocentric concept of religion and offers a more universal concept of religion. An example of discourse that is conceptually relevant in the sense that it demystifies dominant perspectives is the critique of Islamic economics. Finally, an example of a discourse that is of value relevance is that which critically deals with sectarian persecution. I illustrate how such a discourse might look like with recourse to the case of the persecution of Shi'ites in Malaysia. In the three sections that follow, each of the examples of relevant knowledge, that is, applicability, demystification and advocacy, are discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Intellectual Christianization of "Religion" and Its Alternative

I would like to provide an illustration of the problem of Eurocentrism with recourse to the example of the concept of religion for which I draw from the work of Joachim Matthes (Joachim Matthes

2000). This concerns the translation of cultural terms such as religion into scientific concepts. Social scientific concepts originate from cultural terms in everyday language. As such they present problems when brought into scientific discourse and used to talk about areas and periods outside of those of their origins. The result is a distortion of the phenomena that they are applied to.

The Latin *religio*, from which the English term religion is derived, was a collective term referring to diverse practices and cults in and around Rome, prior to the emergence of Christianity. When Rome became Christian, Christianity became the dominant belief and all other beliefs were absorbed or eliminated. But *religio* not applied to Christianity as there was no need to—it was the only legitimate belief, so it was just known as the Church. With Luther and the Protestant Reformation *religio* referred to Christian beliefs and a way of life separate from the institution of the Catholic Church. It was oppositional to the clergy, that is, it was the layman's religion. In 1593, the French philosopher, Jean Bodin published his *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* (*Colloquium of the Seven about the Secrets of the Sublime*). Here there was a generalized understanding of religion and included non-Christian faiths. By the 18th century "religion" came to be used as a scientific concept, referring to belief systems other than Christianity.

But while "religion" meant all beliefs, when European scholars wrote about religion critically, they had in mind Protestantism (as in Marx's reference to religion as the opium of the intellectuals) or the institutional religion (Catholicism) as opposed to the religion of the believers (Protestants). When "religion" is applied to beliefs other than Christianity, for example, Islam or Hinduism, there is an implicit or explicit comparison with Christianity, which results in an elision of reality. According to Matthes, the logic of comparison is such that the two things to be compared are subsumed under a third unit which is at a higher unit of abstraction. For example, apples and pears are subsumed under fruits. "Fruits" becomes the *tertiumcomparationis*.

Similarly, Christianity and Islam are subsumed under religion. The problem with this is that the characteristics of religion are derived from Christianity to begin with. Therefore, the supposedly general scientific concept "religion" is culturally defined by Christianity and Islam is looked at in terms of Christianity rather than compared to Christianity in terms of a *tertiumcomparationis,* a general concept "religion".

What reality is lost, what is the distortion done to Islam? Religion as it is understood in the West is a private matter as opposed to state and church. Therefore there are such dualities as sacred versus profane, religious versus non-religious, and so on. Also, religion in West refers to the beliefs and private lives of believers. The danger is that Islam is also seen in these terms when in fact there are no such dualities. For example, there is no distinction between secular and religious education. All knowledge and education is either about God or the creations of God.

Let us also consider the case of Hinduism. According to Smith, Hinduism is a particularly false conceptualization, one that is conspicuously incompatible with any adequate understanding of the religious outlook of the Hindus. Even the term "Hindu" [an Indian or non-Muslim inhabitant of India] was unknown to the classical Hindus. "Hinduism" as a concept they certainly did not have (Smith 1962). The term "Hindu" has its origins in antiquity as the Indo-Aryan name of the river Indus, which is its Greek transliteration (Smith 1962; Frykenberg 1989; Spiegel 1881). It is from this usage that the terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism" gradually acquired their descriptive and geographical denotations. Muslim scholars such as al-Biruni (A.D. 973 M), writing in Arabic, used the term *al-Hind* to refer to the Indian subcontinent, but when they referred to the people of that subcontinent or aspects thereof they were referring to what they considered the indigenous and non-Muslim inhabitants of India. In Persian and Urdu the corresponding geographical term to *al-Hind* was *Hindustan.* Things *Hindustan* referred to whatever

