Parallels between Contemporary Western and Islamic Thought on the Discourse of Power and Knowledge[1]

Danial YUSOF
Department of Political Science
International Islamic University Malaysia
Jalan Gombak, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
danialmy@iium.edu.my

Abstract. This paper examines parallels between contemporary Western and Islamic thought. It will propose that there is congruence between Western and Muslim political thought processes on issues of soft-foundationalism, negative theology, provisional truth claims and religious democracy, in order to offset hegemonic tendencies. This will be illustrated by a concise juxtaposition of the ideas of Davutoglu, Winkel, Sardar, Tariq Ali, Derrida, Foucault, Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammed Arkoun and others. In the social sciences, namely political science, the neutralization of ideology is also supported in relation to the concern of ideological encroachments into the discipline by William E. Connolly, that echoes Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. This paper concludes that similar concerns on the relationship between power and knowledge in contemporary Western and Islamic political thought processes are beneficial to the study of Islam and its transformation as a social and political phenomenon.
Keywords: foundationalism, deconstruction, negative theology, political thought, sociology of knowledge, hegemony, Islamic human sciences

THEOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

This paper discusses how the Islamic paradigm or its ontological consciousness is likely to develop Islamic social or human sciences, as a prescriptive tool as it oscillates with theology. Husserlian phenomenology and its terminology are utilised to justify the sociology of Islam and its essentialist response through the course of transcultural exchanges and sedimentation with the irreconcilable *Weltanschauung* of the West. The issue of relevant knowledge is considered through the difficult relationship between revivalist religion and state politics where political legitimacy and the development of institutions are features of socio-political fact. In this way, Islamic human sciences must relevantly perceive how Muslim societies create meaning through discourse and practice rather than assuming reliable and prescriptive knowledge on the basis of strong ontol-

ogy. This coincides with the notion of Islamic social sciences through the sociology of Islam and a study of praxis.

(a) Alternating between the Religious and the Political. The interrelationship of ontology, epistemology, axiology and politics might be a meaningful anchors pointing towards the understanding of the irreconcilability of the philosophical bases of Islamic and Western political theories, images and cultures. The principle difference between Islamic and Western *Weltanschauungen* is related to the contrast between the "ontologically determined epistemology" of Islam and the "epistemologically determined ontology" of the Western philosophical traditions. This difference is especially significant in understanding the axiological basis of political legitimacy and the process of justification (Davutoglu, 1994: 5).

Ontology, as a study of being and its utility in political theory, based on modern Husserlian phenomenology, generate a philosophical methodology of social reality based on self perception and common experience. Appropriated in a certain way, its methodology corresponds to Lyotard's (1988) *differend* (or phrases in dispute due to the pluralising concept of language and truth systems, where there is a lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments); essentially contested concepts and hegemony of alternative *selbstverstandnises* (self-perceptions); contextualised in the perpetuating philosophical and theological history of both the West and Islam. The terminology of Husserlian phenomenology, for example, sedimentation, as a developmental process, over time, by which habitualities or dispositions are acquired and practised as tradition, or through ideological conditioning and the history of human thought, in general, to explain essentialist positions and transcultural exchanges. This occurs with "intersubjectivity" as an essential and fundamental structure and reference of consciousness with the plurality of a community or society as being made up of "transcendental subjectivities." The *Lebenswelt* (the world of common experience) as an "intersubjective intentional object" is that of "objective knowledge and possesses social, historical, psychological, mythical, political, religious, sexual, emotional and scientific aspects" (Bell, 2003). The complete conceptual reduction of these aspects through naturalism and the "hegemonic articulation" (Laclau, 1990) of social sciences disregards the milieu of the philosophical-theological history mentioned earlier.

Davutoglu appropriates Husserlian phenomenology by explaining the evolution and transformation of the idea or consciousness of God in

Western philosophico-theological history. Its impact on their epistemological and axiological perspectives generates a less theo-centric and more nature-centered cosmology philosophico-theological history and the modern interlinking of secularised epistemological sources i.e. revelation and reason, axiological positivism and an ontology that is dependent on human knowledge are characteristics of contemporary Western civilization that serve to explain the phenomenology that underlie the theories, institutions, cultures and political images of Western *Weltanshauung* (1994: 12-45). Davutoglu goes on to describe the "ontologically determined epistemology" of the Islamic paradigm i.e. *tawhīd* as founded upon a theo-centric cosmology that pervades the Muslim political consciousness. The Quranic base is pivotal in systematising a paradigmatic unity among the theological, philosophical and spiritual methodologies of the Islamic thought i.e. *kalām*, *falsafa* and *tasawwuf* in generating an epistemology, that reflects the "theoretical and imaginative interconnections" and axiology of the Islamic *Weltanschauung* based on the ontological transcendency and unity of Allah (1994: 48-86).

