

THE THEME OF "RELEVANCE" IN THIRD WORLD HUMAN SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

The fact that the humanities and social sciences in developing societies generally originated in the West has raised the issue of the relevance of these arts and sciences to the needs and problems of Third World societies. This questioning of relevance has led, in turn, to the call for the indigenisation of knowledge in developing societies. While there has been a great deal of discussion on indigenisation, there has been little practice of indigenised humanities and social science. As a result, there are few examples of what indigenous knowledge constitutes from theoretical, methodological and empirical points of view. This paper is directed towards arriving at some conception of what indigenised knowledge is, the various forms that it takes, and its rationale.

THE HUMAN SCIENCES AS WESTERN PHENOMENA

Non-Westerners have at times been recognised as originators of ideas that preceded the development of various disciplines in the human sciences. These disciplines underwent their formative stages in the West and began to be implanted in the non-West since the last century. A prominent example of such a person is 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 AD), the Arab scholar, often referred to as the "Father of Historiography" and sometimes regarded as the true founder of sociology before Comte. His views have also been considered the precursor of ideas in many other fields such as economics, political science, anthropology and historical geography (ibn Khaldun, 1377; Gumpłowicz, 1899; Barnes, 1917; Toynbee, 1935:321-328). Taking geography as a case in point, it is clear to many that ibn Khaldun's theory

of historical development, which incorporated the role of climatic factors and topography, built the foundation for historical geography, and that he was, therefore, the discoverer of the "true scope and nature of geographical inquiry" (Kimble, 1938:180) and the first scholar to take notice of man-ecology relations (James & Martin, 1972:53). There are also a number of studies that have attempted to establish similarities between the works of ibn Khaldun and the classics of post-enlightenment Western thought (Turner, 1971; Baali & Price, 1982; Faghirzadeh, 1982; Newby, 1983; Stowasser, 1983). Nevertheless, a Khaldunian school in geography, sociology or any other discipline never came into being autochthonously in the Arab world. A qualification to this statement is that there has been some attempt to integrate ibn Khaldun's theory into existing so-called Western theories, applied in the context of the Middle East (Cheddadi, 1980; Gellner, 1981; Carre, 1988; Alatas, 1993b).

A modern Khaldunian or neo-Khaldunian historical geography or political sociology did not develop. The lack of home-grown or indigenous theories, concepts and methods in the human sciences is not an issue peculiar to the Arab world. It is true of the general condition of knowledge in the Third World. Although scholars in the Third World have for a long time justifiably attacked the ethnocentric bias of Western arts and human sciences, we have yet to see the emergence of indigenous alternative theoretical traditions outside of the West. Parekh's (1992:535) verdict that no contemporary non-Western society has produced original political theory rings true of other fields and disciplines as well. Even an intellectually lively society such as India has generally failed to Indianise the social sciences. For example, questions such as the nature of the state, state-society relations, secularism, and political morality which have been frequently debated in parliament, Gandhism, and the conservatism of Bipan Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghose and Swami Vivekananda, have all not been worked upon as material for a distinctly Indian brand of political theory in terms of ideas and problem-raising. Neither have Indians reinterpreted or reworked the theories of Marx against the backdrop of Indian history and experiences (Parekh, 1992:546-47). The list of under- or unachievements can be extended to cover various periods of the last two centuries throughout the non-West, when the social sciences began to be implanted in these societies.

This general lack of creativity and originality is in no small measure a result of the wholesale adoption of Western educational systems and philosophies in both formally as well as vicariously colonised nations. The social sciences, as they were introduced in the colonies and other peripheralised regions of the world from the nineteenth century onwards, were implanted without due recognition given to the different historical backgrounds and social circumstances of these societies, the awareness of which would have warranted modified and revamped theories and methods. Despite political emancipation, the intellectual dependence of the former colonies on Western models continued. Although the leading theoretical perspectives originating in Europe and America have not stood

the test in alien milieux, their continuing presence in university syllabi and journal article bibliographies in the non-West are testimony to the process of adaptation to the "rules of the dominant caste within the Euro-American social science game" that world social science has been undergoing (Kantowsky, 1969:129; Kazmi, 1993; Nandi, 1994).

This intellectual dependence can be seen in terms of both the structures of academic dependency as well as in terms of ideas derived from alien settings and whose relevance are in question. The former can be gauged from the relative availability of First World funding for research, the prestige attached to publishing in American and British journals, the high premium placed on a Western university education, and a host of other indicators. As far as intellectual dependency on ideas is concerned, this will be readily understood from a survey of theoretical perspectives that are in vogue across a range of disciplines in the Third World. For example, geography in former British colonies is fashioned along predominantly Anglo-Saxon theoretical traditions. While it is not the aim of this paper to detail the nature and typology of intellectual dependency, the point that the external origins of geography in particular and the social sciences in general raises the issue of the relevance of this knowledge to Third World societies must be made.