that was indigenous to India and non-Muslim (Frykenberg 1989). The English "Hindu" probably derived from the Persian. The term "Hindu" appears in the *GaudiyaVaisnava* texts of the sixteenth century (O'Connell 1973). The usage here is consistent with that in the Muslim texts of the premodern Arabs and Persians. Even in the modern period, this negative definition of Hinduism is found as evident in the Hindu Marriage Act. The Act defines a Hindu, among other things, as one "who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion…" (Derret 1963). The terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism" in reference to religion, and a unitary one at that, were for the most part, a modern development. In the eighteenth century they began to be used to denote an Aryan, Brahmanical or Vedic-based high culture and religion by European Orientalists such as Halhed, Jones, and Müller (Frykenberg 1989). It is this usage that was adopted by the early Indian nationalists themselves like Ramohun Roy, Gandhi and Nehru (Frykenberg 1989). This "new" religion was founded on the ontology and epistemology contained in the *Varnashrama Dharma* and encompassed the entire cosmos, detailing as part of its vision a corresponding stratified social structure (Frykenberg 1989).

What is important in these developments as far as the intellectual Christianization of Indian beliefs systems is concerned is that: (i) the belief systems of the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent (excluding Muslims, Jews, Christians and Parsis) came to be regarded as religion; (ii) these beliefs systems were seen to constitute a single religion; and (iii) they were founded on a system of Brahmanical doctrines based on the *Catur-Veda* (Four Vedas) (Frykenberg 1989). It is in these senses that characteristics of Christianity were read into Indian beliefs. Gradually, the newly christened Hinduism also came to encompass the "low" tradition or what is nowadays referred to as "popular", "temple", "bhakti", "village", or "tribal" Hinduism (Frykenberg 1989).

What are the problems with these constructions of non-Western experiences that utilize Western concepts?

1. The mix of fact and fiction. The beliefs of peoples such as those of Muslims and of the Indian sub-continent are not understood according to the self-understanding of these peoples. There is a mix of fact and fiction in that facts are organized into a coherent framework that is derived from Christian categories posing as the *tertiumcomparationis*, the resultant construction being somewhat mythical.
2. The imposition of categories from the outside. Categories such as "religion" are imposed from the outside, that is, by European scholars, result in constructions that do not accord with the self-description of the communities concerned.
3. Homogenization. There is an attempt to homogenize societies and communities, thereby hiding complexities. Simply stating the commonalities of the people who live on the Indian sub-continent veils not only the contrary self-understandings but also the variety and heterogeneity of religion in India.
4. There is a Eurocentric bias in that ideas, models, problem selection, methodologies, techniques, and even research priorities continue to originate from American, British, and to some extent, French, and German works.
5. There is little generation of original ideas in terms of new theoretical perspectives or schools of thought or innovations in research methods.
6. There is a general neglect of local literary and philosophical traditions. This is not to say that there are no studies on local literature or philosophy. The point is that these traditions remain as objects of study and are not considered as sources of concepts in the social sciences. Furthermore, they are rarely studied by social scientists.
7. The above problems exist within the context of intellectual imperialism, that is, the intellectual domination of the Third World by the social science powers (United States, Britain, France, and Germany) (Alatas 1969).

It should be noted that the field of the sociology of religion, especially where the study of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam are concerned, is very backward in this regard. A proper approach would be to develop the *tertium comparationis* from a comparative study of concepts in all these belief systems. The development of what we may term as alternatives to Eurocentric discourses, therefore, requires familiarity with the local or indigenous tradition which is understood by Kim Kyong-Dong to mean both the classical tradition as well as the world of popular discourse (Kyong-Dong 1996a; 1996b). Knowledge of the local or indigenous is a prerequisite for the development of the *tertium comparationis*.

