

Critical Perspectives on Literature and Culture in the New World Order

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and Culture in the New World Order

Edited by

Noritah Omar, Washima Che Dan,
Jason Sanjeev Ganesan and Rosli Talif

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Critical Perspectives on Literature and Culture in the New World Order,
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PREFACE

The articles in *Critical Perspectives on Literature and Culture in the New World Order* were originally presented at the 4th Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures and Cultures (MICOLLAC 2005) that was held from 23 to 25 April 2005, at the Holiday Villa Subang Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The articles in this volume explore both new and tested theoretical perspectives on literature and culture at large, presenting a multiplicity of discourses made all the more necessary in reaction to an increasingly globalised world, and the monolithic social, political and economic values that it stands for. The publication of this volume would not have been possible without the assistance of various parties. First, we would like to thank Amanda Millar and her colleagues of Cambridge Scholars Publishing (CSP), who approached us with the possibility of publishing this volume even before the close of the conference, and especially Carol Koulikourdi who has patiently corresponded with us in seeing the book through to its completion. We would also like to thank Professor Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud for contributing his article, which was not originally presented at MICOLLAC 2005, but which we felt was well-suited to this collection. Of course, our utmost gratitude goes out to the contributors whose articles are presented in this volume, for their passionate and inspired engagement with a variety of contemporary literary and cultural issues.

INTRODUCTION

This volume explores ongoing debates on the critical state of an increasingly globalised world. Our use of the term “New World Order” refers to a state of the world that is now globalised. Within literary and cultural studies, the opening of world borders has led to the creation of the purported global village, which creates continuous discourses as we try to make sense of the phenomenon. Globalisation has become the buzzword of the times, and tends to be defined indefinitely and simply as a sharing of borders which can indicate both positive and negative effects. Positive in the sense that oftentimes countries with limited economic capability read the effort taken by richer nations as signs of good will in a world of opened borders. Paradoxically, the need for constant assessment of the state of the world reflects the crisis that we face, and also our implicit discontent in conforming to trends of living in a globalised world order—a construct ostensibly called the New World Order. Such discontent can be seen manifested as pessimism in literary and cultural studies, and contestations against the hierarchical relation amongst countries in the world which inflict the social, cultural and political climates of weaker nations. The political and economic hegemony of stronger nations leads to the condition whereby nations run the risk of being dominated by others, or at the very least, the creation of ambivalence in their own national identity and sovereignty.

This volume hopes to bring together critical views in relation to the construction of cultural studies in the Western framework, the application of literary theory in the readings of vernacular literature, contestation of mainstream methodology which promotes scientific evaluation of culture and research in the humanities, the role of English literature in Asian cultures, literary ethics in relation to Islamic literature, Islamic and Western concepts such as democracy, postcolonial experience and also the application of postcolonial theory in reading literature. The volume consists of 15 chapters, which are split into two parts. As its title suggests, the first part of the volume, Positioning New and Other Perspectives, will feature articles that call into question the hitherto accepted norms of viewing and critically evaluating the issues stated above. Part One will begin with Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud’s call for the reintroduction of the Islamisation of present-day knowledge project (IPDK), not only as a

means of retaining Islamic identity in the face of monolithic globalised culture, but also as a viable alternative to existing postcolonial discourses on knowledge, drawing on the conception of *adab* previously championed by the noted thinker Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.

Another important proposition is made by Phil Francis Carspecken in Chapter Two who traces the nature of social research and argues for the role of a more critical qualitative methodology as opposed to quantitative research which is a legacy of “scientism.” Drawing from principles in critical philosophy, Carspecken highlights the distortions produced by scientism and posits that the New World Order (which translates as the process of globalisation and all its ills) needs a more humanistic approach to the social sciences and humanities, that which is provided by contemporary critical methodology. In Chapter Three, M. A. R. Habib juxtaposes Islam and democracy within the context of the New World Order, and considers whether the two can reconcile, and whether Islam provides and demands an alternative approach to democracy.

Chapter Four appraises the state of 21st century Muslim identity within the context of modern day Egypt. Sami Omar addresses the often neglected issue of the globalisation of values as a “new economic order” emerges. He concludes that Islamisation (as a form of modernisation in Muslim contexts) in Egypt is seen as an alternative resolution to the paradoxes between tradition and modernity, providing a reconciliation of the two. In Chapter Five, Anzaruddin Ahmad foregrounds the growing use of hermeneutics (textual criticism) by Muslim scholars in the study of the Qur’an. He traces the nature of the practice of hermeneutics from its linguistic origin to its current use within theology and philosophy, and criticises its suitability when applied to the Qur’an.

In Chapter Six, Noritah Omar considers the potential conflict between Islam and modernity based on the classification of Che Husna Azhari’s *The Rambutan Orchard* as a “Muslim narrative,” wherein due to the utilisation of realist techniques as well as the English language as the narrative medium—thereby perpetuating a colonialist viewpoint, which leads to an exoticisation of Islam. The theoretical and teaching history of communications studies (in the Malaysian context) is addressed in Chapter Seven by Ahmad Murad Merican, who argues that the present curriculum retains vestiges of obsolete Western ideas; and in doing so, he argues that communications studies unwittingly propagates the simplistic idea that foreign, imperial knowledge is objective knowledge, and calls for a reconfiguration of communications syllabi in the country.