THE PROBLEM OF RELEVANCE

The implantation of disciplines and adoption of research agendas in developing countries which originated in Western social science establishments have drawn reactions among Third World scholars who have questioned the relevance of the social sciences for developing countries (Myrdal, 1957; Singh Uberoi, 1968). Disciplines dehumanised and far removed from contemporary realities have become entrenched. For example, even though it seemed that the humanistic and less technical political economy would be more relevant to Asia as it stressed the role of non-economic variables in development, it was modern economic science in

the form of abstract models that established itself in much of the Third World (Pieris, 1969:439-40). For Pieris as well as Myrdal, the abstraction of technical terms such as markets, prices, consumption and savings from the context of advanced industrialised nations may lead to valid inferences, while a similar procedure may not in the Third World. A different set of abstractions taking into account variations in attitudes, institutions, culture, and different standards of living would have to be generated (Myrdal, 1968:19-20). In the discipline of geography, more theoretical works addressing the relevance of Western-derived development models began to appear in the 1970s and 1980s (Raguraman & Huang, 1993:285). Mabogunje, (1980: 27-28) noted that Western and Western-trained students of underdevelopment attempted to craft theoretical frameworks and research agendas based on the historical experience of advanced industrialised nations which, it was held, show to the Third World the image of its own future. Critics pointed out that neo-classical inspired theories of development were irrelevant because they were ahistorical, lacked class analysis, and failed to consider the significance of spatial structure in the process of development. The nature and typology of irrelevancy has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Alatas, 1972, 1974; Alatas, 1993a) but is a field of research that remains undeveloped.

The concerns with the issue of relevance had begun in the 1950s and continue to this day. If colonialism was the context in which intellectual dependency emerged, decolonisation and formal political independence is the backdrop against which to view the question of relevance. In this respect, the experience of the discipline of geography is instructive and may be held true for other disciplines as well. Specifically, political decolonisation has been accompanied by the spread of a polycentrism in world geography in which the relevance of Western or Anglo-American models has been questioned (Hooson,1994:5-6). In Argentina in the 1800s, for example, geography was enlisted to aid in the task of nation-building, which involved clarifying the relationship between territory and national character, articulating a territorial identity, and creating the aesthetics of the patriotic landscape (Escobar, Palacios & Reboratti, 1994:352). It was

only much later that such nationalistic discourse led to the development and legitimation of geography as a discipline. In the effort to rediscover or reconstruct a national history, geography aids in creating a poetic space which defines the landscape of the nation and identifies its sacred sites and historical monuments (Smith, 1986:182, cited in Taylor, 1989:177). What is important here is that the roots of these developments are to be found in the quest for national identity.

Reflection on the question of the relevance and utility of the social sciences for non-Western societies is a consequence of the encounter between a largely Western-oriented social science tradition on the one hand, and specifically national/regional socio-political issues on the other. In the effort to address the question of relevance, a number of theoretical perspectives on the state of the social sciences in developing societies have emerged. These include the theory of *Orientalism*, eurocentrism theory, the theory of mental captivity, and academic dependency theory. These perspectives attempt to address the issue of the relevance of the social sciences to developing societies in terms of their ability to explain and understand social and historical processes.

The theory of Orientalism

The theory of *Orientalism* in the works of Edward Said (1979) is well known. He critically examines the manner in which *Orientalism* as a discourse produced the Orient “politically, socially, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively” (Said, 1979:3). The academic manifestation of *Orientalism* is a phenomenon based on the economic and political expansion of Europe. This expansion involved not only new institutions and organisations, but a corpus of theory founded on certain assumptions, beliefs and ideologies which were to underlie a set of disciplines which studied the Orient. In the name of scientific research and objectivity, Oriental economies, societies, cultures, religions and languages were studied to understand the “pathologies” afflicting these societies and to yield techniques of intervention in order that these societies can be “normalised”.

A central feature of *Orientalism* is the Occident-Orient divide in which Western societies, cultures, religions and languages are said to be superior to Eastern ones. *Orientalism* is a “style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (Said, 1979: 2). Imaginative geographies, such as the Orient as created by Europe, disregard, essentialise and denude the humanity of another culture or geographical region (Said, 1979:108). Arbitrary geographical distinctions help to maintain the difference between a familiar “our” space and an unfamiliar “their” space (Said, 1979: 54). Thus, the Chinatown of North America designates more than just a spatial location of people originating from China but is an evaluative term in which is couched the frames of mind of the West (Anderson, 1991:31). Orientalist assumptions have made their way into, for example, Marxist scholarship on the history of Arab political economy. The notion of a static Arab “Asiatic” society was contrasted with that of dynamic Europe. The notion of static Arab society precluded any further discussion that would reveal a different dynamic of Arab history that arose from the application of, say, Ibn Khaldun’s theory of state formation.

The Orientalist perspective remains important to the extent that Orientalist assumptions linger in the works of both Western and non-Western thinking alike. Concepts of development and progress have their roots in *Orientalism* and ethnocentric biases are difficult to discard even in contemporary scholarship on the Third World. For British geographers, for example, the Commonwealth is the “entry point” and is invaded and conquered with theories of development and underdevelopment (Bell, 1994:183). Here the Occident/Orient dualism takes the form of spatial dualisms such as North/South, core/periphery, and developed/developing (Bell, 1994: 184). Poverty, technological backwardness and other indicators of economic underdevelopment are seen to connote deprivation while the solutions to these “problems” are seen in positive terms (Bell, 1994:184). The Orientalist dualism of progress/backwardness is perpetuated and the result is the promulgation of economic theory and policy that prepares the natural and cultural landscapes of developing societies to be recipients of First World commodities, aid and ideologies.

