Culture and Knowledge: The Politics of Islamization of Knowledge as a Postmodern Project? The Fundamentalist Claim to De-Westernization

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When Muslims think of knowledge, they think of what may be called 'knowledge for living', whereas when a Westerner thinks of knowledge, it is mainly of 'knowledge for power', that is, such knowledge as enables one to control natural and material objects and human individuals and societies. It is in respect of knowledge for living, consisting of religious and moral values, that Islam claims finality and self-sufficiency. . . . Muslims show surprisingly little interest in other forms of knowledge, even those which would be useful to them for practical purposes. (Watt, 1988: 13-14)

As the globalization process of the world touched on the civilizational area called the 'world of Islam' and integrated it into the evolving modern global structures, Muslims started to develop curiosity about the invading powers. They realized that European power was related to superior modern knowledge. Despite the culturally determined basic differences between secular Western and Muslim religious understanding of knowledge, as addressed above by Watt, early Muslim reformists like Muhammad Abduh were, at the turn of the nineteenth century, at pains to introduce modern sciences into Islam while making an effort to find ways to establish harmony between modern knowledge and Islamic culture. They wanted to overcome the gap between Muslim and European knowledge (Adams, 1933/1968). The failure of Islamic reforms gave rise to secular approaches in the first half of this century. Secular nationalism gained ground and superseded Islam politically in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1924. Until the Arab defeat in 1967 in the Six Day War secular nationalism was the prevailing political ideology. The 1967 defeat marked the

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failure of the secular model and resulted in a crisis of the secular nation-state. The Islamic revival has been a result of this crisis (Khoury, 1983). The modern nation-state was an imposition on the world of Islam (Tibi, 1990). The 1970s were characterized by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism which is not *only* a political movement aimed at warding off the political and economic hegemony of the West. It also includes a cultural strategy. The 'Islamization of knowledge' is a basic formula in this fundamentalist agenda. It is an expression of the 'Revolt against the West'. This revolt is 'the reassertion of non-Western peoples of their traditional and indigenous cultures, as exemplified in Islamic fundamentalism'. It is not simply a revolt against Western domination as was the case during the decolonization period. The current fundamentalist revolt is directed against Western norms and values as such. This concern is put in the following very straightforward manner by the intellectual father of Islamic fundamentalism Sayyid Qutb:

The battle is between believers and their enemies . . . it is not political or economic in nature . . . at the hub of the conflict is the involved belief at issue. The related options are: either unbelief or belief which means either to accept *jahiliyya* [Islamic term for ignorance, pre-Islamic age, B.T] or Islam. (Qutb, 1989: 201)

Thus, the Islamization of knowledge is a 'battle against unbelief', a reassertion of the local against the global knowledge and the invading civilization related to it.

The question that has to be asked in this context is as to whether there can be global knowledge related to the structural process of globalization which is the hallmark of the late twentieth century. How can we assess Islamic fundamentalism in its effort to ward off globalization of modern knowledge? Can we involve postmodernism (Gellner, 1992) in this debate? Can we identify a postmodern project in the knowledge-centred Islamic 'revolt against the West'?

Introductory Remarks: The Scope of the Enquiry

In fact, Muslims themselves are involved in the debate on modernity/postmodernity in the context of their revolt against the West (al-Jundi, 1987). Leading fundamentalist scribes, such as al-Qaradawi, rebuff Westernization, without dismissing modernity however, thus acknowledging the distinction between fundamentalism and traditionalism (al-Qaradawi, 1988: 107ff). They only reject modernity when it comes in the shape of Western dominance.

For them 'Western epistemology' is a part of this dominance. In a recent study Akbar Ahmed made an Islamic claim to postmodernity, though fully aware of the fact that postmodernity — like modernity — is equally a Western concept. In his view 'the Muslim modernist phase was engendered by European colonialism' (Ahmed, 1992: 29). Muslims submitted to modernity 'as a drive to acquire Western education, technology and industry. Ideas of democracy . . . were discussed . . . with reservation.' This statement tacitly supports the main idea of this article that modernity is composed of an institutional dimension (Giddens, 1990: 55ff) and of a cultural project (Habermas, 1990). In reality, basically the institutional dimension has been globalized, but not cultural modernity, even though this possibility was not dismissed in the early post-colonial period. Attitudes have been changing ever since. In our current age of global fundamentalism (Marty and Appleby, 1991), cultural reassertion comprises the rejection of alien knowledge, which means banishing cultural modernity. Simultaneously, Islamic fundamentalists approve the adoption of alien instruments, i.e. modern science and technology (Tibi, 1993c: 73–102). In my writings I have coined the term 'the Islamic dream of semi-modernity' for this Muslim fundamentalist ambivalence vis-a-vis modernity and its tendency to split it into two components. For some Islamic writers this duality is an expression of postmodernity: Islamic modernism is described as an adaptation to Western culture, while Islamic postmodernism is viewed as an expression of the rejection of the West. Thus, 'Islamic and Western postmodernisms may have little . . . in common' (Ahmed, 1992: 5, 31–2). To Ahmed, global knowledge, as related to global civilization, can not be acceptable to Muslims, inasmuch as it is an expression of 'the West's global civilisation' (Ahmed, 1992: 99).

