POLITICIZING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: ISLAM AND CULTURE AS SOCIO-POLITICAL FACT

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Introduction

One possible way for a Muslim social scientist to respond and contextualize Islamic discourse is to mediate and cultivate a common perception and understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim readership through an understanding of Islam as a socio-political construct. In this paper, the discussion of Islam as socio-political fact is used to illustrate the impact of Western social sciences on the study of Islam. Through the appropriation of notions of transculture and the politics of identity, post-colonialism and postmodernism, the sociology of Islam is expanded as a paradigm through the understanding of strategic essentialism to deconstruct hegemonic terms of political discourse in academia.

Islam as Socio-political Fact

"Common origins and geographical proximity made Islamic and Christian civilizations the major negative reference points for one another. In this respect, the two civilizations resembled on grand scale ethic groups that commonly define themselves by reference to out-groups."[1]

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1.   Armstrong cited in Smith, Anthony D. National and Modernism, New York: Routledge, 1998

'The study of Islam has been a phenomenon of Western politics, scholarship and thought as much as it has been a governing imperative of Islamic political, cultural and legal world ... in fact, the history of image construction of Islam has furnished the subject matter for recent critiques of the Orientalist tradition and its purpose for the West's own political, economic and ideological interest ... major modern theories and critical approaches have begun to make incursions into analyses of Islam'.[2]

Social sciences as such and the socio-scientific study of religion as a system of meaning, in this case Islam, is placed precariously in between the scriptural or textual based traditional Islamic scholarship and the Orientalist tradition. Additionally, as a study of social fact, it refers to the collective identity of a particular socializing community through embracing the normative community behaviour and sharing its values but simultaneously constraining its members by its very existence.[3] Elements of surveillance and penalties are administered by public conscience upon offences by certain members against itself as a description of dominant discourse.

Agency, thus, in matters of social fact, is limited by the structural context in which we find ourselves[4]. Social facts

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2.   Payne, Micheal (ed). A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996

3.   According to Emile Durkheim, the constraint of social facts as social contract is produced through laws as well as moral authority on the individual. For example, economic relations in modern society partially determine the 'organic solidarity' of various groups and their interests in society while their common humanity is itself jeopardized by anomie. This refers to a modern society that is struggling with traditional and religious values to define its moral environment. See Scruton, Roger. A Dictionary of Political Thought, London: Macmillan Press, 1996.

4.   Faraganis, James. (ed). Reading in Social Theory, Mcgraw-Hill Higher Education Series, 2000.

themselves, if inconsistent with scriptural leaning in the study of religious communities are considered as deviations. This leads to a complex interaction among socio-political paradigms, religious legitimacy via ethical and cultural values and history, and also agency as the means of representing Islamic authenticity of truth in a primarily political context or in fact, as the politics of identity. Political theory as a comparative activity which problematises Western parochialism through transcultural encounters is the attempt to ask questions about the nature and value of politics in a variety of cultural and historical contexts. This concerns the contribution of methodology and significant knowledge outside the confines of the Western canon of political thought. In this sense, disparate cultures are not incommensurable with regards to the human condition although extensive Western cultural influence has perpetuated a problematic perspective of exclusivity and narrative[5].

With globalization being seen as the novel version of Western hegemony, the power of definition over modern epistemological tradition, makes it so that various attempts to delineate Islamic approaches to knowledge are 'at once enframed by and parasitic on the very Western paradigms they contest'[6]. This alludes to what Euben calls "cultural interpenetration" and is not dissimilar to transculture or cross-cultural encounters which will be explained later.[7]

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5.   Euben, Roxanne L. "Contingent Borders, Syncretic Perspectives: Globalization, Political Theory, and Is-lamizing Knowledge" in *International Studies Review 4 (1) 23-48,* 2002.

6.   Ibid.

7.   Dallmayr, Fred. Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross Cultural Encounter, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.