The theory of Eurocentrism

Some years after the appearance of *Orientalism*, Samir Amin’s (1989) *Eurocentrism* was published. This work sought to illustrate how *Eurocentrism* was a systematic and important distortion which influences social theories and ideologies in the contemporary world. Amin defines *Eurocentrism* as a theory of world history which posits Europe as unique and superior. Politically, it involves the legitimacy of European expansionism through such notions as “manifest destiny” and “the white man’s burden”. These notions live on in contemporary scholarship. An example would be works on foreign policy that justify American intervention in Vietnam and other parts of the world on the basis of the moral superiority of the United States.

Regarding the question of why capitalism appeared in Europe before it did elsewhere, this is due to the Greek heritage which predisposed Europe to rationality. Greece gave rise to rational philosophy while the Orient was never able to extricate itself from metaphysics (Amin, 1989:91). Arabo-Islamic philosophy is accordingly relegated to the function of transmitting the Greek heritage to Europe. The impact of the Greek heritage was the creation of an honest bourgeoisie, free from the medieval religious prejudice (Amin, 1989:91-92).

A fundamental part of *Eurocentrism* is the ideological construct of the “Orient”. But Amin (1989:101-02) criticises Said’s work on *Orientalism* for “not having gone far enough in certain respects, and having gone too far in others”. Said is faulted for having denounced *Eurocentrism* without suggesting another system of explanation to account for the facts that Eurocentric theory explains. Said is also guilty of provincialism in that he denies the right of a European Orientalist to compare Islam to the Christian Arian heresy (Said, 1979:62-63; Amin, 1989:103).

The Eurocentric ideology of development is a prop for capitalist expansion and the centralisation of surplus, both of which constitute obstacles to the progress of peoples that are the victims of development. The solution is delinking which involves analysing and appraising Third World

prospects by a yardstick different from that of *Eurocentrism* (Amin, 1989:115).

The theory of mental captivity

It could be said that *Eurocentrism* is reflected in the state of mental captivity. Mental captivity or the phenomenon of the captive mind refers to a way of thinking that is dominated by Western thought in an imitative and uncritical manner. Uncritical imitation permeates all levels of scientific intellectual activity, affecting problem-setting, analysis, abstraction, generalisation, conceptualisation, description, explanation and interpretation (Alatas, 1972; 1974). Among the characteristics of the captive mind are the inability to be creative and raise original problems, the inability to devise original analytical methods, and alienation from the main issues of indigenous society. The captive mind is trained almost entirely in the Western sciences, reads the works of Western authors, and is taught predominantly by Western teachers, whether in the West itself or through their works available in local centres of education. Mental captivity is also found in the suggestion of solutions and policies. Furthermore, it reveals itself at the levels of theoretical as well as empirical work.

An example of mental captivity in the social sciences is reflected in studies on the Mongol conquest of China by Western-trained scholars which are based on the application of various theoretical perspectives that had been developed in the social sciences. Without denying the utility of these approaches, a compelling case can be made for the cogency of ibn Khaldun's theory of state formation for debates on the role of nomads in Chinese history. Khaldunian theory offers a framework within which to understand the dynamics of the Mongol conquest of China. The Yuan dynasty (1280-1367) was the first foreign dynasty to rule over the whole of China, with the process of conquest commencing in the early 1200s. While there are numerous factors that explain the success of Mongol campaigns of conquest, one of direct relevance to Khaldunian theory is the tribal kin social structure of the Mongol pastoral nomads.

A fundamental concept in Khaldunian theory is that of *'asabiyya* or group feeling. This refers to the sentiment of solidarity among the members of a group that is derived from agnatic ties found in tribal social organisations. Greater social solidarity or *'asabiyya* among pastoral nomads meant that they could over-run settled populations and establish their own dynasties. But along with sedentary status came a diminution in *'asabiyya* and military strength, leaving them vulnerable to conquest by new waves of pre-urban nomads with their *'asabiyya* relatively intact.

'Asabiyya is only partly derived from agnatic ties. Beyond the social psychological aspect of *'asabiyya*, there are the material manifestations. *'Asabiyya* refers to the authority that is wielded by a tribal chieftain that derives, in addition, from his control over resources resulting from trade, plunder and pillage (Lacoste, 1984: 107). For ibn Khaldun then, *'asabiyya* referred to three things: kinship ties; a socially-cohesive common conscience that provided a shared idiom legitimising the chieftain's aspirations for authority; and the material strength of the chieftain through trade, booty, pillage and conquest.

Diminishing *'asabiyya*, then, refers to the circumstances under which a chieftain is no longer able to command tribal support by appealing to kinship ties and due to the corrosion in social cohesion that results from assimilation to sedentary society. With diminishing *'asabiyya* comes the erosion of the power of the ruling dynasty until it is finally conquered by an incoming tribal group with superior *'asabiyya*. Such is the nature of the Khaldunian cycle (Lacoste, 1984:154-55). A Khaldunian perspective may be able to provide an understanding of the dynamics of the genesis of tribal solidarity along the steppe polities adjacent to the Chinese empires as well as the weakening of sedentarised Mongol *khans*.

To what extent Khaldunian theory can be the basis of a framework within which to explain nomad-Chinese relations is a matter for historical geography and sociology. The point here is that this is part of the effort to use non-Western sources

for theory and concepts. Since mental captivity defines the research agenda and the theoretical tools to be used, ibn Khaldun had been unwittingly kept out.

