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MAPPING THE ISLAMIC DISCOURSE ON KNOWLEDGE: THE RELEVANCE OF THE NEW ISLAMIC DISCOURSE

Mohamed Oudihat and Che Amnah Binti Bahari***

Abstract: In the aftermath of independence, the ex-colonized Muslim countries were caught up in a comprehensive process of Westernization of Muslim life and thought. In this context, fundamental questions have been raised: What is the vision of knowledge? What is the position of the existing traditional Islamic and modern Western knowledge? This study aims to map existing trends in the interpretation of knowledge and measure the relevance of what Elmessiri calls the “New Islamic Discourse”. Descriptive, analytical, and comparative methods are used in the entire study. The first major finding is that there are seven Islamic discourses according to how they respond to critical questions. The second major finding is that the relevance of the “New Islamic Discourse” is based on five main features namely, (1) Modern science is not neutral, (2) Secularization of life and knowledge is part of the Modern crisis, (3) Islamic view of knowledge is neither modernist nor traditionalist, (4) Islamic view of knowledge is neither positivist nor relativist, and (5) Islam is a worldview that has implications for life and knowledge (on epistemology and methodology).

Keywords: Traditional Knowledge, Modern, Decolonial, Islamization, New Islamic Discourse.

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Introduction

In the aftermath of independence, the ex-colonized Muslim countries were caught up in Westernization, which is the forced imposition of Western ideas, values, and worldviews embedded in everything imported from technology, human and natural sciences, culture, and entertainment. In this context, a collective awareness emerged that “the thing of the West”¹ (technology, industry, entertainment, products, culture, and even knowledge) is not universal but biased by a particular materialist vision. Reflections on the history of the development of science from the Islamic perspective have raised a topical question: how can modern Muslim societies recover the spirit of Islamic science as it has been practiced and developed in history? Different Islamic discourses have been raised to answer this pivotal question: What is the vision of knowledge? What is the position of the existing traditional Islamic and modern Western knowledge?

There is a need to map these discourses to understand the place of each intellectual, his general orientation, and what brings him closer to/distances him from the others. A “discourse” represents a distinctive intellectual trend and approach to knowledge based on a vision of what Islam implies for this activity. Mapping them is a way to measure the emergence and relevance of a “New Islamic discourse”² on knowledge. It is hard to fit very different thinkers into categories that lump them into groups or trends. Furthermore, by what criteria can they be grouped or distinguished? There are many ways to categorize Muslim thinkers, each with relevance and limits. For instance, in his academic work entitled, *The Islamization of Science: Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity*³, Leif Stenberg distinguishes only four Islamic Discourses on “Islam and knowledge”. His typology seems limited because it has been found on four persons instead of being found in more stable categories. In addition, Sardar has moved from a discourse that is highly critical of modernity and postmodernity, hence, joining the decolonial and the new Islamic Discourse on knowledge, to a hybrid semi-modernist-postmodernist discourse that tends to use the *Qur’ān* as a tool to justify today’s fashionable ideas, for instance on gender.⁴

Besides, Leif Stenberg’s typology lacks the categories of “religious discourse”, “decolonial discourse”, and “postmodern discourse”. His work has probably contributed to

¹ Bennabi, Malek, *Le Problème des idées dans le monde musulman*, (Algiers: Al-Bayyinate, 1990), p. 77.

² Elmessiri, Abdelwahab, “Towards A New Islamic Discourse,” In IslamOnline.net. (17/07/2003).

³ Stenberg, Leif, *The Islamization of Science: Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity*, A Doctoral Thesis submitted to Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University, Stockholm, Sweden, (1996).

⁴ Sardar, Ziauddin, *Reading the Qur’ān: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred Text of Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See Part Four: *Contemporary Topics/Homosexuality*.

creating confusion around the idea of “Islamization of knowledge” because he presented four very different thinkers as all promoting a kind of “Islamization of knowledge”. That is why the apologetic discourse is often confused with the idea of the “Islamization of Knowledge” or the modernization of Muslim societies through the massive importation of Western knowledge, sciences, and practices. In other words, it is understood as the superficial Islamic legitimization of all sciences, theories, concepts, and trendy ideas imported from the West. In this context, Tāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī proposes another typology to distinguish the contemporary approaches to knowledge and thought into four main categories:

1. *Al-Muqallidīn* who are both the traditional who are conformist towards the Muslim’s past and the modernist who are conformist towards the Western present,
2. Muslim thinkers whose thinking is structured by *al-Muqāranah* or by a systematic comparative analysis between Western and Islamic Thought,
3. Muslim thinkers whose thinking is structured by *al-Muqārabah* or by a systematic reconciliation between Western and Islamic Thought, and
4. Muslim thinkers whose thinking is structured by a *Qur’ānic* paradigm.⁵

Al-‘Alwānī argues that there are only two main categories: traditional or modern conformists who are *Muqallidīn*, whose thought is structured by *al-Muqāranah* and *al-Muqārabah*, on the one hand, and those who base their thinking on the *Qur’ān* as their first source and methodology. In other words, the honest new Islamic discourse is the *Qur’ānic* methodological-based discourse. This typology has the advantage of simplicity but fails to capture the systematic differences that distinguish contemporary Muslim thinkers. Despite the difficulties, it is crucial to produce a map of the contemporary Muslim thinkers, which helps to understand what connects and separates them. The suitable criteria might be the intellectual positions in which these thinkers recognize themselves or whose basis can be found in their work. This research paper is based on a systematic comparative analysis of contemporary Muslim thinkers’ works, distinguishing eight Muslim intellectual trends or eight main Islamic Discourses on “Islam and Knowledge”, as shown in **Chart 1**:

Mapping of the 8 Islamic discourses on “Islam and Knowledge”



⁵ al-‘Alwānī, Tāhā Jābir, *Study of the Qur’ān: Introducing to the Qur’ānic Method*, (Cordoba University-Qāḍī ‘Iyād University, Morocco, 2003).

The above chart shows that the categories of discourses or knowledge used as pedagogical tools are complex. There are hybrid discourses that combine different approaches to knowledge. For instance, the mystical discourse of “sacred science” can be combined or separated from the modernist discourse of “secular” knowledge, the decolonial or the new Islamic discourse. To further explain, the decolonial discourse can be combined with the new Islamic discourse, presented in a 2021 conference on the *Decolonization of knowledge and reconstruction from an Islamic approach, which has both convergence and divergence zones*.⁶ This study points out the existence of this hybrid trend but goes no further due to various reasons, elaborated in the following discourse.

The Apological Discourse: In the Past, Islamic Knowledge was Marvelous

The Muslim apological discourse on “Islam and modern science” was a significant trend in the 19th century. It focuses all its ideas on “the importance of science in Islam” and on the fact that “in the past, Islamic civilization was the global place to learn science” and “Islamic civilization has inspired European civilization”. This discourse has emerged as an answer to the publication of Renan’s famous lecture, “L’Islamisme et la Science,” in Sorbonne, a renowned French anti-religion philosopher of the 19th century, who strongly argued about the Muslims’ irrationality and inability to contribute to science.⁷ To respond to Renan’s polemic against Islam, Jamal al-Dīn al-Afghānī reminded us that modern science originated from the Islamic civilization and is grounded on Islamic teachings.⁸ Indeed, al-Afghānī is one among a long list of Muslim scholars who fit into this same trend of defending the value of science in Islam and, consequently, “Islamizing” modern science in the sense that this discourse merely legitimized it based on Islam.

One of the most prominent intellectuals who has theorized this trend is Maurice Bucaille, who, in his Book “*The Bible, the Qur’ān and Science*”,⁹ examines the Bible and the *Qur’ān* in the light of modern science to discover what they have to say about astronomy, the earth, animal and vegetable kingdoms. He finds that the Bible does not meet the rigorous criteria of modern knowledge. The *Qur’ān*, on the other hand, does not contain a single proposition that disagrees with the best-established modern knowledge, nor does it contain any of the current biased ideas

⁶ See the Conference ISTAC TV, “*Decolonisation and Islamisation of the Social Sciences: Convergence and Divergence*,” on 26 April 2021. <https://youtu.be/z-qVrXVM3uc?si=0QKzW6OVqDCtSRj>

⁷ Renan, Ernest, *L’Islamisme et la Science* (Islam and Science), (Paris: Calmann Lévy publisher, 1883), p. 3.