An example of Euben's view of cultural interpenetration is, for example projected by Bassam Tibi. Tibi chooses to view the contemporary Islamic resurgence as a 're-politicisation of the sacred' in the context of ideology with Islam propagated as *al-Din wal Dawla* (religion fused with state order), and *Nizam Islami* (Islamic system) with modern projections and selective use of the past as an 'Invention of Tradition'. This form has evolved from its encounter with the West as a cultural revitalization (which he describes as modernist and millenarian nativist) and anti-colonialist movement; to a period of Western educated elites, secular nationalism and institutionalization, and appropriation of religion as an element of cultural legitimacy without theological reformation, and the resulting suppression of Western ideologies as *al-Hulul al-Mustawradah* (imported solutions).[8]

At the same time, the politics of identity also serves to deconstruct the modern *ummah* as a plural socio-political entity which vouches for an Islamic civilization as an essentialism against the other but is internally rife with its own schisms as it seeks to reformulate a dynamic culture to facilitate socio-political and economic development, and vice versa. Tibi acknowledges the reservation that might be extended to the Eurocentric context of using Western socio-scientific terms to explain non-Western civilization, but rejects it under the guise of postmodern skepticism of objective knowledge.[9] The origin of the sociology of religion, was

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8.   Tibi, Bassam. Islam between Culture and Politics, New York: Palgrave, 2001.

9.   Ibid.

itself immersed in the Eurocentric context of modernity and carried an agenda against the representation of reality through religion:

> "All are true in their own fashion; all answer though in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence. Religious beliefs must be distorted representations of an empirical reality which is capable of correct analysis by an empirical science, this time sociology."[10]

Trans-cultural Space and Socio-political Paradigms

The crisis of Western knowledge and world view, as a crisis of the Western undertaking of defining the Self and essentialising the Other, as well as its impact on what I have called the transcultural space between the West and Islam .[11]

The notions of inter-cultural relations and transcultural space have been explored vigorously and indefinitely throughout literature on pluralism and multiculturalism.[12] Criticised for overlooking essentialist paradigms inherent within and outside of its own discourse, relativist multiculturalism becomes universalism applied to cultural politics where it has the unresolved dilemma of simultaneously being both a Western and an anti-Western idea at the expense of a communicative cultural pluralism.[13] At the same time, the approach of transculture itself assumes the fundamental insufficiency and incompleteness of any culture.

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10. Durkheim cited in Turner, Bryan S. Religion and Social Theory, London: Sage Publications., 1991.

11. Quated fromSalvatore, Armando. Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity, Reading: Ithaca Press, 1997.

12. Goldberg, D. Theo.(ed) Multiculturalism: a Critical Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

13. Tibi and Gress in Tibi, Bassam. Islam between Culture and Politics, New York: Palgrave, 2001.

As a term whose origins lies in sociology and anthropology, and later utilized in post-colonial and and postmodern theory with no consensus on its exact meaning, transculture has been described as the process of hybridization engendered with a culture by a fusion of foreign and indigenous cultural elements. This process has been called trasculturation which is essentially political where symbols, discourse, and ideology are transformed through such experiences in the proliferation of local meaning. The fact that a culture manages its preservation or what it assumes of its authenticity throughout the process is indicative of transculture as socio-political phenomena. Transculture explains historically specific and cultural manifestations of identity as dynamic, unstable and ongoing constructions in the problematic of difference and interference in relation to external political and cultural influences. Transculture has also been applied to social spaces where such inter-cultural experiences occur at the expense of a symmetrical relationship between two cultures in colonial and post-colonial contexts, as well as transnational networks, globalization and cosmopolitanism.[14]

Epstein is especially perturbed by the centrality of power in the discourse of cultural studies dominant is postmodernism as maintained by the likes of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. However, this pre-occupation with power and culture very much concerns the agenda of Epstein's transculture and culturology itself i.e. Foucault on truth, the misappropriation of power and forms of hegemony; and Bourdieu on power, knowledge and representation in the ethnography.