Academic dependency theory

The existence of such cultural problems as *Orientalism*, *Eurocentrism* and mental captivity is not to deny that there are also structures of academic dependency that link core and peripheral social scientists. Mental captivity exists within this context of dependency. Academicians in the periphery are dependent on their counterparts in the core for research and development funds. Scholarly journals are controlled mainly by academic institutions in core countries. The various aspects of academic dependency have been discussed by others (Altbach, 1977; Weeks, 1990). It is not only economies but organised educational systems which are in a state of dependency *via-a-vis* industrialised nations. In this sense, dependency reflects the current inequality in wealth and power distribution not only in economic and military terms but education as well. This is particularly true in the design of curricula, and the production and distribution of knowledge. In terms of foreign aid in science, Singh Uberoi (1968:120) emphasised that it:

upholds the system of foreign dominance in all matters of scientific and professional life and organization...It subordinates the national science of the poor to the national and international science of the rich. It confirms our dependence and helplessness and will not end them.

Developing countries, therefore, are at the periphery of the world educational and intellectual systems, intellectual and educational power being concentrated in the core. The result is that "industrialised nations dominate the world's research production, mass media, information systems, and advanced training facilities" (Altbach, 1977:188). A case in point is the marginalisation of research on or from the Third World as reflected in the parochialism of British geography (Sidaway, 1993: 299). The South accounts for 75 percent of the

world's population but this is not reflected in the percentage of geographers specialising in Third World regions in British geography departments (Potter, 1993:292). Among the main papers appearing in the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* between 1989 and 1992, there were only 14 out of a total of 122 (11.5 per cent) that dealt with Third World issues (Potter, 1993: 292).

INDIGENISATION: A PLURALITY OF CALLS

The conceptualisation of the problem of relevance, imitation and academic dependency has not been a central concern in the social sciences in developing countries. Nevertheless, the state of the social sciences throughout the developing world, as described above, has brought forth various attempts in academia to comprehend the origins, nature and functions of irrelevancy and to suggest and call for the development of indigenous social science traditions. Indigenisation, however, is an amorphous term. It refers neither to a theoretical perspective nor to an intellectual movement. Rather, it is a loose category that subsumes the works of various authors from a wide variety of disciplines in the human sciences, all of which are concerned with the problem of irrelevancy and the generation of alternative scientific traditions.

Furthermore, indigenisation as a descriptive category, is also used here to refer to those writers who grapple with the questions of irrelevancy, imitation, academic dependency and make the call for alternative traditions without necessarily invoking the term indigenisation. Later on, I shall have occasion to delineate the features of indigenized social science by drawing upon several writings spread across a number of disciplines, which could be collectively referred to as indigenised human and social sciences. The call to indigenisation has taken a number of forms. A cursory glance at a number of disciplines reveals that there has been some thinking on the theme and the enumeration which follows does not claim to present mutually exclusive categories of such thought. The aim here is only to present a preliminary list of approaches in indigenisation

thought with a more serious attempt at typology to be made in future.

The call for an autonomous social science

First of all, there are works that make the call for an autonomous social science tradition rooted in the Third World context. While this idea has existed in Asia for more than 30 years, it has not been the basis of a dominant tendency in Asian social sciences. In the case of Southeast Asian history, Bastin was quite pessimistic about the possibility of writing Southeast Asian history from a Southeast Asian point of view. This would require a:

revolutionary reappraisal of existing historical methods and techniques, and of existing historical concepts and periodization. But that particular task, which is so often talked about, is fraught with so many difficulties and hazards that it remains unattempted (Bastin, 1959:22).

For Bastin, the immersion of Southeast Asian scholars of their history in the Western intellectual tradition would seem to preclude the possibility of writing Southeast Asian history from an indigenous point of view (Bastin, 1959:22). He seems to discount the possibility of what Collingwood calls “emphatic understanding” or what Windelband, Dilthey, Rickert and Weber call *verstehen* as means by which Southeast Asian history can be understood from a Malay, Javanese or Thai point of view (Alatas, 1964:250-1). For Smail (1961:75), on the other hand, there is only one thought-world and that “whatever the modern Asian historian can achieve in the way of an Asian-centric perspective can equally be achieved by the Western historian”. By Asian-centric history is meant a history in which Asians should be in the foreground, and attention should be displaced from the colonial relationship to domestic history (Smail, 1961:102).

Here the question of an autonomous approach was mis-specified. The call for an autonomous approach in history and the social sciences should not be confused with the suggestion to merely highlight local problems with the appropriate

methodology. It refers to the formation of a social science tradition which involves the raising and treatment of original problems and new research questions as well as the generation of new concepts (Alatas, 1979:265). It also involves the critique of positivist social science to the extent that models of society epistemologically founded on the physical sciences obstruct the interpretive understanding of local situations. Such an anti-positivist tradition, has made its way into the disciplines of psychology, sociology and geography in the form of phenomenology.

In geography, however, it has received relatively little attention. One of the few to make explicit use of phenomenology is Carl Sauer in an essay entitled “The morphology of landscape”. The study of landscape in geography is to encompass the phenomenology of landscape (Sauer, 1967, cited in Relph, 1970:195). The objective of such a phenomenology is to “grasp in all of its meanings and color the varied terrestrial scene” known as landscape (Sauer, 1967:320). This entails viewing landscape as more than just a scene viewed by an observer. Landscape includes the objectifications of humans as an expression and reflection of the scene (Sauer, 1967: 321). The use of phenomenology in geography lies in the notion that nature is encountered in relation to the practical pursuits of humans and can be understood only in terms of human attitudes and intentions (Relph, 1970:196).