In the modern context, this position is subjected to the transcultural pressures and sedimentation of a Western hegemonic articulation. As fundamentally irreconcilable *Weltanschauungen*, the basis of any comparative analysis between the two, concerning the validation of their sociopolitical systems, issues of legitimacy and political authority, power and pluralism and their "imagination of the universal political system" is expected to reflect the axiology that governs the academic discourse as form of political representation.

In the *Lebenswelt*, the individual is motivated to evaluate, based on a subscribed axiology, the experience of others. With hegemony and transcultural exchanges occurring through the colonial and secularist political structures and demarcation with the nation-state configuration, the "political imagination" of these alternative *Weltanschauungen* is stressed in the modern context (Davutoglu, 1994: 201-202). They provide corresponding streams of hegemonic and apologetic counter-hegemonic discourses that are based upon theologico-socio-scientific conceptualisations and nomenclatures, which are at odds with each other. The filtering receptivity of these alternative *Weltanschauungen* in the exchange of discourses in the postmodern context of identity politics and differences, reveal flexibility in the ontological consciousness. This occurs through axiological comparison and evaluation that might lead to conversion, subscription,

rejection or appropriation in transcultural dynamics as contingent constituents of sedimentation.

Davutoglu's work itself is symptomatic of a Muslim's appropriation of a modern philosophy that is exclusively developed through continental philosophical pedigree with the likes of Kant, Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. As political rhetoric, that aims at establishing theoretical consistency between *Weltanschauung*, ideals and a polity that exceeds the demarcation of nation-states, the phenomena of contemporary Islam also finds itself defined and imposed through the West's hegemonic political imagination and organisational structures.

To this degree, the centrality of the first person consciousness is as an inconsistent producer and user of signs through deconstruction, highlights the problem of pure description, authentic representation and hegemonic articulation. In the case of Islam, its ontological hierarchy disallows the proximity between absolute and created beings, which places a significant limitation on the solipsistic or primary approximation of the self in its ontology, epistemology and axiology but necessitates the self as a fallible representative of the transcendent.

(b) Islam as Socio-political Fact. As opposed to intellectual approaches regarding knowledge and morality, society itself as an entity and the object of socially relevant knowledge is non-intellectual and uncritically accepting of received traditions, habits or situational ethics valid within the particular context of time and space. On the other hand, reliable knowledge in Islam is established through an intellectual grounding based on the invoking of its transcendent sources, yet this presents perpetual tension through *'islāh* (reform) and *tajdīd* (revival) that confronts "socially relevant interpretations of knowledge" (Winkel, 1988: 49-51). The issue of structure and reliable knowledge explains the difficult relationship between revivalist religion and state politics in Islamic history.

	General	Particular
Position	Structural	Institutional
Interpretation	Psychological	Ideational

Table 1: Craig Parson's fundamental matrix of explanations of action (2007: 15)

In mapping an explanatory framework in political science (see above), there are four logical segments out of which explanatory arguments can be built in a multi-causal environment. The lack of consensus concerning issues of political legitimacy, in broad structural and institutional terms, affects the synthesis of the people and their environment (exogeneous and man-made) and in this case the interpretation of the role of Islam in state is reliable knowledge (based on strong ontology) and socially relevant knowledge (based soft ontology). The latter being the realm of socio-political fact. Societies reconcile or mitigate their contradictions through structure and sedimentation of cultural interpretations. Winkel questions the vigor and permanence of the social powers of resolution with periods of "liminality" (the threshold between different periods, significant in flux and crisis, for example, colonialism and economic depression). Such experiences may weaken, for example, "religious symbols and belief in the face of upheaval and contradiction in previously coincident social conditions" (Geertz, 1973: 230) and how they are operationalised in the environment.