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14. Epstein, Mikhail and Berry, Ellen. Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

'It is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time'.[15]

'The theory of knowledge is a dimension of political theory because the specifically symbolic power impose the principles of the construction of reality is a major dimension of political power'.[16]

'Culturology addresses the practices and institutions of power no less critically than cultural studies does ... but is not a form of political dissidentism. It does not criticise one cultural politics on behalf of another, more advanced and progressive politics. Rather it criticises politics, as a type of discourse, as a relation of power, as a narrow pragmatism, from the standpoint of culture as a whole.'[17]

The resistance to the centrality of politics, or the usurpation of culture by its creative components (apart from politics, religion and technology etc.) is in part fuelled by the spectre of totalitarianism and the connection of culturology with the idealism of democratic and pluralistic mentalities – which paradoxically places transculture as being motivated by ideology. However, the

15.   Foucault in Bronner, Stephen E.(ed) Twentieth Century Political Theory: A Reader, London: Routledge, 1997.

16.   Bourdieu cited in Winkel, Eric A. "Paradigm and Postmodern Politics from an Islamic Perspective", in American Journal of Social Sciences 8 (2), 1991.

17.   Epstein, Mikhail and Berry, Ellen. Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication, New York: St. Martin's Press,1999.

criticism on the disagreements of Western postmodernism and the proposal for transcultural approach remains useful. This is because the dilemma of strategic essentialism in Western postmodernism is based on intertwining dynamics, and involves the activation of cultrurally defined socio-political paradigms as a condition of postmodernity. Transcultural experiences do not occur at the expense of essentialisms. Euben mentions that:

> 'Cultural interpenetration dates back centuries and the contemporary permeability and hybridity of domains marked as West and non-West does not suggest a smooth blend of world views but instead engenders cultural identities and meanings that are syncretic, indeterminate, and relational, and, as anthropologist James C. Clifford argues, is never given but negotiated.'[18]

The role of transcultural dynamics as a mediator to cultural politics can be significant in resolving muticulturalism's dilemma as being both a Western and anti-Western idea in favour of a communicative cultural pluralism. Deconstruction itself may be utilized and moderated within transculture. A realist version of transcultural dynamics loses none of its defining characteristics. After all, the collapse of Soviet Marxism and its elimination as a totalitarian context becomes an argument for culturology as a meta-system which transgresses all political contexts.[19] Where Epstein perceives politics as a creative component of culture, Clive S. Kessler

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18. Euben, Roxanne L. "Contingent Borders, Syncretic Perspectives: Globalization, Political Theory, and Islamizing Knowledge" in International Studies Review 4 (1) 23-48, 2002.

19. Epstein, Mikhail and Berry, Ellen. Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication, New York: St. Martin's Press,1999.

for example, identifies power and politics as culturally constructed, therefore arguing that Culture itself is inherently political.[20] This is a notion I am in favour of.

The synthesis of strategic essentialism, transcultural dynamics and a post-Western age for both Islam and the West, exemplifies a unique and incessant *kulturkampf* or war of cultures pertaining to knowledge and power. It suggests certain elements in postmodernism as a deliberate proxy of contemporary Islamic thought and agency at the expense of a reactionary 'political Islam'. However, praxis is denied through a parallel modernity critique with the mismatch of social agency and political (and religious) subjectivity, e.g. *jihad* and terrorism. Euben also writes on the Islamisation of knowledge and its deployment of deconstruction not as suspicious of claims to authenticity but to revive the authority of Islamic knowledge against the dominant paradigm of Western epistemology.[21]

Interpretations of Islam

Being netiher a qualitative nor quantitative research method, discourse analysis is a mode of inquiring into the basic assumptions of these kinds of research by facilitating access to their ontological and epistemological hypotheses to 'deconstruct' hidden socio-political motivations. Rooted in critical thingking and philosophy,

20. Kahn, Joel S. and Francis Loh Kok Wah (eds). Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Malaysia, ASAA Southeast Asian Publication Series, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992.