Historical geography has long been dominated by an empiricist tradition which entailed the examination of the past as it “really” was (Gregory, 1978: 161). As such, it is based on the assumption that human behaviour is rational, predictable and calculable and can therefore be measured objectively. Phenomenology, on the other hand, views humans in terms of their consciousness, subjectivity, and intentionality as they impact on the transformation of the natural and cultural landscape (Sauer, 1967: 343; Relph, 1970:198). The development of counter-positivist approaches such as phenomenology is important in the development of autonomous social science traditions to the extent that they involve the grasping of meanings that are beyond the scope of positivist science.

The call for endogenous intellectual creativity

This was the subject of the “Asian Symposium on Intellectual Creativity in Endogenous Culture” which was jointly sponsored by the United Nations University and Kyoto University and held in Kyoto, Japan in 1978 (Abdel-Malek & Pandeya, 1981). Endogenisation refers to the effort at intellectual creativity in the context of original problem-raising, the generation of new concepts and theories, and the synthesis between Western and non-Western knowledge. For example, both the creative application of Marx’s theory of the Asiatic mode of production (Wieggersma, 1982) and a Khaldunian theory of social change (Alatas, 1993b) to the study of Asian history should be seen as part of endogenous intellectual creativity as the “endogenous” here is “understood as referring to the effort at intellectual creativity rather than to the constituent elements of the accomplished result” or the material used (Alatas, 1981:462). The selective assimilation of exogenous elements should be considered as a part of endogenous activity as both the exogenous and the endogenous are required in the effort to address the problem of irrelevancy.

The decolonization of the social sciences

In many former European colonies, there was a need for the colonial administration to have broad ranging and detailed information of the societies they dominated. The social sciences were an indispensable element of colonial capitalism. Whole societies were literally catalogued, with information on cities and villages, tribes and ethnic groups, religious orders, historical origins, statecraft and economy all meticulously noted. As the colonialist nature of the social sciences did not disappear upon independence, it was suggested that the first task postcolonial intellectuals were called upon to perform was the decolonisation of the cultural domain, including academia (ben Jelloun, 1985:70). Decolonisation presupposed independence from the science of the former colonial master and a critical scientific policy founded upon the comparative study of underanalysed (or rather badly analysed) countries (Khatibi, 1967).

As long as the social sciences were not decolonised, postcolonial societies would only participate in the development of the social sciences as objects of research undertaken largely by Americans and Europeans. The decolonisation of the social sciences meant, therefore, a rupture with Western culture. This necessitated, first of all, that postcolonial scholars not only took charge of their reality but examined and challenged the scientific and political foundations of work on their own societies undertaken by colonial or colonised minds (Zghlal & Karoui, 1973).

In geography, this meant, among other things, critiquing the fundamental concept of cultural diffusion. Diffusionism, or the belief that culture changes only by contact with an outside source, resonated with modernisation theory’s emphasis on the diffusion of transnational capital and its associated ideology, attitudes and political culture from the West to underdeveloped regions as the prescription for development (Blaut, 1994:174). Both diffusionism and the ideological underpinnings of modernisation theory have been critiqued by geographers (Blaut, 1970, 1973, 1977, 1994; Brookfield, 1975). Such critiques take their cue from the political economy literature that includes both the “circulationist” and “productionist” schools (Higgot, 1980, cited in Forbes, 1981: 70). Circulationists (Emmanuel, 1972; Amin, 1974, 1975; Wallerstein, 1974, 1979, 1980) focus on the mechanisms of exchange of the world-economy while productionists (Meillassoux, 1972; Godelier, 1974; Rey, 1975) look at the structure of production within the periphery.

These counter-modernisation theories are, in Blaut’s (1973:22) words, “intensely geographic”, although few of their adherents are geographers. He suggests that the theory of underdevelopment redraws the *mappa mundi* in that it presents an alternative world historical atlas since 1492. In contrast to modernisation theory which views the causes of underdevelopment as internal and cultural, and in need of First World external aid and investment, the theory of underdevelopment postulates that it is due to the evolution of a global system of exploitation which has been growing and spreading since 1492. Blaut (1973) isolates the significant moments of this

evolution in terms of plates in a revised edition of the historical atlas. Plate I depicts a traditional, feudal Europe in 1492. Plate II is Europe of 1789 when European merchants are gaining political control over their societies and spearheading industrialisation. Plates III and IV are the New World in 1820 and the Old World a hundred years later respectively. They both display the classical colonialist form of exploitation. Finally, Plate V is the present, depicting the newest phase of underdevelopment, that is, neo-colonialism (Blaut, 1973: 23). In Tunisia, such decolonisation was expressed in the desire of researchers to direct the changes which the social and political structures were undergoing (ben Jelloun, 1985:71). The decolonisation of sociology in North Africa and the subsequent birth of Maghrebi sociology meant that research was to be directed to local situations without commitment to institutionalised theories, such as functionalism, which serve to legitimise the established order. It also meant that the researcher had to avoid voluntary incarceration in the ivory tower in order to be continuously in touch with social reality. As a result, sociologists became suspect as a potential challenge to the state (ben Jelloun, 1985:72). Thus, it was recognised that the decolonisation of sociology meant that sociology was to become politicised if it was to become relevant.