The Muslim scholar, Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Biruni (973-1048 M) provides us with an alternative conception of what is today called Hinduism. He provides a comprehensive account of the civilization of India, including the religion, philosophy, literature, geography, science, customs, and laws of the Indians. This paper concentrates on al-Biruni's construction of the religions of India. We consult both the original Arabic, the *Kitāb al-Bīrūnī fī Taḥqīq Mā li al-Hind min Maqūlatin Maqbūlatin fī al-'Aql aw Mardhūlatin* as well as Sachau's English translation, *Alberinu's India*. Dates in brackets indicate the year in which the work was written. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations in English are taken from Sachau's translation.

Al-Biruni had a universal conception of *dīn*, which he applies to religions other than Islam, at a time when the Latin *religio* was only applied to Christianity. At the same time, al-Biruni does not intellectually or culturally Islamize the religions of the Indians by reading into the Indian material an Islamic model or Islamic meanings. Al-Biruni did not read Islamic meanings into the religions of the Indians. It is interesting that al-Biruni's translator, Edward C. Sachau, observed that al-Biruni's method was not to speak himself "but to let the Hindus speak, giving extensive quotations from their classical authors" (Sachau 1910), while Sachau himself does not

always allow al-Biruni to speak when he reads modern European meanings into al-Biruni's Arabic text.

Sachau's English translation of the Arabic original, which was undertaken in the late nineteenth century, reads into Arabic terms, nineteenth century European ideas about what Hinduism was. For example, in his preface in the Arabic original al-Biruni refers to "the religions of India" (*adyān al-Hind*) (Al-Biruni 1958), while this is translated by Sachau as "the doctrines of the Hindus" (Sachau 1910), leading one to assume that al-Biruni conceived of a single religion called Hinduism. In fact, a study of Sachau's translation may be more a study of the intellectual Christianization of the religions of India than of al-Biruni's work on India.

Islamic Economics as Capitalist Ideology

Academic dependency at the level of ideas is the general condition of knowledge in the Third World. Although it is fashionable to expose Eurocentric biases in the social sciences, the emergence of autonomous or alternative theoretical traditions has been very slow, and the dependence on theories and concepts generated in the European and North American context continues. This problem of dependence is linked to the ubiquity of imitation, a condition conceptualized by Syed Hussein Alatas as mental captivity. The captive mind is an "uncritical and imitative mind dominated by an external source, whose thinking is deflected from an independent perspective" (Alatas 1974; 1972). The external source is Western social science and humanities and the uncritical imitation influences all the constituents of scientific activity such as problem-selection, conceptualization, analysis, generalization, description, explanation, and interpretation.

Among the characteristics of the captive mind are the inability to be creative and raise original problems, the inability to devise original analytical methods, and alienation from the main issues of indigenous society. The captive mind is trained almost entirely

in the Western sciences, reads the works of Western authors, and is taught predominantly by Western teachers, whether in the West itself or through their works available in local centers of education. Mental captivity is also found in the suggestion of solutions and policies. Furthermore, it reveals itself at the level of theoretical as well as empirical work. Alatas suggested that the mode of thinking of colonized peoples paralleled political and economic imperialism. Hence, the expression academic imperialism (Alatas 1969), connoting the context within which the captive mind appears.

Academic dependency at the level of ideas should be seen in terms of the domination of social science teaching and research by the captive mind, the consequence of which is the persistence of Eurocentrism as an outlook and orientation in social science teaching, research as well as planning for economic, social and cultural development. As case in point is the discipline of Islamic economics. The discipline of Islamic economics provides an example of not only the dependence on ideas but also the function of such dependence.

The notion of Islamic economics did not arise from within the classical tradition in Islamic thought. In the classical Islamic tradition, there were discussions and works on economic institutions and practices in the Muslim world, but the notion of an Islamic science of economics and a specifically Islamic economy did not exist (Hassan 1989). Islamic economics, therefore, is a modern creation. It emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with capitalist and socialist models and theories of development in the 1950s (A. R. Muhammad 1984). It is mainly in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia that Islamic economic research is being carried out, although there has also been a great deal of interest in this field in Egypt, India, Iran, Malaysia, and Sudan. Interest in Islamic economics predates the rise of the modern Islamic states of Iran, Libya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan. Islamic economics rejects the ideology of "catching up" with the West and is committed to discerning the nature and ethos of economic development from an

Islamic point of view. The need is, therefore, to identify the Islamic ideal of economic development (Kurshid 1980).