The articles in Part Two of the volume, Applying and Evaluating Existing Approaches, concern the application of current critical perspectives

onto Asian and Western literary texts, from the Malaysian novel *Salina* to the works of William Shakespeare. Washima Che Dan, in Chapter Eight, compares the construction of sex and sexuality by two Malaysian Malay Muslim writers, Dina Zaman and Karim Raslan. Both authors' choice of subject matter, specifically the emphasis on realism and naturalism used to convey that subject matter, as well as their use of the English language, is examined in light of their Malay-Muslim cultural background, leading to an evaluation of perceived cultural and linguistic imperialism in Malaysian literature.

In Chapter Nine, Carmencita Del Rosario Abayan gives a semio-stylistic reading of Cebuano short fiction leading to insights into its hybrid nature brought about by the influence of the Western short story on the local literary culture. Abayan believes that her findings provide a valuable source in understanding the impact of Western Colonial Educational Policy on the Cebuanos (an ethnic group), who form a significant segment of the Philippine population.

In Chapter Ten, Mohd Zariat Abdul Rani uses the locally-generated literary notion of *Persuratan Baru* (Genuine Literature) to explore the controversy surrounding one of Malaysia's most well-known novels, *Salina*, by A. Samad Said. Mohd Zariat contends that the initial hesitancy of the national language and literary agency, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, to withhold the publication of the novel in the late 1950s because of its dubious morality was justified, given that the author employs narrative techniques to legitimise the transgressions of his title character. Abdul Rahman Yusof offers a differing viewpoint on the novel in the following chapter, contending that the novel has received more than its fair share of controversy, which has led to its continued marginalisation in the Malaysian school curriculum, despite the fact that it was a landmark literary achievement.

Shanthini Pillai in Chapter Twelve posits that K. S. Maniam, a prominent Malaysian Indian writer writing in English, has liberated the subaltern Indian ethnic group of Malaysia by bringing it from its marginal position to the centre in his works. Thus, Maniam's works are seen as providing space for resistance to and revisioning of colonial dominance and control which has been illustrated by (colonial) narratives by planters. In Chapter Thirteen, Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya explores female relationships in Sarah Daniels' play, *The Devil's Gateway*. Using psychoanalytic feminism as her theoretical framework, Wan Roselezam highlights Daniels' radical approach in representing patriarchal power, leading to an unbalanced portrayal of male and female characters, and

emphasising the female characters' desire for self-sufficiency and recognition.

The volume ends with a postcolonial reading of Shakespeare's plays by Iffat Sharmin, which calls for an assessment of how "others," particularly "Orientals" are represented in Shakespeare's works. Sharmin argues that the cultural stereotypes found in Shakespeare's plays help give insight into the dominant view towards others in 16th century England.

It is perhaps worth noting here that more than half of the articles in this collection, based on selected papers presented at MICOLLAC 2005 (with the exception of Professor Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud's article), have centred on Islam as a guiding principle, or as a context through which critical perspectives are made on literature and culture, and more generally on today's globalised world order. This inadvertent foregrounding of Islam in our selection reflects a continuing dialogue on and with Islam and its significant impact on Western-style scholarship through which most academic discourses are made today.

—The Editors
May 2010

PART I:
POSITIONING NEW AND 'OTHER'
PERSPECTIVES

CHAPTER ONE

DEWESTERNISATION AND ISLAMISATION: THEIR EPISTEMIC FRAMEWORK AND FINAL PURPOSE

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Introduction

The qualitative success of the development of a nation's human capital rests on the strength of its knowledge framework, which forms the foundation of the nation's ethical-moral and cultural character. Since the 15th century, there has been only one dominant knowledge framework, which has been transported on bridges between the world's civilisations, projecting the worldview of a singular culture and civilisation. These cultural bridges are unipolar: extending outwards from the Western European and North American Caucasian to regions where great civilisations had previously flourished. The cultural bridges transport and transform ideas from the centre dealing with man and his destiny—his development, progress, and happiness; and the means of their attainment, such as knowledge, education, and governance—that are now globally infused into the consciousness and institutions of most educated peoples, and that reflect the worldview, experiences, and dreams of Western culture and civilisation.

This article argues that the Islamisation of the present-day knowledge project (IPDK) is a natural attempt by Muslim thinkers and their communities not only to retain their identity in the age of globalisation, but also to offer a more comprehensive alternative to the decolonisation discourse on knowledge and human development. Hence, it offers an elucidation of the epistemic framework of Islam and its concept of human capital development, particularly in relation to the purpose of higher education. However, we need to first offer a general background of why

Islamic conceptions, just like all other non-Western epistemic frameworks, have been sidelined, even within their own mainstream national human development and educational debates and planning.