The resistance to colonialist discourse has also taken place in the humanities. Recognising that literary discourse is a great seducer, Zawiah Yahya calls for a resistance that provides an alternative reading of European texts that seek to demystify colonialist power, resist the colonialist writer's marginalisation of the native voice, and destabilise the ideological structure of the text (Zawiah, 1994:17-19). Arguing that the most effective way of deconstructing Western discourse is to use its very own tools of critical theory, Zawiah wants to not only dismantle colonialism's signifying system but also to articulate the silences of the native by liberating the suppressed in discourse (Zawiah, 1994:27). As in the case of the human sciences, in the arts and humanities we also see the use of "the language of the oppressor" while at the same time rejecting colonialist definitions and transcending the boundaries of colonialist discourse (Boehmer, 1995:105-06).

The globalisation of the social sciences

A good example of discourse on the globalisation of social science comes from geography. Johnston (1985:325) argues for the globalization of geography and against its myopia and parochialism. Globalisation here refers to the presentation of the world in its full diversity for the aim of creating international awareness and peace (Johnston, 1985:334; Taylor, 1993:182). This must be distinguished from the global view that arose in the imperialist context (Hudson, 1977) to which the modern discipline of geography owes its origins. There, globalisation referred to the exploration and trade activities of the Europeans in the sixteenth century, when much of the non-European world was "discovered", visited, explored (Taylor, 1993:182-83) and, finally, colonised.

European political and economic superiority was reflected in the geographical monologue in which Europe "told the rest who and what they were in its new world" (Taylor, 1993:184). As geography began to consolidate itself as a university discipline by the end of the nineteenth century, it founded itself on the social theory of environmentalism (Taylor, 1993: 185). Such a globalised discipline was to constitute a tool of imperialism in terms of, for example, mapping regions of the world by economic value (Herbertson, 1910). This presupposed a division of the world into a white, civilised core and a non-white barbaric periphery (Taylor, 1993:186-87). If the formative period of the first globalised geography was the end of the last century, the second globalised geography is being thought through at the end of ours. The beginnings of this are to be seen in the interest geographers are taking in global issues such as the food problem, transnational corporations and the international division of labour (Tarrant, 1980; Taylor & Thrift, 1982; Grigg, 1985; Dicken, 1986). The "geo" in geography was rediscovered in the 1980s (Taylor, 1993:191).

While this new geography is still in its formative stage, whatever its content might be, it would no longer be a discipline in which Europeans were the subject and the rest of the world the object. The geographical monologue would be replaced by a

dialogue between many geographies as there would not be one objective description of a place but alternative geographies (Taylor, 1993:194). These alternatives shy away from the spatial dualisms of North/South, core/periphery and developed/developing which tend to “impose a negative uniformity upon non-Western societies” (Bell, 1994: 184). What is needed, therefore, are alternative historical and contemporary geographies and, more generally, social sciences which are able to transcend these dualisms that account for the diversity in political economy within the Third World (Bell, 1994:188).

Furthermore, alternative geographies and other social sciences also question fundamental concepts, tenets and processes of modernity such as the superiority of industrialisation and technological progress and highlight varieties of indigenous knowledge utilised by communities coping with ecological change. The goal of alternative theories is to reveal the diversity in historical, social and geographical contexts of the Third World. There are alternatives to the established corpus of theories, concepts and methods that can be indigenously generated.

Sacralisation

The sacralisation of knowledge project is to be found in many of the religious traditions of the world including Christianity and Islam. The challenge of secularism had led Christian social theory to make a compromise with secular rationality in terms of accepting the readings of reality provided by the human sciences and then bringing them into theology and social ethics (Troeltsch, 1931; Milbank, 1991). Sacralised social theory, by way of a political theology, challenges the direct relationship between the state and the individual by calling for the decentralisation of power. Such a mode of thinking, when transferred to the Third World, emerges as liberation theology which attempts to both rediscover the social meaning of the Gospel for Third World countries waging wars against injustice as well as combine theology with a materialist interpretation of history (Gutierrez, 1983; Boff, 1985).

The Islamisation of knowledge aims to restore religious experience and spirituality to its rightful place in knowledge-seeking activities by means of the sacralization of the human sciences. These are understood to have been desacralised or secularised in the West. Sacralised knowledge or *scientia sacra* is knowledge that “lies at the heart of every revelation and is the center of that circle which encompasses and defines tradition” (Nasr, 1981:130). The relative insignificance of sacred knowledge today points to the need for a science which can “relate the various levels of knowledge once again to the sacred” (Nasr, 1993:173).

Modern science, with its rejection of the varied facets of a particular reality, reduced symbols to facts and was partly responsible for the desacralisation of knowing and being that is so characteristic of the modern world (Nasr, 1981:212). On the other hand, for Muslims, the universe was seen as an Islamic cosmos to be apprehended by Muslim minds and eyes transformed by the spirit and form of the Qur’an. All knowledge is to be integrated into a totality in accordance with the doctrine of *tauhid* (Unity of God) (Nasr, 1981:8-9). What is important here is that Christian social theory, and Islamised social science had emerged as a result of their respective religious traditions being reinterpreted in some parts of the Third World and combined with modern social thought.