This situation qualifies as Durkheim's anomie (in his 1893's *The Division of Labour in Society*), a deregulation in society, where social norms are unclear or confused and no longer defines and controls the activities of society, has an impact on intellectual activity and epistemological assessment. This is extended to the contemporary pre-occupation of revivalists with the Caliphate as coinciding with the difficulty of religious legitimacy, accorded to institutions and structural form of reliable knowledge. Referring to Binder's analysis of Al-Ghazali's theory of Islamic government (1955), the Caliphate as a structural solution is related to the maintenance of order, the collective unity and historical continuity of the Muslim community, and derives the functional and institutional authority from the *shari'a* that is directly related to the description and prescription of human nature. The structural distribution of political, economic and cultural values through the justification of power and authority in Islam, as reliable knowledge in complex organic and heterogeneous societies and socially relevant knowledge makes it problematic as a self-contained context and praxis and as a system that facilitates and conditions individual morality. The search for modernity is for how societies create meaning through discourse and practice (therefore interpretive) rather than that of reliable knowledge. It places praxis as a means of social change and political activism through a constant re-creation of truth and

ideals by social dialectics that confines meaning to particular societies. Through discourse theory, socially relevant knowledge transpires at the expense of a theory of truth, based on an untenable achievement of consensus on values if not also interests, in society and the acceptance of a final and incommensurate plurality of value systems.

Another epistemological approach for objective knowledge, *historicism*, attempts detachment as a way to evaluate value exchange and political legitimacy through sedimentation via *longue duree* (a long span of history from which changes – minute, continuing and in due course momentous – can be perceived in society) from which insular, elitist, ideological and hegemonic assumptions can be abstractly identified and isolated from structure. Social truth is not just evaluated within society but is also comparative as a plurality of truths within itself and amongst other societies. This approach still inextricably links knowledge with power and control, as according to Foucault, especially where knowledge is perceived as an understanding to manipulate the environment and is pervasive in the Lebenswelt and contributes to the development and conditioning of our foundational *Weltanschauung* (Winkel, 1988: 68-85).

The distortions caused by power politics in Muslim history, explains the problematic and critical relationship between revivalist religion and state politics concerning structural legitimacy and political order. So much so that Winkel extends the possibility through the problem of structure that reliable knowledge cannot be ontologically coincident with socially relevant knowledge to disable the element of power and control until a period of liminality (for example, the Arab Spring). There is also an allusion to transculture and the appropriation of post-structural tools by Muslim revivalist scholars to engage "epistemologically distorting interests" and a Sufi perspective to remove the interest of ego and a realisation of the theomorphic nature of mankind (1988: 88-93).

Nevertheless, intellectual activity is itself susceptible to "interests, power and needs" and that an apathetic society is more difficult to provoke than one which is oppressed. Muslim societies may in fact have appropriate religious authority as well as socially relevant and politically reliable knowledge. This is essentially why Winkel emphasised the Sufi elements of Islamic revival, in order to perceive it as a perpetual spiritual and not necessarily political phenomenon, and to avoid the pitfalls of the structural and *homo significans* (man the signifier) (1988: 347-351). The acknowledgment of Man as inconsistent and unreliable representatives of

Allah and Islam, implies a systemic *différence* (of Derrida) towards an "eternally generative God of negative theology" and Islam in the contested realm of the social and political (Almond, 2004: 133).

There is the appeal to identifying a moral society as a "floating signifier" (Laclau, 1993: 28) in the continuing dialectic of a truth system or its continuous re-creation, appropriation and reconciliation in politics. The co-existence of politics with alternative truth systems and the element of transculture, contribute to the continuing strain between religious revival and state politics.

This paper propagates an option regarding the development of a soft ontology based Islamic human sciences, as the study of praxis in relation to Islam with Islamic human 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, which itself as being a feature of the articulation of political legitimacy in the context of Islam is a socio-political fact. It makes out that socio-political realities are not co-incidental with discourses of reliable knowledge and moral society. They are representations of the conciliation of interests with specific value orientation with regards to alternative conceptions moral society. It qualifies as a statement for the amelioration of socially relevant knowledge, sedimentation of socio-political habitualities and necessitates the self and society as fallible representatives of the transcendent in the Islamic human sciences.