From Imperialism to Neo-Colonisation

Globalisation, which started in Europe, began with the voyages of “discovery” in the late 15th century; and was followed by imperialism, which was characterised by conquest and direct political control from the European metropolis. From the 17th century onwards, this imperialism was succeeded by colonisation, with the establishment of immigrant communities in colonised territories, mimicking the metropolis, and supported by slavery and indentured labour, which resulted in colonialism—a condition that refers to the systematic subjection of colonised people.¹ These interrelated developments, which were made possible by a Eurocentric worldview that projected a certain epistemic perspective, had perpetrated great sufferings and political, economic as well as socio-cultural losses on the indigenous populations.

Western domination became intensified with the participation of the United States from the middle of the 20th century in the form of neo-colonialism—especially through the concepts of modernisation and development, and later, through the concepts of democracy and human rights.² Throughout these centuries, globalisation has, in truth, become fundamentally linked to the spreading out and inculcation of a particular view of truth and reality of the world, or in the words of sociologists, the “universalisation of a set of assumptions and narratives,” through informal and formal channels of education and communication, to all parts of the globe. Globalisation, especially when linked to a knowledge framework, has now transcended its socio-geographic, cultural, and economic processes to become “an excuse and a justification for the continuation of some very destructive forms of exploitation.”³ Neo-colonialism—via its hegemony of the project of modernity—deepens the myth of the superior

¹ Peter Cox, “Globalisation of What? Power, Knowledge and Neo-Colonialism,” paper presented at Implications for Globalisation: Present Imperfect, Future Tense, Chester, United Kingdom, 17-19 December 2003, 5.

² Ramon Grosfuguel, “Decolonising Political-economy and Postcolonial Studies: Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” in *Unsettling Postcoloniality: Coloniality, Transmodernity and Border Thinking*, eds. Ramon Grosfuguel, José David Saldívar and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Durham, Duke University Press, 2007), 7-8.

³ Cox, “Globalisation of What?” 3.

West in all dimensions of economic, cultural, scientific, and social-political arrangement.⁴ The hegemonic hold reaches even the religious interpretations of the non-Western societies, whereby the nature or limits of religious tolerance, moderation, pluralism, human rights, etc., are all determined from the Western perspective.

Due to its global technological, scientific, militaristic, and economic dominance for the last two centuries, it is understandable, though not necessarily desirable, for the West to regard the rest of the world as lagging behind it in all the major criteria of human progress and development that it has itself selected, and where all others must undergo a similar sequence of spiritual, social, and political developments as that of the West in order to catch up with, and to be a part of the developed community of mankind.⁵ The linear and evolutionary conception of history and human progress from the Western centre would tolerate no dissenting and contesting notions from others, without these notions being either (i) dismissed as reactionary, anti-modern, anachronistic, traditional, unreasonable, radical, anti-human; or (ii) packaged into idioms and categories that are acceptable to the dominant views and interests of the centre. Non-Western forms and perspectives of knowledge are regarded as local and particular, and hence devoid of universality.⁶ Thus, humanity will face no future except that which is conceived within the worldview and knowledge framework of the Northern liberal democracy.⁷ In fact, the Protagorean call which underlines the secular humanistic framework since the Hellenic age—“Man is the measure of all things”⁸ has now been specifically and effectively modified: “*Western* Man is the measure of all things, things that are that they are; things that are not, that they are not...”

Hence the languages, societies, cultures, economies, and technologies of China and the Far East, the Indian subcontinent, the Malay world and the Pacific, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa have been significantly changed, in some cases irretrievably. To be modern and to be accepted as a Western equal is essentially to be Westernised, a dubious requirement which many non-Western and Muslim nations have apparently accepted. Hence, Alexander Solzhenitsyn is perhaps correct

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, 1978), 25.

⁶ Vinay Lal, *Empire of Knowledge: Culture and Plurality in the Global Economy* (New Delhi, Vistaar, 2005).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ James L. Jarrett, *Educational Philosophy of the Sophists* (New York, Teachers College, 1965).

when he observed, in his Convocation Address at Harvard University in 1978, that even if Japan still retains some of its Eastern features, it is nevertheless becoming less and less the Far East, but rather the Far West.⁹

Since the 1950s, scholars such as Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Jalal Ale Ahmad, in *The Occidentosis: Plague from the West* (1952), Aime Cesaire, in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955), Albert Memmi, in *The Coloniser and the Colonised* (1957), to cite just four, have documented how the rise of Western perspectives have simultaneously impoverished others, and thereby doing a disservice to overall human progress and development in various parts of the world. The worst aspect of these effects is what the late Syed Hussein Alatas has aptly described as the “captive mind.”¹⁰ Since the 1970s there have been many serious discussions to dewesternise, and in the former colonies of the West–Latin America, India, Africa and the Muslim world as a whole, to decolonise, a process which is still in its infancy.

Since the 1970s, the Indigenous Knowledge movement, especially in North America, attempted to create an alternative system of knowing and educating to that of the European ones received international recognition and validation. In the 1990s, this movement generated a decolonising discourse and rethinking of education for indigenous peoples. Conceptually, Indigenous Knowledge underlines the theoretical and methodological orientations of the Eurocentric framework, and re-conceptualises the resilience and self-reliance of indigenous peoples, giving due importance to their own religious, philosophical, and educational orientations. Thus it fills “the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship” on the one hand, and creates a “new, balanced centre and a fresh vantage point from which to analyse Eurocentric education and its pedagogies” on the other.¹¹ Among the First Nations people in Canada at least, this has played a significant

⁹ Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, *A World Split Apart* (London, Harper and Row, 1978).