Indigenisation

The various attempts to address the issue of the irrelevancy of Western forms of discourse and to generate alternative and, therefore, more global theories can be collectively referred to as the call to indigenisation. Indigenisation “honestly alludes to outside contact by emphasizing the need for indigenizing the exogenous elements to suit local requirements; whether this is done by the ‘indigenous’ or by ‘outsiders’ is a mere detail” (Atal, 1981:193). It is obvious from the above discussion that the call to indigenisation does not simply suggest approaching indigenous problems merely by modifying what has already been developed in Western contexts. Rather, the claim is that theories, concepts and methodologies can be derived from

the historical experiences and cultural practices of the various non-Western civilisations (Fahim & Helmer, 1980; Alatas, 1993a). In this sense, the Western social sciences are indigenous although they are not confined to the study of the societies of their origin. Decolonisers, globalisers, endogenisers, proponents of sacralised knowledge, and alternative seekers all indigenise to the extent that they engage in deliberate efforts to develop theories and concepts derived from indigenous, local and regional historical experiences and cultural practices.

In the West, the organic and mechanistic images of society are traced back to Plato and Aristotle respectively and are deeply rooted in Western consciousness. The human sciences, as they developed in the West, are also informed by metaphors of the text and drama. Indigenisers of knowledge generally do not wish to discard Western social science, but wish to open up the possibilities for indigenous philosophies, epistemologies and histories to become bases for knowledge.

THE LEVELS OF INDIGENISATION

The discussion above exemplifies the various attempts to comprehend the different facets of irrelevancy and to suggest and call for the development of more relevant social science traditions in the Third World. All these attempts may come under the descriptive category of indigenisation. The term, however, is ambiguous and it is necessary to present the scope and meaning of indigenisation in a more systematic manner.

On the whole, there has been a great deal of discussion on indigenisation, as opposed to the actual practice of indigenised social science. As a result, there are few examples of what indigenous social science is from theoretical, methodological and empirical points of view. Neither the conception nor the practice of indigenised social science has been high on the agenda of those who advocate indigenisation. Nevertheless, it would be possible to arrive at some conception of what indigenised social science is as well as explore various attempts to create indigenous social science in terms of a number of levels.

Meta-analysis

This refers to the unmasking of worldviews as well as the philosophical foundations underlying works in the arts and human sciences. An example is the work on the mental images that Westerners had of the Malay world as seen through colonial fiction, suggesting that these are “largely conditioned by a culture-squinted eye” (Kong & Savage, 1986:40).

Indigenisation at this level also examines the realm of the pre-theoretical. A case in point would be a critical examination of the traditional-modern dichotomy that characterises a variety of theories of development. Activities at this level also include the examination of the hand that the various disciplines had in voicing colonial and neo-colonial aspirations. Some early work along these lines has been done with respect to the French geographical movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century (McKay, 1943) while more recently the hazards of such work have been pointed out (Driver, 1992).

At this level, therefore, indigenised works would include the various theoretical perspectives on the state of the social sciences in the Third World such as those of *Orientalism*, *Eurocentrism*, academic dependency, and the captive mind. These perspectives address the issue of the relevance of the social sciences to the Third World, including what is meant by relevance and irrelevancy. These are included under the project of indigenisation because they provide critical perspectives from which to view the social sciences both in terms of ideas and the institutionalisation of disciplines. They provide the starting point for indigenisation.

Theory

At the theoretical level, indigenisation refers to the critical study of received theories and concepts as well as the generation of concepts and theories from indigenous historical experiences and cultural practices. Among the few examples of indigenous theories that are known is the work of Akiwowo (1990) on the African concept of *asuwada* in connection with the development of an African

sociology of knowledge. Indeed, the concept of the "Third World" or the category "developing society" is itself open to critique and re-examination at this level of indigenisation (Abdalla, 1978). This is partly suggested by the fact that there is an increasing diversity within the Third World across a wide range of economic and social indicators (Burn, 1981). Other examples follow.

Abdul Samad Hadi (1983) suggests that Western theories of internal migration are based on the assumption that the movement of people involves a change in residence from one administrative unit to another. The movement is unidirectional with a tendency not to return to the place of origin. In the Third World, however, such movements are not widespread. Internal migration tends to be circular and migration to urban areas is temporary (Abdul Samad, 1983:64-65). Such information cannot be gleaned from reports and census data. This is partly due to the nature of questions asked in surveys. Abdul Samad directs attention to local concepts of migration such as *pindah* or *hijrah* (permanent migration), and *merantau* (leaving the state to earn a living with eventual return) (Abdul Samad, 1983:74-75) which reveal the circular nature of internal migration.