21. Euben, Roxanne L. "Contingent Borders, Syncretic Perspectives: Globalization, Political Theory, and Islamizing Knowledge" in International Studies Review 4 (1) 23-48, 2002.

the deconstructive reading and interpretation of a problem or text as reality inscribed and conditioned within a given discourse, disables the provision of absolute solutions in favour of a categorical exposition of their motivations. In this context, interpretations are as subjective as they are conditioned by their environment and the dominant discourse of the time as a "crisis of representation", [22] where competing narratives figure prominently as symptoms of 'will to knowledge' or 'will to power'[23] in the debate over pure and political knowledge.[24]

The construction and articulation of an argument in socio-political inquiries depends upon the knowledge of how the same facts might be used to construct and articulate a different argument which requires both sides to familiarize themselves with each other's terminologies and procedures as the actual basis of cross-cultural encounters. The interdisciplinary concern of interpretation in the study of Islam, in both humanities and social sciences departments, as a socio-political discourse of distinct intellectual traditions, reflect upon the 'disciplinary and methodological diversity which characterizes the field of Islamic studies'. The partiality of knowledge and interpretations, 'where the right to interpret as well as the interpretations themselves are disputed', form an ongoing didactic dialectics or varying essentialist positions.[25]

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22. Marcus, George E. and Fischer, M.J. Michael, Anthropology as Cultural Critique: an Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

23. Dallmayr, Fred. Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross Cultural Encounter, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.

24. Said, Edward W. Orientalism, New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

25. Donnan, Hastings and Stokes, Martin (eds). Interpreting Islam, London: Sage Publications, 2002.

As a dispute over pure knowledge, an Islamic approach to social and cultural phenomena on the basis of Islamic principles and analytical methods from Islamic texts and traditions, bears an overt ideological grounding for a 'value based study of values'.[26] Islamic social sciences pose a problematic question to the social scientific study of Islam it criticises for bearing an implicit ideological agenda. Tapper perceives the attempt to Islamise knowledge as an Islamist critique of Western knowledge and social sciences, specifically anthropology (as a study of a "primitives") in its commitment to positivism, objectivity and scientific detachment. The ethnocentric Western modernization approach or an economic stressed Marxian developmental model as sociologies, are criticised by scholars such as Akbar Ahmed, Illyas Ba Yunos, Farid Ahmad and Merryl Wyn Davies, but they are themselves selective and misrepresent in their delineation and exaggeration of the cultural gap between a secular Christian West and a Muslim East.[27] Tapper also identifies the historical roots and pendulum between transculture and essentialism of both European and Middle Eastern cultures, with conflicts occurring in the contexts of political contest and dominance, and that unlike unrelated traditions, Islam cannot perform a radical critique of the West without criticising itself and vice versa.

In defining Islamic social sciences or an appropriation of social science for Islam, a value laden projection of Islamic socio-political structure has to be constructed as a comparative and critical

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26.   Tapper, Richard. "Islamic anthropology and the anthropology of Islam" in *Anthropological Quarterly 68 (3)* pp.185-193, 1995.

27.   Ibid

vocation with the introduction of alternative categories and concepts. These categories and concepts, are strategic to offset the "primitive" category of Western anthropology and its modernization agenda, in recognizing diversity in the study of community and evading the intellectual premises of Western knowledge as a precursor to an Islamic science of society with a distinct discourse of knowledge.[28] Tapper also finds fault with the appropriating of English social sciences analytical categories into Arabic Islamic terminology as a strategy of assessment with the ideal type. For example, he cites *tawhid* (unity), *ummah* (community), *Din* (religion as way of life), *shariah* (Islamic law) and *minhaj* (ways of life) as translatable to the generic categories of ideals and eternal values, community, culture, norms and customs. But this terminology becomes value oriented as Islamic ethnocentrism 'disguised as universalist relativism', where an Islamic social sciences implies the possibilities that Western approaches have to be rejected, or the basis of the finest and developed Western concepts and ideals are found in Islamic sources, or that Western social sciences can only be appropriated under the regulation of Islamic ideals.[29]