⁸ Guida, Michelangelo, “Al-Afghānī and Namik Kemal’s Replies to Ernest Renan: Two Anti-Westernist Works in the Formative Stage of Islamist Thought,” *Turkish Journal of Politics*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (Winter 2011), pp. 57-70.

⁹ Bucaille, Maurice, *The Bible, the Qur’ān and Science: The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, (Paris: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’ān, 2003).

at the time on the subjects it describes. Moreover, the *Qur'ān* contains many facts only discovered in modern times. Bucaille's book, translated from the French original into almost all Muslim languages, has given rise to a whole apologetic literature focusing on the scientific content of the *Qur'ān*. Relativity, quantum mechanics, the Big Bang theory, the embryology field, and much of modern geology have been discovered in the *Qur'ān*. However, this Muslim apologetic discourse is not confined to "the scientific truth manifested in the *Qur'ān*". Indeed, the tendency to take an apologetic view is also found in the Muslim's attitude towards the Islamic heritage. In this sense, there is an "apologetic tendency"¹⁰ that reacts to modern science by taking refuge in the valorisation of the culture and sciences of Islamic civilization.

Malek Bennabi¹¹ and Tāhā Jābir al-'Alwānī¹², for instance, have extensively analysed the limits and perverse effects of this apologetic discourse, which allows one to forget one's problems instead of being a means of dealing with them. In short, apologetic discourse replaces analysis, criticism, and the production of relevant and operational knowledge.¹³ Bennabi's book "*The Work of the Orientalists and Its Influence on Modern Muslim Thought*"¹⁴ was the result of the inspiration upon knowing that his pamphlet "Islam and Democracy" had been distributed at a conference in Paris. At the same time, a German writer, Sigrid Hunke, had been invited to present her book, *The Sun of Allah Shines on the West*,¹⁵ reminiscing the splendour of the past. Hunke says, "transport the audience from the crucial problems of the present to the splendours and splendours of the past". However, Bennabi criticizes and affirms that the apologetic discourse has replaced a sense of analysis and strategic action among Muslim intellectuals. In this book, he begins by distinguishing between ancient and modern orientalist, polemicists, and apologists for Islamic civilization. He also elaborates his analyses on modern apologetic orientalist, as they have a much more severe negative impact on the Muslim mind. In the conclusion, he specifies that apologetic discourse, whether directed toward modern Western or classical Muslim knowledge, leads the Muslim mind into an inability to understand and transform his social reality. This apologetic attitude leads to another discourse about whether actual knowledge is "religious knowledge", elaborated in the following points.

¹⁰ Bennabi, Malek, *Vocation de l'islam*, (Algiers: ANEP Publisher, 2006), p. 5.

¹¹ See for instance, Bennabi, Malek, *Les Grands Thèmes*, Chapter on *L'œuvre des orientalistes. Son influence sur la pensée islamique moderne*, (Paris: Héritage publisher, 2023); and Bennabi, "Vocation de l'islam."

¹² al-'Alwānī, Tāhā Jābir, "Issues in Islamic Thought", in *Ijtihad*, (Herndon: IIIT, 2005).

¹³ See, Bennabi, *Le problème des idées dans le monde musulman*, p. 61.

¹⁴ See, Bennabi, *Les Grands Thèmes*, Chapter "*L'œuvre des orientalistes...*"

¹⁵ Hunke, Sigrid, *Le soleil d'Allah brille sur l'Occident*, tr. Solange de Lalène, (Paris: Albin Michel Publisher, 1997).

The Religious Discourse: Real Knowledge is Religious Knowledge

Religious knowledge or discourse, according to Tāhā Jābir al-'Alwānī,¹⁶ can be characterized as follows:

1. It is *Fiqhī* in its mode of reasoning, in the sense that the discipline of law and its categories structure its mode of thought;
2. It is *Juz'ī* (partial) and *Tafkīkī* (fragmenting) in that it functions by fragmenting subjects instead of being multidimensional and offering an overview, instead of being *Kullī*, comprehensive and cosmic, in the image of *Qur'ānic* and Prophetic Discourse;
3. It is *Dīnī* or religious, in the sense that it separates “the religious” and “the profane” even though these are not *Qur'ānic* concepts, instead of being “Islamic”, i.e. all-encompassing and concerned with all subjects and dimensions of individual and collective life. In this sense, what Muslims now call “religious sciences”, or “Islamic sciences” are more in line with a modern reductive vision of religion than with a *Qur'ānic* vision of the knowledge to be cultivated;
4. It is *Taqīdī* in the sense that it follows the content of the traditional sciences without evaluating their proofs, arguments, and foundations;
5. It is bounded, seeing with only one eye, confined to the reading of the Revealed Book (the *Qur'ān*) without reading the created book (the universe and society), instead of practicing *al-jam' baynā al-qirā'atayn* (the combination of the two readings), to develop a more accurate knowledge of reality.¹⁷