¹⁰ Syed Hussein Alatas, “The Captive Mind and Creative Development,” *International Social Science Journal* 36.4 (1974): 691-700. His other works, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977), and *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (1977) are equally relevant.

¹¹ Marie Battiste, “Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations,” *World Indigenous Higher Education Consortium Journal*, <http://www.win-hec.org/?q=node/34>, 2-3; see also Evangelia Papoutsaki, “De-Westernising Research Methodologies: Alternative Approaches to Research for Higher Education Curricula in Developing Countries (paper presented at Global Colloquium of the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge, Paris, France, 29 November-1 December 2006).

role in shared capacities that can alleviate poverty and create sustainable development.¹²

Many scholars in the 1990s such as the Subaltern Study Group (SSG) on Latin America developed intellectual critiques of the Western-centric view of knowledge and all that goes with it, but their framework is still essentially taken from, and influenced by poststructuralist and postmodern analysis which are intellectual products of the West, while another influential group, influenced by the works of Ranujit Guha, tries to critique the Western knowledge perspective from a non-Western and largely Indian perspective, by providing a postcolonial critique. By postmodern critique the SSG means a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism, and by postcolonial critique they mean a critique of Eurocentrism from subalternised and silenced knowledge frameworks. However, there are still voices such as that of Ramon Grosfuguel who call for “the need to decolonise not only the subaltern studies but also postcolonial studies.”¹³ Others, such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres, call for a radical diversity and a decolonial geopolitics of knowledge, while some, such as Vinay Lal, propose a Gandhian perspective in dealing with intellectual dissent against the West.¹⁴ African scholars and philosophers have been actively engaging these subjects for some time, as can be seen from the works of, for example, Okot p’Bitek, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Nwaizu Chinwendu and Kwasi Wiredu. For example, since 1980 Wiredu has been advocating a program he calls a “conceptual decolonisation of African philosophy” which involves “domestication of disciplines.”¹⁵ It has been correctly argued that it is important for the citizens of the liberal democracies of the North to understand the alternative and even dissenting voices from the others, which will not only slow down the wheels of neo-colonialism, but more importantly, will make the Western man understand “how the myth of our superiority has damaged us...so that as we seek to make a better world we may start addressing our own profligacy, question our own

¹² Marie Battiste, “Indigenous Knowledge,” 3; see also Cathryn McConaghy, *Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing* (Flaxton, Post Pressed, 2000).

¹³ Grosfuguel, “Decolonising Political-economy and Postcolonial Studies,” 3.

¹⁴ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “The Topology of Being and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: Modernity, Empire, Coloniality,” *CITY* 8.1 (2004): 29-56; Lal, *Empire of Knowledge*.

¹⁵ Kwasi Wiredu, “Toward Decolonising African Philosophy and Religion,” *African Studies Quarterly, The Online Journal for African Studies* 1.4 (1998), <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/3.htm>.

institutions and lifestyles, before deciding on the proper course of action for others.”¹⁶

It is understandable that many critiques of the Western epistemic structure arise due to its historical linkage with European colonialism since the 16th century, its suppressions of dissenting positions even within their own midst viz. Jews, Gypsies, and Muslims in Europe and the present global neo-colonialism. But it is possible that such critiques may fall into a trend of forgetfulness of a certain degree of universality in the European epistemic structure, that is neither possible nor desirable to entirely reject. On the other hand, it must be said that so far, efforts at dewesternising and decolonising the captive mind have been far from successful, even when religion has been ostensibly employed.

Islamisation of Present-Day Knowledge

Made some 40 years ago, Clark Kerr’s observation that modern universities no longer reflect their eponymous origin, as understood by Cardinal John Henry Newman, is only partly correct, and hence should be called multiversities as they reflect multiple perspectives united only by certain bureaucratic and economic procedures.¹⁷ The apparent multiple perspectives in most non-Western universities, if not all, still mask the most dominant worldview and epistemic framework of the West—even those in developing nations. This can be easily discerned from their aims and objectives, faculty and discipline organisation, course offerings and contents and analytical methods, as well as the criteria for academic and professional excellence. For Muslims, the most natural, comprehensive, and perennial response to foreign colonisation and inner spiritual weaknesses is through the process called Islamisation which encompasses different but interrelated personal, societal and institutional aspects. In the context of our present discussion, this project of Islamisation of present day knowledge (IPDK), which involves a process of dewesternisation, was first conceptualised by a contemporary Malay thinker, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, in the second part of the 1970s: “Islamisation is the liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic, national-cultural tradition opposed to Islam, and then from secular control over his reason and his language.”¹⁸ This project was later popularised by the late

¹⁶ Cox, “Globalisation of What?”

¹⁷ Craig Howard, *Theories of General Education* (London, Macmillan, 1991), 64-74.