In this context, Tapper questions the utility of an Islamic anthropology in studying all societies other than its own as an authochthonous perception, while stressing that the anthropological study of religion is not theology[30] although it may be suitable to

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28. Tapper, Richard. "Islamic anthropology and the anthropology of Islam" in *Anthropological Quarterly 68 (3)* pp.185-193, 1995.

29. Ibid

30. Ibid

utilize it as a critical anthropology and social science. Ba Yunos remarks that the value of Islamic social sciences' model as an insider study of Islamic societies, concerns the degree of departure from the ideal type as critical discourse.[31] But as far as "insider-outsider" collaboration is concerned,[32] as an example, mention Bedford's (1994) review article of Fisher and Abedi's 'Debating Muslim: Cultural Dialogue in Postmodernity and Tradition' (1990: Preface), as an effort (in critical anthropology) to utilize their different positions as a transcultural experiment that inadvertently reproduces the structures of power they had strive to overcome in the process, as incommensurable where the "primitive" subject are Muslims.[33]

For example, according to Stringer, ritual activity is when participant observation is forfeited as the ethnographer rationalizes the subject's behaviour with an outsider narrative at the expense of psychological and theological access even when the interest is not in a particular religion per se. Stringer also identifies the importance of discourse as to how concepts are used by different authors in relation to it and not the word itself. While Stringer's specific interest in this case lies in the act of worship, it can be expanded to the function of Islam as a textual or discourse (spoken) context and the role of social scientists themselves in generating text from discourse. Discourse itself is self-limiting and regulated (this again brings up the issue of political and

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31. Donnan, Hastings and Stokes, Martin (eds). Interpreting Islam, London: Sage Publications, 2002.

32. Ibid

33. The centrality of values in Islamic social sciences highlights the problem of narrative and representation where it is difficult to detach the development of knowledge in both Islamic and Western history from socio-political and historical relations.

pure knowledge) political propositions of specific use in different socio-political setups in addition to specific *habitas* of Muslim communities[34] In my discernment of Stringer's understanding of Islam as a trans-national religion in origin, the idea of a general Islamic discourse and its interaction with local forms outline the basic interest of the proponents of Islamic social sciences as a developmental and prescriptive model for polity.

If Tapper's final remarks on the anthropology of Islam are extended to social sciences, the unresolved question as to whether it is the study of Muslim societies or Islam as a religion, alludes to Donnan and Stoke's earlier mentioned emphasis upon inter-disciplinarity (in social sciences as well as humanities) in the diverse field of Islamic studies.

As a protracted discourse, the critique of traditional Orientalism and social sciences is perennially brought up as a problematic disjuncture of text and fact in the field of Islamic studies. And that Islam as a meta-narrative with its own social sciences model, constitutes a "decentred" West with its form of thought, investigation and solutions are part of a plurality of modes with the exception of an incommensurable 'will to power' and the 'will to knowledge', and also for the fact that in Muslim cultures and society, Islam (and in this case Islamisation) is also a political discourse[35]

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34. Stringer, Martin. "Discourse and the Ethnographic Study of Sufi Worship: Some Practical Suggestions", in *Transnational Sufism* [On-line access 6 May 2003]
http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/mdraper/transnatsufi/research_papers.htm

35. Nielsen, Jorgen S. "Orientalism and Anti-Orientalism: Is there a Middle Way?" in *Transnational Sufism* [On-line access 6 May 2003]
http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/mdraper/transnatsufi/research_papers.htm.