In most of the fundamentalist writings published in Arabic, the enmity between 'the West' and the 'world of Islam' is defined in terms of the mutual incompatibility of the two rival cultural conceptions of knowledge. For the fundamentalists, only Muslim knowledge can be globally valid. The superiority of Islam is believed to be based on the superior Islamic knowledge of the world as expressed in Koranic revelation. Islamic fundamentalists no longer acknowledge the superiority of modern knowledge as once did the Muslim Tahtawi last century in his Paris diary. Therefore, contemporary Muslim fundamentalists argue that the focus of the Western attempts to weaken Islam is directed against Islamic knowledge,

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which is believed to be superior to that of the West. Viewed in this manner, Western imperialism in the abode of Islam primarily consists of a *ghazu fikri* (intellectual invasion) (Jarisha and Zaibaq, 1978). Thus, the paramount concern of Muslim fundamentalists is to undo the intellectual impact of the West on Muslims, primarily in the fields of knowledge, as a major step towards re-establishing true Islamic knowledge necessary for the articulation of the *hall al-Islami* (Islamic solution) as an Islamic alternative.¹ Currently, this is the mainstream intellectual view that is dominant in the Arab part of the Muslim world. The revival of political Islam is viewed as part of a cultural programme for the 'de-Westernization of knowledge'.

To deal specifically with the politics of the Islamization of knowledge necessitates grappling on a general level with a variety of questions related to globalization and modernity at the same time.² The basic questions that revolve around culture and society are: does structural globalization in an international society undergird a globalization of knowledge (Albrow and King, 1990), or are there distinct, culturally sustainable, ways of thinking which can be distinguished from the Cartesian discourse³ that underpins the rational modern view of the world? Is the Islamic fundamentalists' rejection of Western rationality a rejection of modernity, i.e. a neo-patriarchal variety (Riesebrodt, 1990) of re-traditionalization? Or can it be viewed in a positive manner as a kind of postmodern accommodation of modernity itself in one's own, i.e. authentic cultural terms?

We cannot deal with the wide range of these crucial questions in their entirety within the confines of this article. The point of departure is therefore restricted to the observation that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism produces a general drive to establish the politics of the *Islamization of knowledge*.⁴ In addressing this issue, I shall single out the efforts to establish a specifically Muslim social science as a decisive component in the fundamentalist Islamization agenda in the realm of knowledge. For this reason, the focus of this enquiry into the politics of the Islamization of knowledge will be the proclaimed Islamic social science.

This study starts by looking at the contemporary Muslim fundamentalist complaint about the Western *ghazu al-fikri* (intellectual invasion) in the abode of Islam. In their view, this invasion includes the introduction of the antagonistic modern Western social sciences into the Islamic institutions of learning. In defying the claim of

modern Western science to universal validity, fundamentalists assert their own claim to simultaneously de-Westernize knowledge and to Islamize scientific thought in order to maintain authenticity. Thus, the main objective of this article is to enquire into the substance of this ambitious agenda and to deal with its implications for the social sciences as employed by Muslims to analyse their societies. Basically, the Islamization programme is based on an Islamic dismissal of the European *project of modernity*, and of its '*principle of subjectivity*' (Habermas, 1990; see also Bernstein, 1986). With regard to social science, the de-Westernization of knowledge envisaged by Muslim fundamentalists is expected to result in the establishing of an authentic Islamic sociology. This claim to indigenization is 'primarily a third world response' to the claim to universality of Western knowledge, it is also an

explicit opposition to the importation of . . . models of social science and especially to terminology and methods developed in and for the First World . . . an emphasis on the distinctive . . . cultural tradition, and the possibilities of finding inspiration there for new directions . . . (Albrow, 1990: 7)

The acclaimed German sociologist Max Weber, though not a historian of science, believed that science, 'in its state of development which we acknowledge as the valid standard' (Weber, 1964: 340), exists in no cultural area other than the Occident. Nor was Max Weber himself a scientist, even though he made great efforts to establish the bases for objective knowledge in sociology, though on an interpretative rather than on a quantitative methodological basis. Weber made these efforts along the lines of the modern understanding of objectivity in the sciences. The Weberian concept of Occidental rationality rests on the modern understanding of science that has developed in Europe since the seventeenth century.⁵ The 'disenchantment of the world (*Entzauberung der Welt*)' (Weber, 1964: 103, 317, 338) is a significant highlight of this Weberian endeavour. Most historians of science share Weber's view that modern science has provided the greatest contribution to the emergence of the modern *Weltbild* (worldview) (Borkenau, 1934/1988: 15-96), as a radically new view of the world based on the sciences as secular knowledge.

The Islamic Challenge to Western Universality: A Religious Ideology Confronts the Secular Age

Contemporary Muslim fundamentalists contest the secular knowledge based on the cultural project of modernity, as well as the worldview related to it (Tibi, 1993c). In their revolt against the Western secular concept of knowledge Muslim fundamentalists do not stand alone. Islamic fundamentalism is as multifarious as Islam itself is culturally. Based on field work in Egypt, I developed in my study of Islamic fundamentalism, modern science and technology (Tibi, 1993c) a typology of five ideal types (in the Weberian sense) of Islamic fundamentalism. In this article, I do not refer to that typology and rather speak of fundamentalism as opposed to modernity, simply because all fundamentalists – despite their differences – commonly share this concern. I do otherwise acknowledge fundamentalisms in the plural form.