¹⁸ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 44. The chapter in this work entitled “Dewesternisation of Knowledge,” was later included in *Powerful*

Ismail Ragi al-Faruqi and the Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (IIIT) with a very different interpretation and programs.¹⁹

This IPDK project, in its more original conception, is neither religious fundamentalism, nor a narrow form of ethnocentrism or indigenisation, nor a matter of identity politics. On the contrary, it is arguably an offer of a more comprehensive option within the current discourse and practice on alternatives to Eurocentrism, one that deeply recognises plurality, while unapologetically and sincerely affirms its universality. It is also an attempt that should be taken seriously in enriching the discourses on decolonisation, postcoloniality, and coloniality, which could offer a non-hegemonic, non-ethnocentric, non-gendered, and non-fundamentalist claim to epistemic universality. It is a more comprehensive and enriching perspective because it not only provides an intellectual critique, but also a prescription based on a worldview and epistemic framework that are largely intact, even if they are not currently dominant. It should be taken seriously because a large majority of the world Muslim population, totalling about 1.5 billion, share a profoundly common worldview projecting an epistemic framework that is based on the religion of Islam, even if a certain segment of its adherents, albeit a rather influential one, is still deeply colonised, externally and internally.

Human capital development in Islam, in a fundamental sense, hinges on the inculcation of the worldview, the epistemic framework, and ethical-legal principles of Islam. Islam regards knowledge as *sine qua non* of humanity, with Adam, the first man and Prophet, having been taught “the names of all things” by God Himself, thereby making him superior even to angels. This epistemologically positive attribute of man in Islam is a direct reflection of man’s *raison d’être* as God’s servant and vicegerent on Earth, which necessitates man’s having the possibility of attaining sufficient knowledge of himself, God, and the universe. Hence in the creed of the Muslims, which is derived from the Holy Qur’an and teachings of the last Prophet, Muhammad, the possibility of attaining certain knowledge as opposed to mere opinions (*ra’y*), doubts (*shakk*), and conjectures (*sann*), are deeply ingrained. The Islamic creed also clearly states the various channels through which knowledge can be established and which reflect

Ideas: Perspectives on the Good Society, ed. Jennifer M. Webb (Victoria: Cranlana Programme, 2002), 229-241.

¹⁹ For an elaboration of the relationship between al-Attas and al-Faruqi concerning this project, see Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition on the Original Concept of Islamisation* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, 1998), chap. 7.

the unitary view, namely sense-perception, sound reason, and trustworthy reports. Certainty (*yaqin*) can be attained; that is, by reason (*ilmul yaqin*), by sight (*'ainul yaqin*) and by experience (*haqqul yaqin*).²⁰ In Islam, the purpose of knowledge is really to enable each human being to carry out that dual role of being the servant of God and His vicegerent on earth—the latter being more fundamental than, and a requisite for, the former. To reflect this dual role, Muslim scholars have creatively categorised all knowledge and skills into *Fardu ain* (required for all Muslims) and *Kifayah* (required for some segment of society), although they have created other schemes of categorisations based on different criteria.²¹

We stated earlier that Islam claims a non-hegemonic, non-ethnocentric, non-gendered, and non-fundamentalist epistemic universality. Islam obviously regards human knowledge as being possessed by a particular person who is gendered, socio-historically located and with certain spiritual strengths and weaknesses, as the case may be. However, this does not necessarily imply a relativity of knowledge according to a specific gender, socio-historical condition, and spirituality, which denies any possibility of universality that crosses gender, socio-historical, and spiritual boundaries. This point is fundamental and must be adequately appreciated, because in Islam, all knowledge (*'ulum*), although it is located in a particular human soul, is not a human product: it is a gift, a light, from the God almighty, as evidenced from these verses from the holy Qur'an: "God teaches Man that which he knows not; God taught Adam names of all things; Prophet's prayers: Lord, increase me in knowledge."²² Hence it is a universally accepted position among all Muslim scholars—before the impact of certain Western teaching, especially of postmodernism and poststructuralism—to reject epistemological relativism. From its inception, Islamic epistemology recognises that knowledge—stripped of the faulty opinions, doubts, and conjectures, as well as the negative influences of various human interests, generally termed as *hawa'*—is indeed universal.²³

²⁰ For a further discussion on the various references from the Qur'an and other sources, see Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Concept of Knowledge in Islam: Its Implications for Education in a Developing Country* (London and New York, Mansell, 1989), especially chaps. 2, 3 and 4.

²¹ See Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*, 312, 417.

²² Surah al-Taha (20): 114.

²³ On the rejection of relativism, see *ibid.*, 84-96; and on *hawa'* as one of the antonyms of knowledge in Islam, see Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Concept of Knowledge in Islam*, chap. 4.