In social sciences, Ragab explores the issue of theory building in modern science where empirical observations are generally considered as science's building blocks even though they are made, interpreted and given meaning within a certain frame of reference.[36] In this context the link between theory and science is tentative because empirical observations are varied and they can support a variety of incompatible theoretical positions. Theories are based on certain assumptions which can be challenged for alternative assumptions as a basis for different hypotheses for the development of knowledge. Citing Rafe Champion's work on the influence of Karl Popper in psychology, Ragab appropriates Popper's theory of conjectural objective knowledge which takes into account various sources of knowledge, which includes tradition and imagination leading to the incorporation of revelation into empirical or theoretical trials of an Islamic epistemology, as neither pseudo-scientific or pseudo-religious approach to knowledge; or a restrictive distinction between religious sciences and social sciences as vocation[37]. It must be maintained here that the discourse over religion, modernity and the socio scientific tradition as to be expected is not exclusive to Islam. It also, for example, involves Christian theology and postmodern philosophy with the likes of John Milbank,[38] who perceives social sciences and modernity as a heresy based on

36.   Ragab, Ibrahim A. "Islamic Perspectives on Theory Building the Social Sciences" in Abul-Fadl, Mona M. (ed) *Association of Muslim Social Scientists: Proceedings Twenty First Annual Conference,* Herndon: IIIT and AMSS, 1993.

37.   Ibid

38.   Milbank, John. Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

nihilist and anti-Christian assumptions and seeks to re-appropriate religious tradition and practice. In this case, religious and rational (ideological) discourses are not dissociated but are necessarily distinguished as contending narratives in society. Propagating Islamic social sciences or perhaps, a Christian science of society is not merely an oxymoron, but constitutes an acknowledgement to modernity and social sciences as setting the terms of discourse.

The *Differend*

It would appear that transcultural dynamics facilitate the contingent overlapping of a plurality of socio-political paradigms, with authenticity as a political condition through the differend of critical discourse. The problem of arbitrating differends or phrases in dispute is due to the pluralising concept of language and truth systems where there is a lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments.[39]

The language of politics is not a neutral medium that conveys ideas independently formed. It is an institutionalised structure of meanings that channel political thought and action in certain directions. Those who simply use established concepts to get to the facts of political life, those who act unreflectively within the confines of established concepts, actually have the perceptions and modes of conduct available to them limited in subtle and undetected ways. Such conceptual blinders impede the work of any student of politics, but they are particularly corrosive of efforts

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39.   Lyotard, J. F. The Differend: Phrases in Dispute, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

to explore radical perspectives on politics. For to adopt without revision the concepts prevailing in a polity is to accept terms of discourse loaded in favour of established practices.[40]

This relates to the concept of neutrality that Connoly is dealing with and how academic neutralists do not transcend the politics of discourse. They instead perform a reification of the terms of political discourse by establishing or revising shifts in the criteria of essentially contested concepts and its network, that determines how perspectives are successfully communicated and culturally institutionalised as an ethical-political element in a hegemony, or in this case, a transcultural intellectual hegemony. In the social sciences, the issue of syncretism this phenomenon entails upon the global, national, civil society, ethno-cultural, religious, cult and individual identities, has ironically reinforced its multiplicity as a pluralist politics of interest management and reconciliation. While this implies that both the polity and individual are constructed and contested subjects in rational space, it is the hegemonic representation of these subjects which concern alternative paradigms in the political space.

Academic Discourse as Political Representation

Mohammed Arkoun[41] puts forth the theory of history as an ideology of legitimation. There is an emphasis on the representation of duality through, for example, the terms Islam, Islamic, Muslim,

40.   Connolly, William. The Terms of Political Discourse, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.

41.   Arkoun, M. Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers, Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1994.

the Orient, Fundamentalism, Orient and the West, Western, Modern, Democracy and Human rights, despite being projected on diverse cultures and societies and their institutions, different historical periods and varying intellectual discourses. Arkoun frames his arguments concerning the cognitive status and ideological functions of history with the prominence of mythology and ideology over critical historical knowledge in the context of modernity. On the relationship between religion and history, religion decisively affects the use of history for ideological purposes as the political theology of a mutual dependency between state and religion in forging legitimacy.