The starting point of Islamic economics is based on a rejection of various ethnocentric misconceptions to be found in modernization theory with regard to Muslim society such as its alleged fatalism and the lack of the achievement motive (Kurshid 1980). Muslim scholars have been tireless in pointing out that the prerequisites of development are to be found in Islam and that development within an Islamic framework is based on the constellation of values that are found in the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* (the traditions of the Prophet of Islam) (Alhabshi 1990). Western development theory and policy are based on the peculiar characteristics, problems, and value constellations that are found in Western society.

But the Islamic critique of development studies is not directed solely at modernization theory but generally at the corpus of development thought encompassing the entire spectrum of perspectives from the left to the right that is seen to be located within the discourse of modernism. Modernism, whether in its liberal or leftist moments, calls upon Islam to promote development by recasting Islam in a modern light, by tempering its fundamentalist tendencies, by accepting Western notions of economic and political development, in short, by recasting itself in a Western mold (Tibi 1988). Islam, on the other hand, has a different outlook on life and the nature of social change, and implies a unique set of policy options for the solution of the problems of development. Nevertheless, Islamic economics suffers from a number of problems, some of which have been dealt with by others (Kuran 1983; 1986; 1989). The following remarks on Islamic economics, however, are centered on the distinction between ethical and empirical forms of theory.

Ethical theories express preference or distaste about reality in accordance with certain standards of evaluation. In addition to this, they specify the ideal goal toward which changes should be made. Empirical theories, on the other hand, are generalizations

about observable reality and require the process of abstraction and conceptualization.

Islamic economics presents an ideal of development that is based on an Islamic philosophy of life. Arising from this alternative vision of development, various policy options have been suggested such as the introduction of interest-free banking and *zakat* (poor tax) (M. S. Khan 1986; Arif 1982; Faridi 1980; Iqbal and Mirakhor 1987; Karsten 1982; M. S. Khan 1986; M. S. Khan and Mirakhor 1987; Iqbal and Mirakhor 1987; Uzair 1980). What is presented as Islamic economics are in fact ethical theories of production, distribution, price, and so on. When Islamic economists discuss the traditional categories of economics such as income, consumption, government expenditure, investment, and savings they do so in terms of ethical statements and not in terms of analyses and empirical theory. Contrary to what is claimed (Kahf 1982; F. Khan 1984; M. S. Khan 1986; A. M. Muhammad 1982; Siddiqui and Zaman 1989a; 1989b; Zarqa 1983), it would be difficult to refer to an Islamic science of economics, although we do have the scientific study of economies in Muslim countries, as well as the study of Muslim economic institutions and commercial techniques.

When Islamic economists are doing empirical theory, what is presented as Islamic economics turns out not to be an alternative to modernist discourse as far as empirical theory is concerned. The foci and method that have been selected by Muslim economists for economic analysis, is essentially that of Keynesian and neo-classical economics. The foci are the traditional questions that come under the purview of theories of price, production, distribution, trade cycle, growth, and welfare economics with Islamic themes and topics involved such as *zakat*, interest-free banking, and profit-sharing. The problems associated with this are the following:

First of all, the techniques of analysis that have been selected, that is, the building up of abstract models of the economic system, have not been translated by Islamic economists into empirical work.

For example, works on interest tend to construct models of how an interest-free economy would work. There is no empirical work on existing economic systems and the nature, functions, and effects of interest in these systems.

Secondly, these attempts at Islamic economics have sought to ground the discourse in a theory of wealth and distribution in very much the manner that Western economic science does, as a glance at some of their works will reveal (Kahf 1982; F. Khan 1984; M. S. Khan 1986; A. M. Muhammad 1982; Siddiqui and Zaman 1989a; 1989b; Zarqa 1983). When it is engaged in the sort of discourse that one could understand as constituting empirical theory, it is not doing so from a specifically Islamic scientific approach. The point here is that attempts to create a "faithful" economic science have not yielded policy options for the problems that are being addressed because what "Islamic economics" amounts to is neo-classical economics dressed and made up in Islamic terminology.