On a general level, some distinguished Western scholars, such as Daniel Bell (1980) and Richard Falk (1988), seek to restore 'the religious' against the Weberian notion of 'disenchantment' (*Entzauberung*), when they resort to the meaning of religion in whatever conceived postmodern sense. Viewed from this angle, the knowledge programme of Islamic fundamentalism seems to be a postmodern effort. Setting aside the critique of secularism, one cannot escape the observation that the Weberian concept of rationality and the concomitant quest for scientific objectivity are the grounds on which most of the varying schools of social sciences currently operate and develop their framework, which claims universality. The counter-claim of *Islamization of the sciences* (see note 4) is directed against these very common grounds. Muslim fundamentalist scholars denounce the prevailing standards as an 'epistemological imperialism of the West' (Sardar, 1985: 85ff), while they attempt to introduce an alternative specifically Islamic concept for the social sciences in particular and the humanities in general. This concept is based on the belief in Islamic revelation. We encounter this effort at the top of the agenda of current Muslim fundamentalist writers who seek to de-Westernize the world of Islam, i.e. free it from Western influence. Their politics of the 'de-Westernization of knowledge' is viewed as a major step in this direction.

The observation that all streams of Islamic fundamentalism are an expression of a social and political rather than a religious phenomenon related to a revolt of mostly semi-modernized Muslim

intellectuals against the modern age (Lawrence, 1989: Part 1) is not completely wrong. It is true that economic deprivation, social uprooting and political opposition are the most important constraints underlying the political activism of current fundamentalists. However, it is inappropriate to study Islamic fundamentalism in a reductionist manner. Nor is Islamic fundamentalism reducible to political activism. Most importantly: Islamic fundamentalism is currently the pervasive view of the world shared by the majority of Muslims, and it results from a crisis of meaning. It thus provides the major source of public choices among most Muslims. It also includes the efforts of some, more or less serious Muslim fundamentalist intellectuals who devise alternative concepts to those prevailing in international society in order to establish a new authentic Islamic worldview and thus to resolve the collective identity crisis. The social sciences lie at the hub of these scholarly fundamentalist concerns.

Muslim fundamentalists view the prevailing methods and concepts in the contemporary Western-dominated social sciences not only as being inadequate (*qasira*) for interpreting Islamic societies, but above all as being inimical (*mu'adiya*) to Islam (Husain, 1985: 6). For this reason, they target the replacement of these social sciences with authentic Islamic disciplines based on the Islamic doctrine (*'aqida Islamiyya*) (Husain, 1985: 30). Inasmuch as current social sciences are rejected for being Western, the effort endorsed by these fundamentalists is defined as an endeavour aimed at the 'De-Westernization of Knowledge' (al-Attas, 1985: 127ff) in pursuit of an Islamization of sciences. This article aims at contrasting these fundamentalist efforts with the emancipatory cultural project of modernity on which modern sciences rest. In view of the fact that the Weberian 'disenchantment of the world' is one of the significant results of the European project of cultural modernity, as conceptually reconstructed in the recent work of Habermas (1990), the fundamentalist programme addressed is clearly a *defensive cultural response* (Tibi, 1988). What is at issue is a self-assertive response to the challenge that European cultural modernity is hurling at Islam — thus engendering a crisis of Islam defined rather as a *cultural system* than a religion (Tibi, 1991). This is the cultural and socio-historical context of the politics of the Islamization of knowledge which is conceived of as a response to the secular concept of knowledge underlying modern sciences. Viewed from close up it is reassertive and defensive-cultural rather than postmodern.

Only if we consider colonization as modernization may we view Islamic reassertion as a postmodern concern. In my view this is not the appropriate way to study the cultural knowledge-centred dimension of Islamic fundamentalism, for cultural modernity cannot be equated with colonial rule on any terms.

It is important to outline the historical context of the addressed defensive-cultural response, as well as the crisis of the Islamic cultural system involved, for this crisis pre-dates by far the rise of fundamentalism. The historical framework of this context is the confrontation of the world of Islam with the 'Rise of the West'. We know from the research of the historian Geoffrey Parker (1988) that the 'Rise of the West' was based on the 'Military Revolution' of 1500–1800. This revolution was based on the products of modern knowledge. The impact of this revolution⁶ and its implications for the world of Islam have been a series of defeats starting with the failure of the siege of Vienna in 1683, and continuing with Carlowitz (1699) and Passarowitz (1718). In regard to Islamic awareness and responses to this 'military superiority' and to its historical consequences, the most recent defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War — like the earlier defeat in the Six Day War 1967 — is nothing other than a link in the chain of this historical process of military defeats and their socio-cultural consequences (Tibi 1993b). Needless to say, modernity and the rise of the West cannot be reduced to the above-mentioned 'military revolution'. For modernity is also a cultural project which triggered off a man-centred secular view of the world and respectively a *Könnenbewusstsein*,⁷ i.e. an insight into the capability of man to know and to change his social and natural environment autonomously, regardless of supernatural forces such as God's will. The concept of *Könnenbewusstsein* runs counter to the Islamic belief that God is the Creator (*al-Khaliq*) and man is the *Makhluk* (creature) unrestrictedly submitting to Allah's will and directed by it as it is revealed in the *Koran*. Current fundamentalists share the view of their spiritual leader Sayyid Qutb that the neo-*jahiliyya* is precisely expressed in the view of cultural modernity that man governs himself. In the view of Qutb this is heresy because it results in 'the suspension of Allah's sovereignty on earth . . . and attributes the political rule to humans who become gods' (Qutb, 1989: 10). The conclusion is clear: cultural modernity is a heretical belief in man which replaces the belief in God.