In the context of the modern West, this legitimacy is replaced by philosophy-politics based on secular legitimacy and its institutions in state and nation building and the modernising process (therefore ideological). What transpires is a transference of the hegemony of historiography from theology-politics to the legislative powers of state entities and academic discourse through cultural and educational institutions in the modern context. When expanded as transcultural-intellectual hegemony, this occurs at the expense of alternative narratives and historiographies.

Where modernising states do not gain independence from the prominence of theology-politics with religion still the defining factor of identity, official religion and the state both define the parameters of history. In the case of Islam, the ideological construction of a modern national identity among newly independent states means that religion becomes officially institutionalised as a supporting feature of hegemony. Nationalist Islamic leaders, a

synthetic construction of theology-politics and ideological self-determination, operate within the context of Western imperialism and their cultural-intellectual hegemony in effectively designing the discourse of a religiously sustained nationalist history. The constructed nationalist hegemonic discourse utilises religion to alleviate the impact of critical social sciences or to appropriate its disciplines for system reinforcement. While nationalist history as an ideology of legitimation presently face counter-hegemonic opposition in the form of theology-politics by representatives of an Islamic model, the context of political communication stays within the parameters of an adaptable hegemony and a conditioning nationalist history.

This co-existence emphasises the gap between manipulated history and critical history by which the government, civil society and the opposition implicitly control, support or criticise and contest historical experience from the need to legitimise and perpetuate a constructed and agreeable identity. The involvement of social sciences and history in hegemony undermines their own responsibility as a discipline that ensures constructive criticism of the predominance or inter-reliant ideology and religion in polity. Political representation through academic discourse interacts with varying discourses produced by other institutions, which reinforce and expand or adapt the transmission and maintenance of a hegemonic order and its historiography, be it as individual states and societies, or as satellites to a global hegemonic order.

The application of theories of hegemony, the differend and essentially contested concepts on critical social sciences and history

demonstrate the various ideological and religious interpretations and orientations in societies where both the state and religion are crucial elements of identity. Muslim states that negotiate and control their religious legitimacy through official institutions, censure internal religious opposition as extremists and treacherous elements which cause instability to the working political consensus of a moderate national religious identity. This occurrence mutually reinforces the active and partial representation of Islam as an international and domestic threat in the West at the expense of an exhaustive representation that includes radical, moderate and liberal interpretations on contemporary issues of democracy and other forms of government, religious plurality, rights and self-determination.

Too often academia, government and the media have focused on crises and headline events and then a violent radical fringe and, failing to see the forest for the trees, not studied sufficiently both moderate political and non-political movements and organisations. This trend (and deficiency) has been reinforced by the realities of the market place. Publishing houses, journals, consultancy firms, and the media all too often pander to that which captures the headlines and confirms fears of extremism and terrorism and reinforce stereotypes.[42]

The constrained modern secular concept of religion and its reification in social sciences, makes it a problematic and reductive research and analytical tool in distinguishing an agreeable function

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42. Esposito, J. "Clash of civilisations? Contemporary Images of Islam in the West" in Munoz, G.M. (ed) *Islam, Modernism and the West,* New York: I.B Tauris, 1999.

of religious tradition as integral in Muslim socio-political aspirations from its own reflective perception of secular fundamentalism, and an ingrained and hegemonic historiography. It was mentioned earlier that complex cultural syncretism between Western ideas and reinterpreted Islamic tradition where the dominant Western epistemological model has set the terms of discourse for Islamic thinkers, even for those who seek to reject or redefine them as modernist, Islamist and Islamisation of knowledge approaches. The debate about the democratic potential of Islam and the relevance of its authenticity occurs within the context of this hegemonic historiography and varied interpretive responses to specific social, cultural and political concerns and circumstances.