Thus, for al-'Alwānī, religious knowledge, in the modern sense of discourse confined to worship and the personal, is not Islamic discourse, which encompasses “profane” and “religious” knowledge, the individual and the collective, thought and action, spiritual and intellectual life, present and future life. He invites readers to go from a “religious” discourse to an “Islamic” discourse. Islamic discourse is about building a well-balanced individual and society and a fair human civilization that embraces people and communities of all religions and philosophies of life. This religious discourse largely influences the contemporary Muslim mind and the definition and classification of contemporary “Islamic” sciences. It is not based on the *Qur'ān*. Indeed, the idea of a “religious discourse” and a “religious science” stems from the modern secularized worldview, according to which there is, on the one hand, the Church, which produces a religious discourse and beliefs, and on the other, a society which produces a “civil” discourse, and finally, the science which produces “objective and universal” knowledge. These concepts and the religious, civil, sacred, and social conceptions do not conform to the *Qur'ānic* conception of life and knowledge.

¹⁶ al-'Alwānī, Tāhā Jābir, “*Criticism of the Contemporary Islamic Discourse*,” Lectures given in Arabic, accessed July 7, 2021. Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FkrAqMcDMk> / Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTbfo3huhXk&t=3s> / Part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9z10Sy5Dek>

¹⁷ al-'Alwānī, Tāhā Jābir, *Al-jam' Baynā al-Qirā'atayn*, (Virginia: IIIT, 2010).

For instance, what “Islamic” method and knowledge should be used to determine the first and last days of Ramaḍān: direct observation (which, according to widespread religious discourse, is the religious/Islamic method) or indirect observation using technology or calculation (widespread religious discourse considers these two methods to be “rational”, not religious)? To cite an example, al-'Alwānī informs that Ibn Bāz prefers that scientific calculations are not needed to determine the day of *Ramaḍān* and that anyone who climbs on the moon is a *kāfir*. For al-'Alwānī, there is nothing *Qur'ānic* about this “religious” discourse. The reason is that the *Qur'ān* invites Muslims to observe the signs of God in the universe through the senses, reflection, and calculation. In this sense, the method of calculation to determine the first and last day of *Ramaḍān* is no less “religious” than direct observation:

It is He Who made the sun to be a shining glory and the moon to be a light (of beauty) and measured out stages for her; that ye might know the number of years and the count (of time). Nowise did Allah create this but in truth and righteousness. (Thus) does He explain His Signs in detail, for those who understand. Verily, in the alternation of the night and the day, and in all that Allah has created, in the heavens and the earth, are signs for those who fear Him. (*Yūnus*, 5-6.)

From the above citation, one can see that religious discourse tends to see Islam, the world, and knowledge under the influence of non-*Qur'ānic* categories, which come more from the modern secularized or Muslim legal vision of knowledge. This religious discourse proposes a “synthesis between the sciences of the modern West and the authenticity of traditional Islam”. However, this “synthesis” is more like a “syncretism” that generates a disconnection between thought and action, a disconnection between objectives and means, confusion, contradiction, and perverse effects.¹⁸ No effort is being made to ensure coherence to correct the significant problem of contradiction between “secular” and “religious” sciences and theories, clarified further in the subsequent discussion.

The Mystical Discourse: Real Knowledge is Sacred or Traditional Science

The mystical discourse is part of a minority trend confined to Sufi circles. This school of thought is led by René Guénon in France and Seyyed Hossein Nasr in English-speaking countries.¹⁹ Accordingly, Guénon’s vision of the world and knowledge is inspired by the perennialism of Eastern traditions, notably Hinduism, Muslim Sufism, Chinese Taoism, and

¹⁸ See, Bennabi, *Vocation de l’islam*, p. 70.

¹⁹ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993); and, Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study*, (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976).