Current Muslim fundamentalists reject modernity and fail to see the substantial distinction between the two aspects of modernity

which we shall later address as, first, 'an institutional dimension of modernity' (Giddens, 1990) and, second, the 'cultural project of modernity' (Habermas, 1990). Islamic fundamentalists confuse the two. Their rejection of the West as institutionally experienced in the encounter with colonial rule embraces equally cultural modernity.

The dilemma of Muslim fundamentalists is that they simultaneously envisage adopting the instruments of modernity (military technology) and rejecting its cultural underpinning, i.e. the cultural project of modernity. For this dilemma I have coined the term of the 'Islamic dream of semi-modernity' (Tibi, 1993c). This is the basic dilemma of contemporary Muslims in regard to their attitudes toward modern knowledge (Tibi, 1993c). They seek to adopt modern knowledge as an *instrumentality*, but reject its undergirding rationale: *cultural modernity*. They separate the achievements of modernity from the very knowledge that led to them and first made them possible. Can we characterize this splitting of modernity as postmodernism? There are a variety of reasons for raising doubts about what Islamic postmodernism means. Ahmed's views (1992) rather provoke more doubts about this formula.

Reversing the 'Disenchantment of the World'

Basically, the 'disenchantment of the world' rests on establishing objectivity in our knowledge about nature and society. This results, as Weber states, in the supersession of the religious view by a subjective one (Weber, 1964: 340). Thus, Occidental rationalism has 'led in Europe to a disintegration of religious worldviews that issued in a secular culture' (Habermas, 1990: 1). It has also smoothed the way for a 'reflective treatment of traditions that have lost their quasi-natural status' (Habermas, 1990: 2).

The Cartesian view of the world, as an objective entity, corresponds with man's discovery of his own capability to establish human knowledge about the objective world. Man acts as a *res cogitans* — a thinking substance able to discover the objective world. Unlike Habermas, who overemphasizes and overestimates the position of Hegel and the German contribution in his explanation of modernity, I think that modernity, as an epistemology, is a French achievement as it rests on Descartes' *res cogitans*.⁸ The principle of subjectivity (*das Subjektivitätsprinzip*, Habermas) — which is the philosophical term for individual freedom — in its form of self-consciousness determines, ever since

that realization, all aspects of modern culture and, in particular, modern knowledge. To be sure, this is not an atheistic position. Even Descartes acknowledges that man is created by God but that man is able to create knowledge on his own, by his own means. Why are Muslims unable to share this view? Why always use the fact of colonial rule to dismiss cultural modernity? Why involve the belief in Allah to disregard the ability of man?

With these questions in mind, the effort to de-Westernize knowledge, as pursued by Muslim fundamentalists, can be interpreted as an effort to reverse the 'disenchantment of the world' and thus to subject man to supernatural powers. The knowledge of man, as perceived by Descartes, stems from the doubt out of which certain human knowledge of the objective world grows. The *cogito ergo sum*, i.e. self-consciousness, enters through doubt and helps establish certainty on the grounds of abstract subjectivism. This is basically cultural modernity. European post-modernists contest modernity for different reasons from those of the Muslims. Akbar Ahmed (1992: 5) outlines Muslim thought:

Faith versus scepticism, tradition versus iconoclasm, purity versus eclecticism — it is difficult to relate Islamic postmodernism to Western postmodernism in any coherent or direct manner, or even to establish a causal relationship between the two. (1992: 5)

For this reason, Ahmed aims to seek his own inspiration for establishing an Islamic postmodernism. Even though Ahmed is tempted to reduce Islamic fundamentalism to a Western image of Muslims in the media, he at some point correctly realizes that 'fundamentalism is the attempt to resolve how to live in a world of radical doubt'. In other words: fundamentalism is the response to Cartesianism. Ahmed seems clearly to identify Islamic fundamentalism with what he calls Islamic postmodernism.

Whereas fundamentalism submits man to Allah's will, Cartesianism helps man to realize an awareness of himself as *res cogitans*. In epistemological terms, this is the principle of subjectivity which establishes the foundation for the shift from the religious view of the world to the modern worldview (*Weltbild*) (Borkenau, 1934/1988). Any postmodern religious project that questions this worldview results in irrationalism. This is the case with fundamentalism.

Not surprisingly, Muslim intellectual fundamentalists are fully

in accord with Bernard Lewis's (1982: 221–38) assessment that in modern times, the greater threat to Islam is no longer merely military or political. It is rather the threat related to modern knowledge, as just described. The Muslim writer al-Attas acknowledges this threat quite frankly:

Today's challenge posed by Western civilisation . . . is the challenge of knowledge . . . which is productive of . . . scepticism, which has elevated doubt and conjecture to the 'scientific' rank in methodology. (al-Attas, 1985: 127)

The Cartesian methodological principle of doubt and conjecture is a threat to religious belief, and it deprives Muslims of their certainty. In this situation the solution is, for al-Attas, the 'de-Westernization of knowledge'. Another prominent Muslim fundamentalist, Ziauddin Sardar, denounces 'the epistemological imperialism' (Sardar, 1985: 85) of the West and pleads for an 'Islamic epistemology' which he determines to be an alternative to Cartesianism.