Hence, Muslims were commanded by the Prophet himself to seek knowledge even in non-Muslim lands, such as China. Muslims showed great interest in and appreciation for the intellectual and scientific achievements of other cultures and civilisations, contemporary or ancient, as witnessed, for example, in the work of the 11th century Andalusian Sa'īd al-Andalusi, *Tabaqat al-Umam*, in which he summarises the various achievements of these other ancient and contemporary civilisations such as the Indian, the Persian, Chaldean, Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Arab and Jewish civilisations.²⁴ Even al-Ghassali's far-reaching 11th century critique of Greek philosophy in his *Tahafut al-Falasifah* was limited only to a few fundamental metaphysical aspects. Therein he also praised the ethical qualities of the Greek philosophers, and in other works, such as in his *Nasihatul Mulk*, he cited, with great approval, the examples of many great pre-Islamic Iranian rulers.²⁵

Its confident claim to various levels of certainty (by reason, sight, and experience) does not negate its understanding of human frailty which, inter alia, makes it tend to abuse and suppress dissenting and, sometimes more valid, opinions. Hence, in traditional Muslim higher learning activities, *tahsibul akhlak* (refinement of character) and *taskiyatul nafs* (purification of the soul) were integrally included.²⁶ Yet, and more significantly, the Islamic conception of man, as has been argued above, is utterly positive, whether such a man is a Muslim or otherwise. Islam's claims to having a more superior conception of the Truth have not allowed Muslims, as commanded in the Qur'an, to compel others to accept its vision of truth and reality. Objectively, it has long been recognised that Muslim

²⁴ Sa'īd al-Andalusi, *Tabaqat al-Umam* [*Science in the Medieval World*], translated and edited by S. I. Salem and A. Kumar (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1991).

²⁵ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* [*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*], translated by S. A. Kamali (Lahore, Pakistan Historical Society, 1958); *Nasihatul Mulk* [*Counsel for Kings*], translated by F. R. C. Bagley (London, Oxford University Press, 1964).

²⁶ Ahmad ibn Muhammad Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-Akhlak wa Tathir al-A'raq* [*The Refinement of Character*], translated by Constantin K. Surayk (Beirut, Centennial Publication, 1968); al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum al-Din* [*Al-Ghazali on Disciplining the Soul and The Breaking the Two Desires: Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences*] translated by T. J. Winter (Cambridge, The Islamic Text Society, 1995), especially the chapters on *Kitab Kasr al-Shahwatayn* and *Kitab Riyadat al-Nafs*; see also Burhanuddin al-Sarnuji, *Ta'lim al-Mutallim Tariq al-Ta'allum*, translated by G. E. von Grunebaum and T. M. Abel (New York, King's Crown Press, 1947); and Ibn Jama'ah, *Taskirat as-Sami' wal-Mutakallim fil Adab wal Muta'allim*, translated by Noor Muhammad Ghifari (New Delhi, Adama Publishers, 2006).

communities and leaders have consistently allowed other religions to have full freedom not only to organise religious practice, but also to have parallel legal systems.

Serious attempts at exposing the various dimensions of postcolonial issues and of coloniality have made significant contributions in showing the repressive elements of the Western epistemic framework; especially in its project of modernity. Our arguments for Islamisation, while they may share certain similarities with these worthwhile efforts, transcend cultural and ideological frameworks in identifying elements that promote and hinder, as the case maybe, human epistemological, ethical, and societal developments. Islamisation does not look only into the “external other” as possible sources of good and evil, but also into the negative forces of the individual inner self. Islam talks about how whims and desires, and so on, can affect one’s judgment. The greater struggle (*jihad akbar*) as the Prophet used to remind Muslims, is not against the external “other” but the internal one, against one’s fancies and desires. In this sense we can agree with Memmi and many others that some failures in Muslim nations are not necessarily due to external, colonial, and neo-colonial factors, but also and perhaps of equal significance, to inner intellectual-spiritual problems—the roughness of character, the unrefined soul—of many of our leaders of various institutions. It is quite possible that the mind may be free from Western colonial and neo-colonial frameworks and ideas, but may be deeply infected by dishonesty, greed, envy, and lack of wisdom, courage, and justice.²⁷

Most discourses on Islamisation of knowledge since the 1970s address the writing of textbooks, reformation of academic disciplines and creating or reforming sociocultural and economic institutions. They seem to forget that the very purpose of the Islamisation and dewesternisation of present-day knowledge centres wholly on creating the right kind of human being. Human capital development in Islam is centrally rooted in education, whose purpose is not merely to produce a good citizen, nor a good worker, but a good man. This is aptly articulated in the modern sense by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas that

...it is man’s value as a real man, as the dweller in his self’s city, as citizen in his own microcosmic kingdom, as a spirit, that is stressed, rather than

²⁷ For a discussion on how these matters affect ethical integrity, see Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The ICLIF Leadership Competency Model: An Islamic Alternative* (Kuala Lumpur, International Centre for Leadership in Finance, 2007), chaps. 2 and 7.

his value as a physical entity measured in terms of a pragmatic or utilitarian sense of his usefulness to state, society and the world.²⁸

He argues that a good citizen or worker in a secular state may not necessarily be a good man; but a good man, however, will definitely be a good worker and citizen.²⁹ It is obvious that if the employer or state is good as defined from the holistic Islamic framework, then being a good worker and citizen may be synonymous with being a good man. But an Islamic state presupposes the existence and active involvement of a critical mass of Islamically-minded men and women. In a later work, al-Attas emphasises that stressing the individual is not only a matter of principle, but also “a matter of correct strategy in our times and under the present circumstances.”³⁰ He further argues that stressing the individual implies knowledge about intelligence, virtue, and the spirit, and about the ultimate destiny and purpose. This is so because intelligence, virtue, and the spirit are elements inherent in the individual, whereas stressing society and state opens the door to legalism and politics.³¹

However, al-Attas asserts that Islam accepts the idea of good citizenship as the object of education, “only that we mean by ‘citizen’ a Citizen of that other Kingdom, so that he acts as such even here and now as a good man.”³² The primary focus on the individual is so fundamental because the ultimate purpose and end of ethics in Islam is the individual.³³ It is because of this notion of the individual’s accountability as a moral agent that in Islam, it is the individual that shall be rewarded or punished on the Day of Judgement.