Western esotericism (alchemy, Kabbalah, and Freemasonry).²⁰ For him, “traditional” knowledge is not revealed by successive Divine Revelations, of which the *Qur’ān* is the last. Nor is it the knowledge taught by generations of Prophets, the last of whom is Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). Nor is it the knowledge acquired by studying the world through observation, experimentation, and calculation. “Traditional” knowledge is the hidden knowledge obtained through spiritual initiation, symbolism, and brotherhood. The “Hidden Truth” contains the repository of “Tradition”, whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or others.²¹

Guénon believes that when Christ dies on the Cross, something supernatural and sacred happens, something that reason cannot grasp. Only symbolism can provide metaphysical meaning.²² Although these interpretations are remarkable, the *Qur’ān*, far from confirming them, neither invalidating them (*al-Nisā’*, 157-158). Thus, in the traditionalist vision of “sacred” knowledge, there is no knowledge of the world as such, for the separation between Creator and creation, that is, the very meaning of *Tawḥīd* in its common Islamic understanding, is reinterpreted as “unity of Being”. It does not seek to produce knowledge to solve collective problems. Science does not solve concrete problems like habitat, family, university programs, technology choices and design, and governance. It is solely a means of accessing a hidden metaphysical and spiritual Truth, which the modern Christian vision of life and knowledge biases this traditionalist vision of “sacred” knowledge. Indeed, for instance, “sacred” or “religious” architecture is confined to the architecture linked to the Church. In other words, the architecture of ordinary houses is not part of the sacred but of the profane.²³

This sacred-profane distinction does not exist in Islam. Islamic architecture inspires and structures the way mosques, houses, and everyday buildings are built. In other words, Islamic architecture embraces both the sacred and the profane. Similarly, Islamic art is visible in the mosque, at home, and even in the toilet, for instance, in a specific earthenware style.²⁴ This mystical trend can be found in other significant scholars such as Martin Lings,²⁵ Frithjof Schuon,²⁶ Titus Burckhardt²⁷ and Hossein Nasr. Nasr, an Iranian academic Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, is a central figure in the Traditionalist School. He

²⁰ Guénon, René, *Symboles de la Science sacrée*, (Paris: Gallimard Publisher, 2010).

²¹ Benaïssa, Hamza, *La connaissance traditionnelle et l'épistémologie moderne*, (Paris: Fiat-Lux Publisher, Paris, 2016).

²² See for instance René Guénon, *Le symbolisme de la croix*, (Paris: Dervy publisher, 2021).

²³ Stevens, Ray S., *An Hermeneutic Exploration of René Guénon's 'The Symbolism of the Cross' Applied to Sacred Architecture*, Master Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Built Environment, University of New South Wales, (2018).

²⁴ al-Fārūqī, Ismā'īl Rājī, *The Arts of Islamic Civilization*, (Virginia: IIIT, 2013).

²⁵ Lings, Martin, *Symbol & Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence*, (Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2006).

²⁶ Schuon, Frithjof, *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, (Illinois: Quest Books, 1984).

²⁷ Burckhardt, Titus, *Art of Islam, Language and Meaning*, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009).

develops the same vision of “traditional” knowledge.²⁸ Unlike Guénon, Nasr does not adhere to the religious-profane or sacred-secular division.²⁹ Nevertheless, he advocates the same vision of a “sacred science”, a product of a particular mystical tradition - namely the tradition of Gnosis and goes back to the Greek Neo-Platonists.³⁰ The concept of “sacred science” makes no difference between a monotheist and a polytheist view on the world and knowledge because, in both cases, it is “sacred” and “vertical”. In other words, regarding conceptions of sacredness and unity of knowledge in ancient civilizations, there remains no apparent difference between the metaphysical framework of all ancient civilizations and the Islamic one.³¹