DEMOCRATISING POLITICAL THEOLOGY

(a) Tradition, Authenticity and the Representation of Islam in Postmodernity. There is a marked difference in the way tradition is activated i.e. 1. Tradition, once a product of human choice, now suppresses further choice and initiative and that the issue of authenticity cannot arise in traditional society, where tradition commands respect precisely because it is "unexamined" (Lee, 1997: 16). Another problem is "validation," and this applies to all traditions, where each community or group interpretation and application cannot be expected to be authenticated by each other (Lee, 1997: 194) and thus find essentialism inescapable; 2. On the other hand, rethinking tradition requires an appreciation of cultural authenticity and autonomy. Traditional systems are a source of solutions unique to its value parameters as a particular, potential and historical civilisation

that can be applied in modernity as a sociology (here it implies variety) of Islam that can engineer an autonomous identity. Here, the relationship between power and knowledge is disruptive to the concept of authenticity where "other" cultures are either seen as inferior or sufficiently adulterated as being "unknowable" through various forms of imperialism, and this includes Muslim societies and their notion of tradition (Sardar, 1998: 281-283).

Tariq Ali claims that religious resurgence is partly explained by the lack of alternative to neo-liberalism and advocates a reformation of Islam that stifles conservatism and fundamentalism associated with tradition while espousing more dynamic ideas than Western modernity. At the same time, he warns of the further political expediency of Islam in relation to globalisation, which is true to his Marxist leanings (2002: 312-313). In addition, there was also the assertion of a relationship between postmodern European Leftism and Islamic radicalism as a means of challenging Western modernity from Foucault's coverage of the Iranian revolution; Sartre and the Algerian revolution; Ali Shariati's translation of Fanon and Sartre; and similarities between Bin Laden and Che Guevara as a revolution against modernity as a weapon of Euro-American hegemony and the fundamentalism of its "Empire" (Ali, 2002: 305; Hardt and Negri 2000, Newell 2001).

The post-September the eleven world has reinforced stereo-types of Muslims as extremists at the expense of a transvaluation of identity that reduces its authenticity as merely a pre-modern reactionary offspring to modernity. The realisation that the foundation of an authentic logic of development of Islam must be free from the vestiges of Western modernity, which has led to the idea of cultural resistance that "tradition" is a step forward and has to be distinguished from "traditionalism." Sardar activates "tradition" as "the summation of the absolute frame of reference provided by the axioms of a civilization that remains enduringly relevant and conventions that has developed into history with its own distinctive "gaze"" (1998: 273). On the other hand, "traditionalism" as reactionary is personified by fundamentalist ideas and movements (as defined by the West) and while it has successfully maintained a non-Western heritage through the sentimentality of the past, it cannot build a new, presumably, a reality that conforms to an authentic identity and vice-versa.

On the concept of reality, Islamic culture is:

designated by a number of technical terms which allude to diversities of reality as well as its social construction e.g. *haqiqah* (reality per se), *haqiqah ahadiyah* (unitary reality), *haqiqah al-haqaiq* (reality of realities), *haqiqah muqayyadah* (rational/scientific reality), *haqiqah mutlaqah* (absolute reality), *haqiqah al insan* (the reality of man), *haqiqah wahidah* (single reality). (Sardar, 1998: 41)

These realities are inter-related and validated through their own particular methodology, logic and value system, for example, the glimpse of absolute reality through scientific reality. He argues that, "a universe of diverse realities does not abolish meta-narratives – on the contrary, it makes certain meta-narratives essential to our survival to discover alternative visions of society" (Sardar, 1998: 42-43).

(b) Cultural Hegemony: Islam in a Self-contained Western Modernity. The critique of modernity as a global experience is also self-contained as a continuation of Western civilization and identity. This trend is not easily reconciled with Islam: for example David Channel and Bruze Mazlish (cited in Gray, 2001) perceive modern to be:

culture as a merging of organic order (The Great Chain of Being) and mechanistic rationality (The Clockwork Universe) in the idea of the vital machine. It is also about transcending illusions of Man's place in the cosmos (the Copernican Revolution), distinction from animals (evolutionary theory), rational (Freud's unconscious) and the future divide between the organic and machinic with a cyborgian epistemology of thesis, antithesis, synthesis, prosthesis and again, as possibly posthuman (Gray 2001: 12)

where "the postmodern condition is a technoscientific one" (Gray, 2001: 12). Their "crisis," for example, will necessarily have an impact on the future transcultural space between the West and Islam for an uncommon quest of authenticity and values engaged by proponents of various cultures, traditions or civilisations within the melting pot of society.