In short, in studying the cultural efforts of intellectual fundamentalists, we can state that reversing the 'disenchantment of the world' and denying doubt and conjecture as methodological scientific rules is their major concern. The basic achievement of cultural modernity, as portrayed by Habermas in the following statement, is no longer acceptable to them:

. . . in establishing the *principle of subjectivity* . . . religious faith became reflective; the world of the divine was changed in the solitude of subjectivity into something posited by ourselves. . . . In modernity, therefore religious life, state, and society, as well as science, morality and art are transformed into just so many embodiments of the principle of subjectivity. (Habermas, 1990: 17–18)

The dilemma of, in particular, Muslim fundamentalists who embark on the de-Westernization of knowledge, and of the world of Islam in general, is that they are not traditionalists but rather modernists. They want to implement modernity as a tool while emphatically refusing its logic: the principle of subjectivity, as based on human reason and the recognition of the capabilities of man. This conflict between two incompatible views of the world: the cosmologically oriented theocentric Islamic *tawhid* worldview, and the *Könnenbewusstsein* (see note 7) related view of the world. It is a conflict between modern knowledge and specifically Islamic knowledge. The polemic against modern

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knowledge, as aimed at replacing revisable knowledge with faith is certainly no postmodern view. Al-Attas makes the point:

The holy *Qur'an* is the complete and final revelation . . . and there is no other knowledge . . . except based upon and pointing to it . . . that can guide and save man. (al-Attas, 1985: 138)

No postmodernist can follow this belief. For this reason it is understandable when we see Husain Sadr determining knowledge in Islam as utterly opposed to any Western concept as he argues:

The pursuit of knowledge in Islam is not an end in itself; it is only a means of acquiring an understanding of God and solving the problems of the Muslim community. . . . Reason and the pursuit of knowledge has a very important place in Islamic society but it is subservient to *Qur'anic* values and ethics. In this framework reason and revelation go hand in hand. Modern science, on the other hand, considers reason to be supreme. (Sadr, 1984: 22–3)

In this effort aimed at reversing the 'disenchantment of the world' while subordinating human reason to divine traditions, the cosmological worldviews are restored and the reflective treatments of religious traditions are dismissed by Muslim intellectual fundamentalists. The de-Westernized sciences are, then, no longer based on the principle of abstract subjectivity, i.e. on the view that man is able to establish human knowledge of the objective world and to subject the discovered nature in the pursuit of the satisfaction of human needs. The de-Westernized sciences are not epistemologically grounded, but rather based on religious belief. Unlike Western science, the Islamized sciences — though not traditional — are subordinated to religious traditions and they do not permit reflective treatments of the latter. In the view of the fundamentalist Ismail al-Faruqi 'the problem of the progress of science in Islamic society is not how far can society liberate itself from clutches of its religion, but how more truly Islamic can it make its educational program' (al-Faruqi, 1969: 241).

The major target of Muslim fundamentalists is the idea that *all knowledge is in principle revisable*. To them Islamic knowledge is based on revelation, is thus sacred and must not be subjected to any human reasoning whatsoever. The fundamentalist insistence upon the sacred stands as an antithesis to the Western idea of the project of modernity according to which all knowledge is revisable. To de-Westernize the sciences is to decouple them from

this Western idea and from the Cartesian methodological principles of doubt and conjecture on which scientific knowledge rests. Belief ought to replace these principles of knowledge. The fundamentalist yearning for the absolute introduces a concept of absolutism in human knowledge, definitely not a postmodern idea. The general framework of the Islamization programme prescribes that sciences have to be de-Westernized methodologically and be related to Islamic religious belief. The intriguing question now is, how do Muslim fundamentalists apply this general approach to social sciences? What is the frame of reference for analysis in Islamic sociology?

The Effort to Establish Islamic Social Sciences: The Politics of Islamization of Sociological Knowledge

In the introductory section to this article the dismissal of Western social sciences by Muslim fundamentalists as *qasira* (insufficient) and *mu'adiya* (inimical) was stated. This negative identification can be found in a characteristic manner in a paper by one of the most influential Egyptian fundamentalist writers, 'Adel Husain. His proposition for an Islamic sociology was presented at a significant pan-Arab sociological congress, and it was later published in a widely circulated collection of essays by the same Husain.⁹ His criticism is equally methodological and political in its nature. Conceptually, in Husain's paper Western sociology is considered an insufficient tool for the analysis of Arab-Muslim societies. Politically it is viewed as inimical. This negative portrait of Western sociology concludes that Arab Muslims need their own sociology, or, more precisely, an Islamized sociology based on the concept of the de-Westernization of knowledge. The contribution of 'Adel Husain is both significant and representative, and its examination can shed light on the formula of Islamization as a claim to de-Westernization, as they are spread among Muslim intellectuals who subscribe to fundamentalism. Husain is also the influential editor/columnist of the fundamentalist weekly *al-Sha'b*. I have personally witnessed the dissemination of his thought throughout the Arab world.

Husain is aware of the complementary relation between the secular concept of knowledge, on which modern sociology rests, and the modern worldview, as based on a scientific view of the world related to modern physics. Both have evolved in modern Europe. This awareness accounts for Husain's effort to

subordinate knowledge to the religious *aqida* (doctrine), to decouple social sciences from natural sciences. Any science which cannot be subjected to religious belief and which cannot be freed from the physics-related view of the world is, in Husain's angrily worded statement, 'condemned, we have no need for it' (*mal'un wa la hajat lana bihi*) (Husain, 1985: 16). This strong proclamation aside, Husain is obviously aware of some modern scholarly approaches based on the anthropology of knowledge. Husain views the contention that the Western understanding of science is the only valid one as a 'Western belief' (Husain, 1985: 23). In a similar vein, he dismisses the Western claim of science to universality and confronts it with the Islamic counter-claim to an authentically Islamic science. Thus, Western science 'rests on the knowledge of the people of the West as related to their own societies. . . . We note this to deprive Western social sciences of their claim to universal validity' (Husain, 1985: 17-18).