In the 1930s, 40s, and 50s economists in Latin America, Europe, and the United States began to pay attention to underdeveloped areas. The dominant school used to explain development in advanced capitalist countries was neo-classical economics, according to which the operation of free market forces can maximize aggregate economic welfare, and the growth of output under full employment will continue as long as there is a positive propensity to save and invest in excess of what is needed to maintain capital equipment. The subsequent rise of development economics was in part a response to the inapplicability of neo-classical economics (Hunt 1989). There are a number of approaches to the study of the economies in underdeveloped areas, including the structuralist school, neo-Marxism, dependency theory, and the new institutional economics.

Islamic economics is very much embedded in the tradition of neo-classical economics in terms of its near exclusive concern with technical factors such as growth, interest, tax, profits, and so on. A host of issues relating to political economy such as uneven

development, unequal exchange, bureaucratic capitalism, corruption, and the role of the state that have been addressed by structuralist, neo-Marxist, dependency, and new institutional economic theorists, are not dealt with at the theoretical and empirical levels by Islamic economists. This is not to suggest that Islamic economists should uncritically adopt these other perspectives to replace neo-classical economics. The successful indigenization of development economics and the claim to scientific status depend on the degree to which indigenization efforts retain what is of utility in neo-classical and other theories of development.

The main problem with this state of affairs is that under the guise of "Islamic economics" the policies generated in industrialized capitalist centers are implemented in the Muslim world and are legitimated, thereby undermining the very project that Islamic economics is committed to. In attempting to ground itself in a theory of rational man and a hypothetical-deductive methodology it has merely substituted Islamic terms for neo-classical ones, retaining the latter's assumptions, procedures and modes of analysis. As such, it has failed to engage in the analysis and critique of a highly unequal world economic order in which the gaps are ever widening. That this supposedly anti-Western economics was coopted and made to serve those very trends that it outwardly opposes must be considered.

Thirdly, not very different from neo-classical economics it extends a technical-economic rationality over a wide range of problems which presupposes viewing different ends as comparable outcomes, which in turn, entails the elimination of cultural hindrances to the comparability of outcomes. In this sense, neo-classical economics, Islamic economics, Marxist as well as other alternative theories of development are similar in that they are based on narrow assumptions about human action.

It can be said, therefore, that Islamic economics functions ideologically to support world financial capital while claiming to offer an alternative to mainstream economics. More importantly

it interacts and reinforces an attitude that can be described as a modernist Muslim ethic that some have referred to as Islamic Protestantism. This refers to a sense of piety in economic action in the context of the loss of traditional culture and the buying into a crude materialistic outlook. An example frequently cited is the development projects around the *ḥaram* in Mecca.

Many historical sites in Mecca have been demolished to the extent that much of the prophetic legacy is disappearing. Irfan al-Alawi, director of the UK-based Islamic Heritage Research Foundation, said: "The authorities are trying to destroy anything in Mecca that is associated with the prophet's life". The homes of the Prophet's wife, grandson and one of his companions have been demolished. The house of Prophet Muhammad's wife, Khadijah was replaced with a block of 1.400 public lavatories. Other historical sites have been replaced with skyscraper hotels. To complete the picture we can add that this modernist ethic has an affinity with Salafist and other modernist ideologies in the Muslim world in that both are indifferent to or reject tradition.

The 16th century Protestant remained traditionalistic in terms of the outlook on family, marriage, culture and aesthetics. By the nineteenth century, however, the Protestant element had receded into the background. As Weber said:

> The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate world morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism… (Weber 1958).

Salafist economics can be said to embody an extreme development of this attitude in which culture and aesthetics is excessively subordinated to the technical and economic

requirements of development, even at the expense of the destruction of religious heritage. However, this must be distinguished from the so-called "Islamic Puritans" or "Islamic Calvinists" for whom the interconnectedness between religion, heritage and culture, on the one hand, and economy, on the other, remains strong (Yavuz 2013; Uygur 2007; Alatas 2007; Brouwers and Kurzman 2004). The kind of political and business elite I am referring to as embodying the crass consumerist culture which is driven by Salafist economics is more akin to those who wish to tear down old neighbourhoods and forested areas and build shopping malls, luxury apartments and hotels.