The politics of authenticity by reviewing Western thought is to bring attention to the fact of mutually exclusive world views and the need for a minimalist framework for comprehension and a common ground to bridge cultural gaps (Lee, 1997: 18-21, 25–53, 194). In the context of the relationship between Islam and Western modernity, "the use of the unfamiliar in the critique of the familiar, the reference to foreign value systems in the evaluation and representation of one's own parent culture" is

a criticism pitched towards the cliché Orientalist representation of Islam by renowned postmodern philosophers from Foucault to Baudrillard (Almond, 2007: 195). It remains to be seen that an Islamic human sciences or Muslim social sciences practitioners will make for constructionist sociology of Islam and an Occidentalism for its own use and representation of the West i.e. a West for a post-Western logic of Islamic modernity. The examples of Al-Farabi from classical Islam and Aquinas from medieval Europe are fairly reasonable historical examples of how their *Weltanschauung* will prevail as a transcultural experience of the other, as far as theological foundations are concerned.

In his exposition of Muhammad Iqbal, Rober D. Lee found a unique figure of transcultural dynamics that appears to him similar to Soren A. Kierkegaard who wanted to save Christianity from both politics and institutionalisation. It appears to Lee that Iqbal denies the logical necessity of a "true Islam" while asserting its centrality for self-understanding upon Muslims, as a means of authentication through agency, which is a principle of modernism. Earlier in his text, Lee mentions that Iqbal claims that the borrowing of ideas from other cultures is just merely a form of substantiation and not treason, if the principle of spiritual and worldly unity is found in those cultures and asserts that Iqbal's reading of European philosophy convinced him that Islam represents the best expression of the sense of the self within human possibilities. Lee brought up this stream of thought as a point of possible criticism when in a reading of Abdallah Laroui, he suggested that Iqbal would counter Laroui in saying that an Arab revolt against the West through a historicism of Marx "cannot be genuinely eastern if it occurs within a secular, rationalist, historicist Western perspective" (1997: 78). Lee similarly places Shariati in the same light, where he rejects the necessity of modernization theory and Marxism but retains the teleology of different cultures and ideologies as streams of the process of authentication. Shariati's own authenticity, neither idealistic nor empirical, goes further by attempting to mend internal schisms with the integration of different strands through practical politics that accommodate particularities, thereby avoiding essentialist purveyors of Truth, as a basis of political construction (1997: 138-139).

Lee also includes Arkoun in his text, being his English translator for *Rethinking Islam* (1994). Arguably the most theoretically radical among the four discussed in his book, Arkoun's approach to authenticity (although

Lee says Arkoun does not identify himself with it) as more a "will to think than a will to action" is arguably the most vivid example of trans-cultural dynamics affecting Islamic scholarship. Arkoun activates authenticity within the context of *asala*, of which its root constitutes the foundations of religion, for example, *usūl-al-dīn* and *usūl-al-fiqh*. At the same time, this authenticity cannot be detached from socio-political conditions while ideologies (of which he says Islam is not) themselves serve to alienate its adherents from the authenticity of cultural and intellectual identity. Arkoun necessitates the connection of abstract absolutes and experience, through inter-disciplinary investigation, as a deconstructive socio-scientific method and an Islamology that exposes Islam and the Quranic fact as a socio-psychological truth at the expense of exclusivism and essentialism.

If Arkoun can be interpreted as advocating a culturally authentic Islam, through a radical socio-scientific methodology, Ali is then similar in this regard and at the same time explicitly secular where he seeks to impose his modern ideology upon a cultural authenticity that is pre-modern through advocating an "Islamic Reformation" at the expense of its own essentialism (Ali, 2002: 303-313). This is a form of "desacralisation of politics" as a means to secure the future of Islam. At the same time, Ali's ideas might seem to suggest commonalities between postmodern Leftists and proponents of essentialist Islamic authenticity against American-Euro imperialism. Ali mentions the appreciation of the pro-Aryan surgeon, biologist and sociologist, Alexis Carrel (for his placing a primary importance on religion) by both Qutb and Shariati that again refers to the complexity of transcultural dynamics (2002: 274). This refers to Alexis Carrel's association with eugenics and "salvation of the white races" in his 1935 book, *Man the Unknown.* Ali also highlights the shifts in the theoretical positions of both Huntington (who now asserts a self contradictory idea of "Muslim Wars") and Fukuyama (who perceives September Eleven as an assault on modernity and now moves closer to Huntington's original thesis through his label of "Islamo-fascism"), on the grounds that Islam (just like any other formal system) is not monolithic and that the United States of America backed reactionary and fundamentalist elements for its own imperialistic purposes (2002: 273-275).