To make the issue addressed by 'Adel Husain clear, it is important to refer briefly to the current debate concerning the anthropology of knowledge. The recently established discipline of the anthropology of knowledge departs from Robert Merton's distinction between 'science' and 'belief'. Adherents of this new approach consider Merton's distinction to be 'no longer valid' (Lepénies, 1981: 256). A well-known German sociologist, Wolf Lepénies of Berlin's Institute for Advanced Study, contends that

one might, quite on the contrary, define it as one of the aims of the anthropology of knowledge to analyse scientific knowledge as a specific kind of belief which is only part of the larger belief-system of a given culture. (Lepénies, 1981: 256)

In a footnote, however, Lepénies makes it clear that this statement 'does not imply any judgement on the truth-value of scientific knowledge' (Lepénies, 1981: 259). Despite this restriction, the implications of this relativism strike me as fatal.

If the project of modernity, as based on the principle of subjectivity, is denied its universal platform for a rational discourse, the result would be to reinforce cultural fragmentation. If this denial, as based on rampant cultural relativism, were to become the general principle, then it would become difficult for people of different cultures to communicate their 'sciences' to one another, insofar as their scholarly findings would be downgraded to cultural beliefs only valid in the confines of their own culture. The introduc-

tion of the concept of culture into the debate on knowledge, an issue until recently submerged, need not mean overlooking the fact of globalization. In identifying the processes creating *one world*, generated by globalization, people of different cultures need to communicate with one another 'in a global discourse'.¹⁰ To deny this is to deny people of different cultures the possibility of global intercultural communication. We would then have an Islamic, a Hindu or a Buddhist knowledge, but not any generally shared global discourse for communication among culturally divergent scholars and communities, nor an overall human knowledge.

On the other hand, I am aware of the limitations in the claim of the project of modernity to universality. As I recently (in June 1993) was able to observe in the course of the United Nations Human Rights World Conference in Vienna: the universality of human rights is a proposition, not a reality (Tibi, 1994). I believe this is the case with knowledge. An insight into the limitations addressed may help us to understand the revolt of Muslim fundamentalists against European modernity as a variety of the already mentioned 'Revolt against the West' (Bull, 1988). My enquiry into the programme of the Islamization of knowledge as a claim to de-Westernization, and thus, as a view radically opposed to that of the European project of modernity, is aimed rather at understanding than denouncing the programme, despite my radically diverging, yet avowedly normative position regarding how to determine what constitutes knowledge. As social scientists we must study this programme and the claims related to it while considering the consequences involved. We need to establish a better understanding of the obstacles in the way of mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. A further discussion of the view of 'Adel Husain promises to be helpful in this endeavour. Why do Muslims perceive modernity as a threat on the one hand, while they strive to adopt to its achievements on the other?

The Two Dimensions of Modernity: The Cultural Project and its Institutional Dimension

In the West the unfolding of modernity has been a process that equally encompassed cultural and institutional realms. However, the globalization of modernity has been basically restricted to its institutional dimension. It is intriguing, in pursuit of our enquiry, to figure out the major points in the Muslim fundamentalist

understanding of this process. The following statement of Husain sheds some light on the Islamic fundamentalist perception of European modernity and the pattern of knowledge based on it. This perception also pertains to the question as to how modernity matters for Muslim lands:

It is understandable when people of the West praise their historical periods of Renaissance and of Enlightenment, for these periods are in fact a progress in their own history. But why should we act in a similar way, and why should we accept these achievements as an indication of a global Renaissance and of an international Enlightenment? Given that our people have been the very victims of these developments, then why should we appreciate them? (Husain, 1985: 24)

In my view, the question posed by Husain, as quoted, both reveals and conceals the issue. It also continues the confusion that can be found also among leading Western sociologists in their dealing with modernity. To make my point clear, I need to clarify a basic historical and conceptual distinction between two already addressed separate, but intrinsically interrelated phenomena: the *cultural project of modernity* and the *institutional dimension in the globalization processes of modernity*. Habermas restricts his dealing with modernity, in a typical Eurocentric manner, to the cultural meaning of this phenomenon (Habermas, 1990: 2). Another distinguished sociologist, Anthony Giddens, restricts his analysis of modernity and of its globalization to studying its institutional dimension, even though he concedes 'that a coherent epistemology is possible — and that a generalisable knowledge about social life and patterns of social development can be achieved. But I want to take a different tack' (Giddens, 1990: 2). In their work, Habermas and Giddens single out only one aspect, be it the cultural or the institutional dimension of modernity, and focus exclusively on it. Neither of them relates these dimensions to one another. Unlike Habermas and Giddens, the Arab-Islamic fundamentalist Husain refers to both; he confuses the cultural and the institutional dimensions of modernity, however. In fact, cultural modernity was an emancipatory project which resulted in the liberation of man from oppressive traditions and from their quasi-natural religious status. On the other hand, globalized institutional modernity has been an instrument of power to establish Western dominance over the rest of the world. Muslims encountered modernity as a colonial rule.