In his work on the history of the Islamic sciences, Nasr focused exclusively on issues such as the occult, alchemy, and astrology, to the detriment of the extensive work done on the exact sciences, in an attempt to show that the Islamic sciences in history were a “sacred science”.³² In other words, for him, “traditional science” does not mean science as it has existed in Islamic civilization and history, but the esoteric products made in the tradition of Islamic mysticism or Sufism. “Traditional science” is “sacred science”, the science of ultimate reality, as thought by Sufi masters and mystics of other traditions. Moreover, today, “Islamic science” aims to rediscover the classical Islamic esoteric traditions and their sacredness. Several Western³³ and Muslim³⁴ historians contest this interpretation of the history of the Islamic sciences. Nasr advocates a metaphysical and spiritual “re-enchantment” to counter the modern “disenchantment of the world.”³⁵ As Manzoor argues,³⁶ the terminology of “disenchantment” and “re-enchantment” connotes magical and animistic elements in an immanentist conception of the world that is incompatible with the transcendent metaphysics of Islam. Al-Fārūqī also criticized this mystical trend of “sacred” knowledge discourse. He argues that in premodern Islamic history, under the influence of Hellenic philosophy and Sufism, Islam witnessed a separation of *‘Aql* (Intellect) from *Wahy* (Revelation), a bifurcation of reason from revelation that was unknown in its very early formative history. This separation led to an excessive reliance on intuition and esotericism and

²⁸ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

²⁹ Iqbal, Muzaffar, “*Science and Islam*,” (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), p. 149.

³⁰ For a deconstruction of Nasr's view of the history of Islamic science, see Ziauddin Sardar, *Explorations in Islamic Science*, (London: Mansell Pub., 1989), Chapter 5.

³¹ Dallal, Ahmad, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 174.

³² Iqbal, Muzaffar, *Science and Islam*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), p.150.

³³ King, David and Hill, Donald R., *Studies in Medieval Islamic Technology from Philo to al-Jazari – from Alexandria to Diyar Bakr*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

³⁴ Rashed, Roshdi, *Encyclopaedia of the History of Arabic Science*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 3 Vols; Ihsanoglu, Ekmeleddin (ed.), *History of Mathematical Literature During the Ottoman Period*, (Istanbul: Organization of the Islamic Conference's Research Centre for Islamic History, 1999), 2 Vols.

³⁵ Weber, Max, *Sociologie de la religion*, tr. Isabelle Kalinowski, (Paris: Champs-Flammarion, 2006).

³⁶ Manzoor, S.P, *Metaphysics or Politics? The Clash between Two Orthodoxies*, *Muslim World Book Review* 22(1): (2001), p. 13.

meant that the acceptance of revelation became subjective, arbitrary, and whimsical.³⁷ In short, the mystical discourse of the “sacred” science does not approach science as a problem-solving endeavor but as a mere contemplative activity, a mystical quest to understand the absolute. Therefore, building hypotheses and theories has no real place: what matters is a mystical experience. A reality experienced esoterically cannot be validated and would end in the corruption of the authentic message of God.³⁸ Does it mean a secular view confirms it? The explanation of it is as follows.

The Modernist Discourse: Real Knowledge is Secular Knowledge

This current tends to see modern Western science as universal. If there are excesses and perversions in science, they are “neutral double-edged tools” that can be used for good and evil. In other words, modern Western science deserves no fundamental criticism beyond the “good and bad use” of these tools. Furthermore, it considers that Islam and Muslims must “adapt to the modern context” and must assimilate modern knowledge and sciences to reform themselves and reach the same level of progress. In France, Mohammed Arkoun is the best representative of this trend.³⁹ He takes the West as the universal standard. If he criticizes the West (e.g., the Enlightenment, which has turned into contempt for the Other), it is only to return to the Western standard as a universal model without its accidental excesses. For him, it is necessary to “reconcile Islam and modernity”,⁴⁰ that is to say, to modernize Islam, to select all that conforms with the Western modernity standard of knowledge, science, civilization, political, and economic organization in Islam. In other words, the solution for the Muslim world lies in the “opening” to modernity, in the assimilation of modern philosophy and science. Arkoun considers that Islam - including the *Qur’ān* - is a “social construction,”⁴¹ therefore imperfect, to be reformed and improved through the assimilation of modern sciences.

More broadly, his sophisticated language expresses a general idea of modernity: “It is not God who created man, but man who created religion.”⁴² In other words, unlike what

³⁷ Al-Fārūqī, Ismā’īl Rājī, *Al-Tawhīd. Its Implications for Thought and Life*, (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982).

³⁸ Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 174.

³⁹ Arkoun, Mohammed, *Les tâches théoriques et pratiques de l’islamologie appliquée*, Lecture held at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, (31 May 2007).