Ali writes at length about the historical context of American-Euro imperialism and that as an "Empire," they have developed a parochial culture of ignorance and consumerist paradise (a form of ahistoricism) in

the form of its capitalist driven political economy and an ideology of humanitarian intervention. If Lee's contention that authenticity is the condition of politics, transcultural dynamics can become the primary intellectual framework in the problematic invoking of Islam be it traditionally authentic, cultural or secular in the entrapment of modernity as a socio-political domain. However, it is also the anxiety of losing this authenticity in the modern domain that promotes essentialism against cultural or secular forms of validation in the process of authenticating and integrating a plurality of paradigms and the establishing of an Islamic logic of development.

(c) Political Theory, Islam and Proliferation of Ideology. Those who simply use established concepts to get to the facts of political life and 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 to explore radical perspectives on politics. For to adopt without revision the concepts prevailing in polity is to accept terms of discourse loaded in favor of established practices (Connolly, 1993: 1-2).

Connoly defines as "appraisive," the discrepancy occurring with the application and analysis of a generally shared system of value achievement and "cluster concepts." A cluster concept is a multi-faceted concept which is determined not just by mere definition but also through various criteria, which are themselves complex while the agreed and contested rules of application are open, enabling interpretation that invites endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of the users. While politics itself is one such concept, it is also the mode in which different ideological groups express that contest (1993: 10-40). By acknowledging the contestability of a particular network of concepts, is not to question the universal criteria of reason but, to affirm both the conflicting and reconciliatory dimension of rational space in socio-political vocabularies. Connoly also states that the internal connection between concepts imperfectly shared in a way of life and the contending standards, judgments and priorities that help constitute that life with the human subject being an ambiguous achievement of modernity and bound to the realm of socio-political control (1993: 225–243).

In relation to this, Gramsci emphasises the role of ideology in the creation of knowledge and perceives of hegemony with its premise of main-

taining the status quo, through a process of consent and compliance where such hierarchical arrangements produce benefits, cultural coherence and political stability (Browning, 2002). In a state of perpetual struggle, socio-cultural institutions also support proponents of the dominant ideology when challenged through "repair techniques" and extensive re-organization through co-optation of popular public thought to realign its hegemony (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996: 249; Gerbner and Gross, 1976).

(d) Academic Discourse as Political Representation in the Social Sciences. Yasmeen Abu-Laban examines how the works of Edward Said, in relation to power and Western scholarly discourse, underlines the hegemonic feature of its assumptions toward the Orient and their intellectual abilities. By establishing a multi-disciplinary critical discourse on Western scholarship, advances in alternative assumptions and perceptions by the "Other" on ethical-political issues and developing a more complete and reflective humanities and socio-scientific scholarship based on contending paradigms can be undertaken. This may possibly expose "monolitihic and essentialist constructions of either oppressed or oppressor" (2001: 74). The critical approach in Said's works has also implanted, as Connoly recommends in his earlier mentioned thought on the language of politics, a revision of concepts established in Western scholarly discourse. For example, Abu-Laban mentions the term Orientalism in the glossary of the social sciences and humanities, which is also defined as a term induced critically by Said through his own book in Roger Scrutton's *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (1996). More importantly, Abu-Laban points out what Euben (2002a) mentioned earlier concerning the transcultural and syncretic impact of identity and knowledge on both the West and Islam that do not negate essentialist perspectives and hegemony – where in Scrutton's dictionary, the term Orientalism comes after the term Oriental despotism.

This reverts back to the concept of neutrality that Connoly was 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.

Ernesto Laclau (1993: 277-296) discusses at length the relationship between power and representation. In his discussion of the features of modern political theory and realpolitik, political intervention occurs at the social level and requires its radical transformation through the understanding of social totality, which explains the framework and network of power that supports political action. Representation, which is necessary in the self-constitution of totality, requires a hegemonic universal class, that is, an imposing limitless historical actor that converges with political action by eliminating alienation in other forms of representation. The predicament this gives rise to is the relativity of power in the experience of the oppressed and history, where historical rationality itself belongs to hegemonic discourse. Academic discourse is conceived as being confined to the agenda-setting strategy of hegemonic representation that manipulates counter-hegemonic debate and the resultant system reinforcement or its adaptation.