The Persecution of Malaysia's Shi'ites

The human sciences should be critical and impactful upon the people that are the subject-matter of their discussions. I provide an example of how this can be so from the case of the persecution of Shi'ites in Malaysia. Shi'ite in Malaysia made up 250.000 to 300.000 of the Malaysian population. Over the last 30 years, the attitude of the Malaysian authorities towards the Shi'ite and their treatment of this Muslim minority sect have changed from one of acceptance to one of rejection and even persecution. In 1984, the Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs declared that the following Shi'ite schools of jurisprudence, the Ja'fari and Zaidi, were acceptable in Malaysia. In 1996, this decision was revoked.

This was followed by a series of fatwas between 1998 and 2012 issued by various states in Malaysia that placed restrictions on the spread and practice of Shi'ism. In some cases, such as in the state of Negeri Sembilan, the ruling is simply to prevent the spread of Shi'ism. Shi'ites are free to practice Islam according to their way but were not permitted to spread their beliefs and practices among the Sunni majority. In other cases, such as in the state of Selangor, Shi'ites has been arrested for practicing their rituals. In December 2010, about 200 Shi'ites including some foreigners were arrested

by state religious authorities during a raid at a Shi'ite center (Dawn Today's Paper 2010). In other cases, such as in the state of Perak, the law makes provisions for the arrest of Shi'ites who possess Shi'ite literature (books and documents). Under Section 16 of the Perak Criminal (*Sharia*) Enactment, 1992, it is an offence to possess items on Shi'ism including books, audio-visual materials and posters. In early August 2013, two Shi'ites were arrested, followed by another six arrests in September. The Perak Islamic Religious Department (JAIPk) enforcement chief Ahmad Nizam Amiruddin is reported to have said that the Shi'ites should be eradicated (New Straits Times 2013).

Shi'ites is reported to be a threat to national security. The Ministry of Public Order and Security issued a paper entitled "The Modus Operandi of the Shiite movement and the Threat to National Security" at the seminar "Facing the Shiite Virus", held at the Science University of Malaysia (USM) on Oct 13 2013 (Sinar Harian 2013). No evidence for the Shi'ites being a threat to security was ever presented.

The Malaysian government's position regarding Shi'ism appears to be in conflict with the Federal Constitution of Malaysia:

Article 3(1):
Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation.

Article 8(2)
Except as expressly authorized by this Constitution, there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment.

Article 11(1)
Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it.
The Federal Constitution clearly protects the rights of Muslims as well as practitioners of others faiths. Where Islam is concerned, the constitution mentions only Islam and not any specific school of thought.

The position taken by the Malaysian religious authorities and the government is contrary to a series of international declarations, including the Amman Message. The Amman Message, released in 2004, declares among other things that: "Whosoever is an adherent to one of the four *Sunni* schools (*Mathahib*) of Islamic jurisprudence (*Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i,* and *Hanbali*), the two *Shi'i* schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Ja'fari* and *Zaydi*), the *Ibadi* school of Islamic jurisprudence and the *Thahiri* school of Islamic jurisprudence, is a Muslim. Declaring that person an apostate is impossible and impermissible." The Amman Message was endorsed by the major Sunni clerics and leaders of the Muslim world. Malaysia is also signatory to the Amman Message. The Malaysians who endorsed it were H.E. Dato' Seri Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi, then Prime Minister of Malaysia and Dato' Dr. Abdul Hamid Othman, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and Religious Adviser to the Prime Minister (The Amman Message 2004). The Malaysian authorities' position with regard to Shi'ism is, therefore, contrary to the majority view or consensus of the religious scholars of Sunni Islam.

The Amman Message was preceded by other declarations, among the most famous being the fatwa issued by HE Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut, the Head of Al-Azhar University, Cairo, on the permissibility of following the Shi'i school of thought. An excerpt from the fatwa reads as follows:

> The Ja'fari school of thought which is also known as Al-Shi'a Al-Imamiyya Ithna 'Ashari is a school of thought which is religiously correct to follow as other Sunni Schools of thought.