²⁸ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 141.

²⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, 1973), 51-2; *Islam: The Meaning of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality* (Petaling Jaya, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1976), 33-4; *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education* (London, Hodder & Stoughton and King A. Aziz University, 1979), 32-3; and *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Petaling Jaya, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1980), 25. I have elaborated upon al-Attas’ idea in my article “Insan Baik Teras Kewarganegaraan,” *Pemikir*, January-March 1996, 1-24.

³⁰ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*, 6.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 32-3.

³³ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 70; cf. a *hadith* of the Prophet: “Whosoever sees an evil action (*munkar*), he should change it with his hand, if not with his tongue, if not with his heart, and the latter is the weakest in faith.”

A Man of *Adab*

An educated man is a good man, and by “good” we mean a man possessing *adab* in its full inclusive sense. A man of *adab* (*insan adabi*) is defined as

...the one who is sincerely conscious of his responsibilities towards the true God; who understands and fulfils his obligations to himself and others in his society with justice, and who constantly strives to improve every aspect of himself towards perfection as a man of *adab*.³⁴

Education is thus *ta'dib*: the instillation and inculcation of *adab* in man.³⁵ The Qur'an testifies that the Holy Prophet is the Ideal who is the best example of such a man, whom some scholars have called the Prophet the Perfect or Universal man (*al-insan al-kulliyy*).³⁶ Thus the organisation of administration and of knowledge in an Islamic educational system should reflect the Perfect Man.³⁷ The concept of *ta'dib*, if properly understood and competently explicated, is the correct concept of education in Islam, and not *ta'lim* or *tarbiyah*, which are currently in vogue among Muslims all over the world, because *ta'dib* already includes within its conceptual structure the elements of knowledge (*'ilm*), instruction (*ta'lim*), and good breeding (*tarbiyah*).³⁸ Although the Qur'an does not use the word *adab* or any of its derivatives, the word itself and some of its derivatives are mentioned in the traditions of the Holy Prophet, of the Companions, in poetry and in the works of later scholars.³⁹ *Adab* had a wider and more

³⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin*, 54.

³⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*, 37.

³⁶ Cf. “the most honourable,” Surah al-Hujurat (49): 13; “the beautiful model for conduct,” Surah al-Ahzab (33): 21 and Surah al-Qalam (68): 4; “a (universal) messenger to all mankind,” Surah al-Saba' (34): 28.

³⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 39; and *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin*, 157.

³⁸ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 34.

³⁹ There are at least 18 entries on *ta'dib*, *addaba*, and *adab*, many of which occur in more than one *hadith* collection. See A. J. Wensinck, and J. P. Mensing, *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1943), 26; and Nasrat Abdel Rahman, “The Semantics of Adab in Arabic,” *Al-Shajarah* 2.2 (1997), 189-207. In this paper Abdel Rahman painstakingly analyses the various shades of meanings of the term *adab*, and its various derivatives, especially *ta'dib*, from about 50 major Arab authorities, which has generally confirmed al-Attas' interpretation.

profound meaning before it became restricted to only a few of its many significations, namely belles-lettres and professional and social etiquette.⁴⁰

The content (*maudu'*) of *ta'dib*, according to early scholars, is *akhlaq* (ethics and morality).⁴¹ From the earliest Islamic times, *adab* was conceptually fused with right knowledge (*'ilm*) and proper and sincere action (*'amal*), and became significantly involved in the intelligent emulation of the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet.⁴² *Adab* can be defined as follows:

Recognition and acknowledgement of the reality that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchically according to their various grades and degrees of rank, and of one's proper place in relation to that reality and to one's physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials.⁴³

Recognition can be understood as knowing again (to *re-cognise*) one's Primordial Covenant with the Lord and everything that follows from it.⁴⁴ It also means that matters and things are already in their respective proper places in the various orders of being and existence, but that man, out of ignorance or arrogance, "makes alterations and confuses the places of things such that injustice occurs."⁴⁵ Acknowledgement is requisite action

⁴⁰ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 36. F. Gabrieli, in his brief yet succinct exposition of *adab*, explains that in the first century of the *hijrah*, *adab* carried within it an intellectual, ethical and social meaning. Later it came to mean a sum of knowledge which makes a man courteous and "urbane," and according to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, by the time of al-Hariri in the 10th century, the meaning of *adab* had become restricted to a discipline of knowledge, namely *adabiyat* or literature.