Mohammed Arkoun (1999: 25-37) 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, Fundamentalism, Orient with 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 the 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 modernizing process (e.g. ideological). What transpires is 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, in terms of religion, still the defining factor of identity, official religion and the state both define the parameters of his-

tory. In the case of Islam, the ideological construction of a modern national identity amongst 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 the religion in order to alleviate the impact of a 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. It is not surprising that the proponent of critical discourse in Iranian politics, Abdolkarim Soroush, on the basis of Islam as socio-political fact and political legitimacy finds "that no Islam is ever complete or final, he dismisses any attempt to formulate an official Islamic ideology" where human understanding and knowledge of religion changes in a reconcilable relationship between religious and scientific knowledge. Soroush emphasises caution against "confusing religion and religious society itself with the knowledge gained from it i.e. religious knowledge as a human construct," especially the power of Islam as a political ideology and the assumption of a definitive Islam by the religious establishment (Vakili, 2001: 151, 154-156).

The application of hegemony, essentially contested concepts and the *differend* in social sciences, demonstrate the various ideological and religious interpretations and orientations in societies where both the state and religion are crucial elements of identity. The *differend* is used to explain irresolvable conflict between two parties and that the discourse is biased against one party in favour of the hegemon. A *differend* "between two parties takes place when the regulation of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom" (Lyotard, 1988: 9). Muslim states that negotiate and control their religious legitimacy through official institutions censure internal religious opposition as extremists and treacherous elements that cause instability to the working political consensus of a moderate national religious identity.

Too often in 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, have 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 (Esposito, 1999: 105-106).

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 of religious tradition, as integral in Muslim socio-political aspirations from its own reflective perception of secular fundamentalism, ingrained and hegemonic historiography.

Yet, techniques of the modern polity like elections and the separation of powers are critically discussed along with values like human rights and freedom, through the theory of a modern Islamic order. Kramer negatively perceives this ability to absorb and integrate various "ideas, techniques, and, yes, values" (1999: 187) and argues that the modern concepts have been validated by granting them an Islamic derivation. His perception is based on the imposed distinction between religion and politics that are subject to the *shari'a* law that pave the way for a modern contextual discourse that depends on the political will of the interpreters and their orientation as to whether such interpretations fall under the hegemonic institutionalisation of official religion and the extent of its application in a "functional theory of government" (1999: 180).

This human imposed distinction is based on earlier differentiation concerning:

The fundamental (*al-asl*) and non-fundamental (*al-furu*) elements of religion, the "fixed" (*al-thabit*) and "flexible" (*al-mutaghayyir*), and their relation to the divine will and word (*al-nass*) or a structured interpretation (*ijtihad*) and consensus (*ijma'*), and a further distinction of fixed "duties towards God" (*ibadat*) and flexible "social duties" (*mua'amalat*). (1999: 177)

These distinctions are all based on the fundamental issue of representation between the divine *shari'a* (Islamic law) and human interpretation involved in jurisprudence that put forward the question of authority, po-

litical power and its impact on the theoretical consensus of an Islamic political order.

Two principles enter into the potential conflict: the yearning for a definitive system of values and norms, established by a higher authority and therefore beyond the reach of human manipulation, in terms of certainty, clarity, order and stability, and the recognition of unending change requiring the constant use of human reason, even if it be reason guided by the faith that does not question its truth or demands (Kramer, 1999: 179).

The critical discussion of Kramer understates transcultural exchanges and refuses to accept that the authentication of certain techniques and values of modern democratic polity through the theory of an Islamic order are plainly the rhetorical process that involve floating signifiers and essentially contested concepts of which contesting essentialist positions ensure incommensurability in moral discourse. But his perception of the political process that occurs directly from the issue of distinction and interpretation in an Islamic discourse of politics that involve varying sociocultural institutions and intellectual groups and individuals is strategic in revealing their limited historical representation and what Arkoun refers to as an intellectual "unthought" and "unthinkable" category of Islam and its historiography (1999: 35).

(e) Society and State. Hassan Hanafi explains this category further by reflecting on the risks to society and state, that are rooted in the generally conservative discourse of Islam through the legacy of *al-Ghazzāli*, *Ash'arī* theology and *Shāfi'ī* law at the "critical, marginal and anathematic" expense of the legacy of earlier pluralistic Muslim societies with varying "philosophical, theological, mystical, and legal trends" that are propounded by the failure of modernist Islam and secular nationalism (2002: 72-74). According to Hashmi (2002: xii-xiii), modern Muslim intellectuals must attempt to reconcile classical Islamic theory with new and various contexts of Muslim societies that involve nation-states and civil society within and amongst Muslim states, and issues of war and peace. This synthesising discourse involves a diverse group of intellectuals in the form of traditional religious scholars or the ulama and the Islamic human Scientists that go through the dialectical process and various controversies that necessarily involve national and international scenarios, Muslims and non-Muslims.