In dealing with Western social sciences we find both aspects of

modernity involved: the function of liberation and the contrary one of being an instrument which serves to establish global rule. Husain confuses both functions and he reduces all Western sociology to 'a plan to establish Western dominance over the world system. . . . All schools of thought in Western social sciences are a belief which serves as a tool for legitimizing Western imperialism and for establishing its rule.'¹¹ Husain refers not only to the anthropology of knowledge to identify Western sociology as a cultural belief and to deny its claim to being objective knowledge, he also draws on the sociology of knowledge in order to disclose the social function of Western scholarship in establishing the system of Western hegemony:

Current Western sociological theories are not only ignorant about our environment and about its historical background. They are, moreover, inimical theories which, in the best cases, look down to us. The worst we can do is to adopt them, which would be tantamount to subjecting ourselves to the disdain these theories treat us with. (Husain, 1985: 26)

Husain thus draws on a variety of new approaches to support his plea for the Islamization of social sciences as a claim to the de-Westernization of knowledge. As already shown, this variety ranges from the anthropology and the sociology of knowledge to the recent theories of self-reliance, and the theoretical approach of 'decoupling from the world system' that can be found in some development studies following the line of Samir Amin. In applying these theories to a social science analysis, Husain contends that Arab Muslims need their own sociology to enable themselves to deal properly with the problems of dependency and autonomy. 'Modern social sciences are nothing else than the export of intellectual dependency to us in the guise of Western social theories' (Husain, 1985: 29). Husain's alternative to dependency is 'to establish autonomous sociological schools of thought, which precisely means Arab Islamic ones' (Husain, 1985: 30). We find this argument in the bulk of the writings of Islamic fundamentalists. Anwar al-Jundi, one of the more strident Egyptian fundamentalists, established the concept of *al-asala* (authenticity) to free Muslims from *al-taba'iyya* (dependency) in all realms of education, language and law (al-Jundi, no date). Koranic instructions replace all scholarly formula. Even the efforts to reform the Islamic *shari'a* are dismissed as *taghrib al-shari'a* (Westernization of the sacred

law). Thus the effort at de-Westernization amounts to cultural self-isolation in the world of Islam.

Again drawing on the major assumptions of the anthropology of knowledge, Husain states that we are encountering 'two radically divergent beliefs, each of which has its own decisive impact on forming the methodology needed in each case' (Husain, 1985: 31). One of these beliefs is Islam. Unlike the belief underlying Western sociology, the Islamic belief is professedly attached 'to our prevailing doctrine and to its Islamic substance' (Husain, 1985: 33). Islamic sociology conceived of in this manner leaves no opening for subjecting religion and tradition to critical reflection and is thus not up to the standards of human reasoning achieved by the cultural project of modernity.

Conclusions

The approach to the Islamization of sociological knowledge in particular, and the humanities in general, as an overall claim to the de-Westernization of knowledge is an ideologically inspired approach which remains reassertive and thus too vague. Husain tries to illustrate his approach in a lengthy essay on the socio-historical constraints of democracy, in which he seeks to provide a culturally specific sociological analysis of democracy in Arab-Muslim societies. The problem which Husain evades is that democracy is a modern phenomenon that institutionally originated in modern industrial societies and is culturally based in ancient Greece. The term 'democracy' does not even exist in Arabic. Husain continues to use the Arabized form of the term, *demoqratiyya*. As a sociologist, he fails to realize that not only the cultural, but also structural requirements¹² which underlie democracy are missing in the 'World of Arab Islam'. Islamization as a claim to de-Westernization proves to be a concealing formula for the ill-structured responses of contemporary Muslims to the challenges of modernity. In my book *The Crisis of Modern Islam* (Tibi, 1988), I coined the term 'defensive culture' referred to earlier. The term serves to characterize these Islamic responses to the challenge of modernity. Sociological analysis ought to help people cope with social change. In my view, Islamized sociology is an obstacle to Muslims coming to understand and to accommodate social change (Tibi, 1991) inasmuch as its adherents seldom succeed in rising above their defensive cultural responses.

In recalling the Aristotelian idea that knowledge of the polity

is the highest possession of human beings, we may also underline the Aristotelian politics in which the link between knowledge and action lies at the centre of thought.¹³ The fundamentalist politics of the Islamization of knowledge is not an indication of such possession, for it is not an agenda for coping with modernity, but rather a step away from it and its achievements. What is presented to us, for instance, as 'Islamicized political science' (Isma'il, 1989: 12-134) lacks all the indispensable traits of Aristotle's *Politik* as the rationale needed for establishing human knowledge of the polity.

Based on the analysis presented in this article, I strongly share the concern of John Waterbury that the result of the Islamization of politics in the realm of knowledge would result in 'a new era of flat-earthism'. This era

may emerge in the Middle East in which the epistemology underlying social science inquiry may well be rejected as a culturally alien importation, a tool of the devil, or at the very least, a tool of the adversaries of Arabs and Islam. (Waterbury, 1988: 302)

The outcome of such an era, which in fact has already started, would be that 'certain questions will not be asked, not merely because they are politically sensitive but because they are potentially blasphemous' (Waterbury, 1988: 302).

In looking at science as a pattern of culture, and in viewing culture in the context of science,¹⁴ the politics of the Islamization of knowledge pursued by Islamic fundamentalists presents the beginning of a new counter-scientific trend in Arab culture. The attitudes of Islamic fundamentalists toward modern science and technology (Tibi, 1993c) do not contribute to the accommodation of modern knowledge that Muslim people urgently need for the development of their societies.

It seems apt to conclude this article by having recourse to the Edinburgh School (see note 14) and to its view on science as a culture. This school gives

prominence to the relationship between the sub-culture of science and the wider culture which surrounds it . . . science is primarily a source of knowledge and competence . . . science operates as a source of cognitive authority: not only does it provide knowledge and competence, it is required also to evaluate the knowledge-claims and putative competences of those situated beyond its boundaries. Indeed, in modern societies, science is near to being *the* source of cognitive authority. (Barnes and Edge, 1982: 2)

Viewed from an Islamic fundamentalist angle, it is heretical to determine science in this manner. Science, as produced by man, cannot claim to be the source of cognitive authority.