Another example is Batra's (1980) work which poses the question of Islamic revival in terms of a theory of social cycle derived from Sarkar's philosophy of history. It is an attempt to develop and apply a theory of social cycle derived from the Hindu tradition of thought. Societies are divided into four categories which correspond to the four groupings of the caste system. They are the *shudras*, *khatri*, *vipras* and *vashyas*. Each group reflects a type of mind, action and outlook towards life. The *shudran* mental type is completely dominated by the surrounding environment while the *khatrian* mind is "moved by the spirit of controlling matter" (Batra, 1980:7-8). *Vipras* are intellectuals while *vashyas* seek enjoyment from the accumulation of material possessions (Batra, 1980:8-9). Society is said to evolve over time in terms of four distinct eras, each of which is dominated by one of these four mental types (Batra, 1980:11). *Khatri*, *vipra* and *vashya* mental types in turn dominate the ruling class. The *shudras* never become members of the

ruling class as they are unable to control material forces or the physical environment (Batra, 1980:7, 11), but a *shudra*-dominated society is bound to be disorderly and lacking in leadership, guidance and authority (Batra, 1980:13). What is interesting about Batra's work is that it is not confined to the study of Hindu society but is presented as a universal theory of social change which, in the work in question, is applied to the study of the evolution of Islamic society.

Other examples include the neo-Khaldunian theory of the state, the concept of marginality developed by the Mexican social scientist, Pablo Gonzales Casanova (1965), the study of the concepts of despot and despotism (Venturi, 1963), the study of the geographical ideas of the tenth century Arab *ibn Haukal* (el Gowhary, 1964), the identification of geographical knowledge in the Upanishads (Amravati, 1956), the critical analysis of the notion of "plural" society as applied to Malaysia (Mullard & Brennan, 1978), the critique of the concept of diffusion (Blaut, 1994), and arguments for the reorientation of geographical theories of Third World development (Brookfield, 1975).

Empirical studies

At the empirical level, indigenisation would refer to a focus on problems more relevant to the Third World that have hitherto been neglected. An example would be a focus on Asian approaches to human resource development and utilisation (Cummings, 1995). This involves the study of the central components of the Asian approach such as the emphasis on both indigenous value transmission and the implantation of foreign technology, the prioritisation of engineering and science at the levels of secondary and tertiary education, and the prominent role of the state in manpower planning and job placement, and in the coordination of science and technology (Cummings, 1995:67-68).

Another example is the study of how indigenous knowledge of the environment is acquired by adolescents (Potter & Wilson, 1990). This involves studying how people acquire knowledge of space and the way mental maps are formed by individuals

living in Barbados, West Indies. A sample of 112 school children between the ages of 11 and 17 in Barbados were shown an outline map of the coast and the boundaries of the 11 administrative parishes that made up the country. They were given 30 minutes to indicate all the features and places that they thought were important (Potter & Wilson, 1990:57-58). At one level, the aim of such an exercise is to allow subjects to speak for themselves rather than consider them as mere data to be explained.

Applied social science

At the level of applied social science, indigenisation means specifying remedies, plans and policies, and working with voluntary organisations and other non-governmental organisation, as well as with government in implementation. The problem can be seen to exist at two levels.

First, there is the problem of translating theory into practice. Consider the case of urban planning. Based on an Indonesian case study, McTaggart and Stormont (1975) showed how Western urban principles were blindly applied to a country with a very different social structure. For example, following Western notions of the family, the provision of housing was viewed in terms of allocating as many houses as there were families in spite of the possibility that the predominance of the extended family system may require fewer houses to be built (McTaggart & Stormont, 1975: 43).

Second, there is the question of the access that the social science community has to policy-makers. While it is generally agreed that development is meaningful only when it involves the full participation of citizens in public affairs, whether this refers to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), professional associations, the mass media, trade unions, and others, the extent to which social scientists impact upon interest and pressure groups is limited. However, if NGOs are to be effective, they must combine sophisticated research with insightful policy analysis and vocal advocacy of change. For this, there has to be a close working relationship among NGOs, academics, professionals

and government agencies. Therefore, to a large extent, the success of applied social science depends not only on the ability to absorb indigenous and traditional knowledge into modern planning and policy implementation (Clarke, 1990; Dei, 1993; Osunade, 1994) but also on the political constraints under which social scientists work.

CONCLUSION: THE PROBLEM OF NATIVISM

The extent to which all the above attempts to “correct” Eurocentric discourse constitute centrisms of their own must be examined. The vast majority of proponents of indigenisation would distance themselves from what has been referred to as nativism, orientalism in reverse (Amin, 1989; Moghadam, 1989; Abaza & Stauth, 1990), or academic nationalism (van Dijk, 1994). More often than not, calls for indigenous, autonomous, or decolonised social science are indistinguishable from calls for globalised or internationalised social science. Therefore, the so-called “dilemma of two alternative ‘calls’: to maintain international standards of scholarship by focusing on internationally recognized methodologies and theory-building orientations; and to do work relevant to the daily lives of their own peoples” (Quah, 1993:95), does or should not exist.

“Going native” involves celebrating absolute opposition between Western and Eastern culture, and often results in a wholesale rejection of Western thought. Indigenisation, on the other hand, is simultaneously the effort to universalise the social sciences. The idea is not to create mirror opposites (Moghadam, 1989:82) of Eurocentric scholarship. The social sciences which aspire to be more universal consist of many cultural voids. Indigenisation means filling these voids by looking at the various non-Western philosophies, cultures and historical experiences as sources of inspiration, insights, concepts and theories for the social sciences. The Western social sciences are truly indigenous in the sense that they arose as a result of responses to European social and political revolutions and are rooted, at least partially, in medieval absorption of Arabo-Islamic philosophies.

The implicit assumption here is that there is a pluralistic and rhetorical dimension to truth and that, therefore, the source of truth construction should not be restricted to one civilisation.

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