The Malaysian official position is also contrary to the International Bill of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, in particular the following articles (United Nation 1948):

Article 1
All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 3
Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.

Article 18
Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

Article 29

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.
3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

In addition to legal action taken against Shi'ites in Malaysia, the community has been subjected to slander and demonization by the government-controlled media. A cocktail of distortions and half-

truths have been reported in the media about Shi'ite practices and beliefs. For example, They are reported to encourage bloodshed and the killing of Sunni leaders (New Straits Times 2013). At a Friday sermon in November (2013), the Malaysian Islamic Development Department or JAKIM listed 10 beliefs that Malaysian Shi'ite allegedly held, including sodomy (Malay Mail 2013). In order to discredit Shi'ism, it has also been disseminated in the media that Shi'ism is a religion created by the Jews. Many other examples of the misrepresentation of Shi'ism in the Malaysian state-controlled media can be presented.

Advocates of religious freedom for the Shi'ites of Malaysia should make the following demands:

(i) To return to the 1984 decision of the Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs that recognized the Ja'fari and Zaidi Shi'ite schools of thought as legitimate in Malaysia. This is in keeping with international Sunni practice;
(ii) To revoke all anti-Shi'ite fatwas and gazette laws arising thereof;
(iii) To insist on fair reporting in the state controlled media of matters to do with Shi'ism.

Furthermore, now is the time for social scientists and others to conceive of a research project that examines the nature and causes of sectarianism in Islam. Part of the objectives of the project would be to document and publicizes the opinion of contemporary Sunni and Shi'ite theologians and jurists who have sensible views of the matter as well as sound theological arguments against the sectarianists.

CONCLUSION

Scholars that work outside of the world social science powers have to become more familiar with each other's works, particularly in the areas of the critique of Eurocentrism and Orientalism and the development of alternative social sciences. This contact is at an

all-time minimum now. Such scholarly contact should be founded on the idea that local scholarship has universal significance and implications. For example, the works of José Rizal and Syed Hussein Alatas on indolence may be of theoretical relevance to those studying Persian perceptions of Arabs. See for example Joya Blondel Saad, *The Image of Arabs in Modern Persian Literature* (Saad 1996). These studies may profit from sociological research in other parts of the world that expose myths concerning "natives".

What's important is to understand that the search for alternative discourses in the social sciences has to be based on the historical experiences and cultural practices of a society or community. These are to be seen as sources of concepts and ideas for the social sciences. The social science community of a society should be cosmopolitan and actively draw upon other traditions. The critique that social sciences are Orientalist, Eurocentric, and imitative suggests that there is disconnect between the social sciences and the reality they are supposed to explain. This disconnect may take various forms of irrelevance. In this paper I have emphasized two types, which are, conceptual and value relevance.

In order for the social sciences to develop along the lines of alternative discourses, that is, to be rooted in its tradition, cosmopolitan and relevant, they must also be autonomous from the state and from all forms of ideological domination as well as avoid the indigenous-universal dichotomy. As Ghaneirad put it:

> These discourses criticize the political and ideological dimensions of both indigenous and universal science discourses without ignoring the democratic and humanist capabilities of either the indigenous and universal dimensions. This school of thought (whose members include Shari'ati, Tajik, Fakuhi, and Khalili) is interested in making the social sciences a dialogical, interactive and democratic project both among various local groups and between Iran and world powers (Ghaneirad 2010).

Lastly, it should be noted that a crucial area for concerted activity along the lines of alternative discourses is teaching. It is not sufficient that conferences are held and books are published on the themes. It is necessary that another generation of scholars is trained in the way of alternative discourses so that the problems associated with Orientalism in the social sciences can be reduced. In order to be relevant to society, teaching sociology itself must address society's needs (Ghaneirad 1385). Beyond that and, as noted by Miri, it is crucial that our students' minds be exposed to the variety of traditions that have contributed to our inter-civilizational global reality (Miri 2010).

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