The agenda of Islamization of the sciences in de-Westernizing them, i.e. decoupling them from modern secular knowledge, has been placed in context and analysed in this article. It would not be surprising to see the Middle East fall back into an era of 'flat-earthism' if the politics of the Islamization of knowledge becomes the authoritative source for determining the relationship between the contemporary culture of the Middle East and the place of sciences as an expression of modern secular knowledge in it. At the turn of the twentieth century, we are living in an age of the global confrontation between secular cultural modernity and religious culture (Juergensmeyer, 1993). The challenge of Islamic fundamentalism has a most prominent place in this confrontation.

Notes

This article is based on my research conducted at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences/The Fundamentalism Project 1989–92. I am most grateful to Anthony Giddens, Mike Featherstone and the anonymous readers of *TCS* for their most valuable comments on two earlier drafts (1990–92) which led to this radically revised version. The submitted version was completed at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs in the spring of 1992 and revised in Göttingen in the summer of 1993.

1. The term *hall al-Islami* (Islamic solution) was coined in the early 1970s by the leading fundamentalist Yusuf al-Qaradawi in his two-volume publication *Hatimiyat al-hall al-Islami* (1974). Both volumes were reprinted numerous times. A third volume (1988) focused on '*Shabahat al-ilmaniyyun wa al-mutagharribun* (The doubts of the secularists and the Westernised, which is the sub-title) and was published in Cairo.

2. See Featherstone (1990). For more details on the role of the nation-state in the globalization of modernity with reference to the Middle East, see the new introductory chapter in Tibi (1990). See also the basic works of Albrow and King (1990), Bernstein (1986), Habermas (1990), and Giddens (1990).

3. René Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode* is generally acclaimed as the first milestone in grounding the modern worldview (*Weltbild*). On this see the classic of the Frankfurt School by Franz Borkenau, *Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild* (1934/1988) first published in French exile (though in German), in Paris and reprinted numerous times.

4. International Institute for Islamic Thought (1986), see also 'Awwad (1987). The three-volume authoritative publication of al-Qaradawi (see note 1) revolves around this issue.

5. For more details see the decisive work by Edgar Zilsel (1985: 49ff, 66ff). The Harvard historian of science, Everett Mendelsohn, praises the work of Zilsel

(1891–1944) in the following manner: ‘Zilsel’s sophisticated . . . studies of the social bases of the cognitive and epistemological styles of early modern science are only now being given the recognition they deserve’ (Mendelsohn et al., 1977: 8).

6. See Geoffrey Parker (1988) and Martin van Creveld (1989). In non-Western societies modernization has been primarily based on the introduction of military technology. See the important work of David B. Ralston (1990).

7. The historian Christian Meier (1989) coined the term *Könnenbewusstsein* for the combination of the classical Greek concept of *techne* (skills) and *episteme* (knowledge). In the European Enlightenment, the concept of progress rests on this *Könnenbewusstsein* view of the world according to which the world is man-centred and no longer governed by God.

8. See René Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode* (1637) and the chapter on *cogito* in Joachim Kopper (1990: 21–7). Descartes is defined as ‘the founder of the modern view of the world’ by Borkenau (1934/1988: 268–383, esp. 309).

9. ‘Adel Husain (1985: 11–37). Husain started his career as a member of the totalitarian underground group *Misr al-Fatat* (Young Egypt), and then converted to Marxism before he achieved his ‘return to Islam’. In a recent interview with Husain published in the fundamentalist journal *Liwa’ al-Islami* (15 Sept. 1989) Husain describes his intellectual development as ‘*Min dhalam al-shiyu’iyya ila nur al-Islam* (from the darkness of Communism to the Light of Islam).

10. See the introduction by Martin Albrow in Albrow and King (1990: 11). Contrary to this is the view of the Muslim fundamentalist Khalil (1983), who believes in a distinctly *aql Muslim* (Islamic reason).

11. ‘Adel Husain (1985: 23). The fundamentalist sociologist Husain has a point here. It is true that some Western sociologists do not have any inhibitions against putting their knowledge at the service of Western rule in non-Western parts of the world. For a critical discussion of this issue see Irene L. Gendzier (1985: esp. 56ff). However, one must beware of confusing these rather unscholarly services and the emancipatory cultural project of modernity. One must also be aware of the Arab conspiracy (*al-mu’amarah*) approach employed by Husain. On this approach see Tibi (1993a).

12. On this see my paper ‘Al-bina’ al-iqtisadi wa al-ijtima’i li al-demoqratiyya’ (The socio-economic, structural underpinning of democracy), delivered at the pan-Arab conference ‘Crisis of Democracy in the Arab East’ (Limassol, November 1983) and published in the proceedings of that conference (Tibi, 1984a: 73–87). See also my report on that conference, published in German (Tibi, 1984b).

13. See Aristotle, *Politik* (1958). See also the intelligent interpretation of the Aristotelian ‘Politik’ by Peter Weber-Schäfer (1968: 36–63) in particular pp. 39–40 on knowledge about the polity.

14. I am most grateful to my colleague Anthony Giddens for drawing my attention to the ‘Edinburgh School’ and the works of Barry Barnes and David Bloor that resulted from it. See Barnes (1972, 1974) and Bloor (1983).

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