⁴¹ Mahmud Qambar, *Dirasat Turathiyyah fi'l-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyyah* (Doha, Dar al-Thaqafah, 1985), 1: 406.

⁴² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 35; cf. Nasrat Abdel Rahman, *The Semantics of Adab in Arabic*, 2-18.

⁴³ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 27. Based on this definition of *adab*, al-Attas ingeniously elaborates on the statement of the Holy Prophet quoted above in this manner: "My Lord made me recognise and acknowledge, by what He progressively instilled into me [i.e., *adab*], the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it led to my recognition and acknowledgement of His proper place in the order of being and existence; and by virtue of this He made my education most excellent." *Ibid.*, 27-8.

⁴⁴ The Primordial Covenant which is cited by all Sufis is derived from the Qur'an (Surah al-A'raf (7):172): "When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam—from their loins—their descendents, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): 'Am I not your lord?'—they all said: 'Yea! We do testify!'"

⁴⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 21.

in conformity with what is recognised. It is “affirmation” and “confirmation” or “realisation” and “actualisation” in one’s self of what is recognised. Without acknowledgement, education is nothing but mere learning (*ta’allum*).⁴⁶ The significance of the above meanings of *adab* as they relate to the education of a good man is further underlined when it is realised that the recognition, which involves knowledge, and acknowledgement, which involves action, of proper places explained in the section above, are related to other key terms in the Islamic worldview, such as wisdom (*hikmah*) and justice (*‘adl*), and reality and truth (*haqq*). Reality and truth (*haqq*) is defined as both the correspondence and coherence with the right and proper place.⁴⁷

Several examples of how the notion of *adab* is manifested in the various levels of human existence can be cited. *Adab* towards one’s self starts when one acknowledges one’s dual nature, namely the rational and the animal. When the former subdues the latter and renders it under control, then one has put both of them in their proper places, thereby placing one’s self in the right place.⁴⁸ Such a state is justice to one’s self; otherwise it is injustice (*‘ulm al-nafs*). When *adab* is referred to human relationship, it means that the ethical norms which are applied to social behaviour would follow certain requirements based on one’s standing in say, the family and society. One’s standing “is not formulated by the human criteria of power, wealth, and lineage, but by the Quranic criteria of knowledge, intelligence and virtue.”⁴⁹ If one displays sincere humility, love, respect, care, charity, etc., to one’s parents, elders and children, neighbours and community leaders, it shows that one knows one’s proper place in relation to them. Referring to the domain of knowledge, *adab* means an intellectual discipline (*ketertiban budi*) which recognises and acknowledges the hierarchy of knowledge based on the criteria of degrees of perfection (*keluhuran*) and priority (*keutamaan*), such that the ones that are based on revelation are recognised and acknowledged as more perfect and of a higher priority than those based on the intellect; those that are *fard ‘ayn* are above *fard kifayah*; those that provide guidance (*hidayah*) to life are more superior to those that are practically useful (*kegunaan amali*).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin*, 186-8; *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur, ISTAC, 1989), 22.

⁴⁸ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, “Address of Acceptance of Appointment to the Al-Ghazali Chair of Islamic Thought,” in *Commemorative Volume on the Conferment of the Al-Ghazali Chair* (Kuala Lumpur, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, 1994), 31.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 30.

Adab towards knowledge would result in the proper and correct ways of learning and applying the different sciences. In conjunction with this, respect towards scholars and teachers is one manifestation of the *adab* towards knowledge. The purpose of seeking knowledge and of education ultimately is such that the self will attain happiness in this world and in the hereafter.

For the natural world, *adab* means the discipline of the practical intellect (*akal amali*) in dealing with the hierarchical program that characterises the world of nature such that a person can make a proper judgement concerning the true value of things, as God's signs, as sources of knowledge, and things useful for the spiritual and physical development of man. In addition, *adab* towards nature and the natural environment means that one should put trees and stones, mountains, rivers, valleys and lakes, animals, and their habitat in their proper places. And *adab* towards language means the recognition and acknowledgement of the rightful and proper place of every word in a written or uttered sentence so as not to produce a dissonance in meaning, sound and concept. Literature is called *adabiyat* in Islam precisely because it is seen as the keeper of a civilisation and the collector of teachings and statements that educate the self and society with *adab* such that both are elevated to the rank of the cultured man (*insan adabi*) and society.

For the spiritual world, *adab* means the recognition and acknowledgement of the degrees of perfection (*darajat keluhuran*) that characterise the world of spirits; the recognition and acknowledgement of the various spiritual stations (*makam keruhanian*) based on acts of devotion and worship; the spiritual discipline which rightly submits the physical or animal self to the spiritual or rational self.⁵⁰ No wonder then, that *adab* is also the spectacle of justice ('*adl*') as it is reflected by wisdom (*hikmah*).⁵¹ Therefore, by synthesising the meaning of knowledge, meaning and *adab*, the complete definition of Islamic education is given the process of instilling the right *adab*, which includes the ultimate purpose, content, and method of education:

...the recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to

⁵⁰ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin*, 155–7; cf. "Address of Acceptance of Appointment to the Al-Ghazali Chair of Islamic Thought," 31.

⁵¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 23.