Conclusion

Multiple readings about the position of Islam as a floating signifier, where theory and practice are not kept apart in the reductive context of social sciences, can also be critically utilised to deconstruct the appropriation of theology in hegemony. Likewise a critical theology, where the intellectual element of religion can be used to deconstruct demeaning elements of socio-scientific approach to religion in historiography, are both means for academic discourse involving both organic and traditional intellectual elements to question interpretations and applications of authority and legitimacy involving religion.[43] Gudrun Kramer[44] points to

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43. Miles, Jack. "Of Theology and Diplomacy" in Hashmi, S.H. (ed) *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism and Conflict,* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002.

44. Kramer, G. "Techniques and values: Contemporary Muslim debates on Islam and democracy" in Munoz, G.M. (ed) *Islam, Modernism and the West,* New York: I.B Tauris, 1999.

issues that are evident with the inclusion of techniques and values in contemporary Islamic discourse involving culture, development and modern technology, and its contextual relevance to the techniques and values discussed in liberal and pluralist democracy. In relation to their own contending versions of authenticity, modernity and its requirements as compared to that of the West's own discourse, their readings of the Islamic discourse of politics, as one that gives primacy to morality, legitimise, adopt and reify established modern concepts by incorporating the techniques and values of modern democratic polity as its own base of apologetic discourse.

Unfortunately, the equation of Islamists with 'political Islam' through particular socio-scientific analyses, is communicated as the primary discourse and representation at the expense of the actual and miscellaneous modern Islamic discourse of self-definition and Islamic politics in the media. This discourse encompasses both civil society and government upon which the premises and context are modern and Western by proxy, yet distinct values applied ensure that its conception and application involves distinct but complementary function of religious and political institutions. Kelsay calls it the 'complementarity thesis' as exemplified by what he calls the 'historical-critical understanding of this "founding" narrative through the Prophet Muhammad[45], the *ulama'* and their associated institutions of the *masjid*, the *madrasa* (school) and *jāmi'a* (university) as the classical analogy to civil society, and the Caliphate (Islamic polity) primarily as the archetypal state and government.

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45. Kelsay, J. "Civil Society and Government in Islam" in Hashmi, S.H. (ed). *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism and Conflict,* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002.

This ensures the established status of Islam as an essentialist position with regards to religious and socio-political identity.

At the same time, the tentative boundaries between the two and possible encroachments, are indicative of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic designs. In general, civil society and their institutions, apart from directly ensuring the application of Islamic values in the polity of an Islamic order, also mediate and extend citizen socio-political expressions. Various degrees and forms of association conserve and address issues concerning the balance of power between the government and citizenry, or even those that are critical of traditional intellectuals and their function in the modern political context. Apart from its values (which affect conceptualisations and definitions of floating signifiers, for example, citizen), the modern technical function is similar to that of the conventional understanding of civil society in constitutional democracy along the technical lines of Hegel and Locke, but not in the Hobbesian value sense which bear contemporary Western notions of equal citizenship, freedom, democracy, constitution, private property, liberal economics and capitalism.[46]

Transcultural exchanges and sedimentation of Western socio-political thought and culture in Muslim societies have contributed to its appropriation and strategic essentialism by contemporary Islamic discourse as a form of praxis. This paper supports as a possible option, the development of a weak ontology

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46.   Ibid

based Islamic social sciences as the study of praxis in relation to the Islamisation of Knowledge and Islamic social sciences itself as a representation of authenticity. More importantly, this option is advocated in relation to the possibility of Islamic institutions, and the production of Islamic discourse itself, as being a feature of the articulation of political legitimacy in the context of Islam as socio-political fact.

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