Unfortunately, the equation of Islamists with political Islam through particular socio-scientific analyses is communicated as the primary repre-

sentation at the expense of the actual plurality of discourses on political Islam in history, contemporary society and the media. For example, there is a postgraduate course in the London School of Economics and Political Science on Political Islam: From Ibn Taymiyya to Osama Bin Laden. This discourse encompasses both society and state upon which the premises and context are modern and Western by proxy, yet the distinct values applied, ensures 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 Prophet Muhammad (2002: 7), the ulama and their associated institutions of the masjid, *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. This ensures the established status of Islam as an essentialist position, with regards to religious and socio-political identity.

Generally, traditional civil society, apart from directly ensuring the application of Islamic values in the polity of an Islamic order, also mediates and extends citizen socio-political expressions (Kelsay, 2002: 3-19, 31). From a governmental perspective, its liability (civil society) indicate that the ulama has a designated role of providing or withdrawing religious legitimacy through the classical characteristics of *al-khuruj* (secession)*, al-ta'wil* (inner meaning and interpretation) and *al-shawka,* (strength) as counter-hegemonic strategies (Hanafi, 2002: 57-58). It has to be noticed that in the modern context of the civil society, in a pluralised Muslim socio-political habitas, the ulama itself is a generic class. Its multiplicity implies various forms of contending religious representations that compete and become part of the creative tension and political process for legitimate and authentic representation. Whether through the traditional ulama or Islamic human scientists (or perhaps the more neutral term of Muslim social scientists) or even a modern synthesis between the two, these representations can complement governments and their hegemonic strategies or are themselves counter-hegemonic strategies domestically and in the global scenario of Islamic discourse in modernity.

Kelsay further argues for a more inclusive Islamic civil society with regards to the citizenry of Muslims bearing in mind the possibility of "over-reaching" by both the government and the ulama in the Islamic order, for a check and balance diffusion of power amongst its constitu-

ents (2002: 32-33). This may refer to an expanded understanding of *ahl al hall wa'l 'aqd* (people of loosening and binding) *vis-à-vis* civil society for the government to consult. It is common to perceive moderate scholars as aligning themselves with the viable reformist position whereby civil society itself may be of Western origin, but its features are extendable to the values of political Islam which, for example, is already been realized in the pluralistic ethnic and cultural context of Malaysia, where Islam is the official religion (Hanafi, 2002: 56-64). The antagonism between the ulama and *muthaqaffūn* (intellectuals), as a result of dual education systems, generate the core dynamics of the discourse on Islam with Islamisation scholars aligning themselves with the ulama against secular intellectuals. They define themselves as the new interpreters in place of their traditional counter-parts (2002: 64).

CONCLUSION

I have discussed at length the relationship between power and representation, in the context of value systems, cultural autonomy and identity politics. The relationship between power and representation is a feature of hegemony and manifests itself as socio-political and cultural hegemony in the relationship between the West and Islam; and the state production of Islamic discourse in the context of the nationstate. The articulation of Islamic authenticity, whether by the hegemon or state, factions of dissent in political and civil society, and academic representation are largely dependent on the relationship between society and religion, where Islam features strongly in the social imaginary as a floating signifier entrenched in its paradigm. However, the fact that academic representation reflects upon the dependency of the institution upon the state and its co-option cast issues over the independence and reliability on the purveyors of Islamic social or human sciences, as an academic narrative and authority on the plurality of Islamic discourse in civil society. There will always be disparity between the ideational and institutional components in the achievement of its goal, in relation to the reliability and relevance of Islamic human sciences to the production and analysis of Islamic discourse as socio-political fact. Islamic human sciences, however, emerges as consistent and redemptive when viewed with soft Islamic ontology derived from negative theology and companionable with Western social sciences. This is in order to effectively begin questioning and de-

scribing the continuous transformation and representation of Islamic po-
litical will with the autonomy and fallibility of its institutional and intel-
lectual narrative.

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Notes

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