⁴⁰ Arkoun, Mohammed, “Comment concilier islam et modernité ?”. In *Le Monde Diplomatique* online Journal, (April 2003).

⁴¹ Saint-Blancat, Chantal, “Mohammed Arkoun, La construction humaine de l’islam,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, Vol. 160, (2012).

⁴² *Ibid.*

Islamic orthodoxy maintains, religion is not above society but is entirely and unavoidably within society.⁴³ Thus, deconstructing Islam - including the divine character of the *Qur'ān* - is the “subversive” method he applies by basing his view on Western modern social sciences.⁴⁴ He is committed to the modern and postmodern paradigm of knowledge as a starting point in constructing his view of life and knowledge. He criticizes the foundations of Islam (Islamic thought including *Qur'ān* and Sunnah) and “Islamic reason” by using the tools of the modern social and human sciences as an unquestionable standard.

For Arkoun, “all the *surahs* and pages of the *Qur'ān* are the word of God” is a belief rather than a divine revelation. Indeed, the *Qur'ān* is a *Corpus Officiel Clos* (Closed Official Corpus), a text constructed and imposed by political power, first by ‘Uthmān (R.A.).⁴⁵ Since then, the *Qur'ān* has become “the sacred Text of the Muslim orthodoxy.”⁴⁶ He thus seeks to show the radical historicity of “Islamic reason” in contradiction to the transcendentalist picture that comes out of most Islamic discourses. He wants to open Islamic thought to modernity and accelerate its modernization, stating that “Nothing will be done without a subversion of the systems of religious thought.”⁴⁷ In addition, the modernist discourse tends to see the history of science in Islamic civilization as the history of “secular” Muslim scientists, closer to the Western than to the Islamic worldview.⁴⁸ Further reading reveals that the modernist discourse of “secular” science has three main shortcomings.

The first shortcoming of modernist discourse replaces conformism to tradition with conformism to Western modernity. Arkoun is one among a list of “modernist *muqallidūn*” like Mohamed Abed al-Jabri, Abdelmajid Charfi, Youssef Seddik, and Nasr Abū Zayd,⁴⁹ who have applied the Western “hermeneutical method” to Islamic thought, to the Sunnah and the *Qur'ān*. Relating to Islamic thought, the hermeneutical method shows that all schools of thought are fighters in a space of power. Likewise, the Sunnah, the hermeneutical method, consists of showing that all *Aḥādith* are social inventions of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.). In

⁴³ Arkoun, Mohammed & Gardet, Louis, *L'Islam: Hier-Demain*, (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1978), p. 145.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.146-148.

⁴⁵ Arkoun, Mohammed, *The Unthought in Islamic Thought*, (London: Saqi Books, 2002), p. 257.

⁴⁶ Arkoun, Mohammed, *ABC de l'islam: Pour sortir des clôtures dogmatiques*, (Paris: Grancher, 2007), p. 85.

⁴⁷ Arkoun, Mohammed, “*Il est vital que l'islam accède à la modernité*,” (Interview with *L'Express Journal*, 27/03/2003). Translated from French into English by Mohamed Oudihat.

⁴⁸ This is a typical example of the colonial view of the history of science: Huff, Toby, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ al-Jabri, Mohamed Abed, *The Formation of Arab Reason: Text, Tradition and the Construction of Modernity in the Arab World*, (Beirut: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Charfi, Abdel Majid, “*L'Islam entre le message et l'histoire*,” (Paris: Albin Michel, 2004); Seddik, Youssef, “*Nous n'avons jamais lu le Coran*,” (Paris: Éditions de l'Aube publisher, 2019); Abū Zayd, Nasr, *Rethinking the Qur'ān: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics*, (Utrecht: Humanistics University Press, 2005).

addition, it is said that the *Qur'ān*, if viewed from the hermeneutical method, separates the Text from the possibility of being understood. Modernist discourse strips the *Qur'ān* of its divine and infallible character, making “context”, “the times”, and “modern science” the new infallible divinity. Their view of the “context” and “the times” is incredibly naïve: “The age, it is true, is a reality. It is also a convenient myth, an everyday deity invoked to subject the individual to the imperatives of ‘modernity’. The preachers of conformity recite the same litany: we must ‘adapt to evolution’, ‘keep up with the times’, and ‘be of our time’. However, who decides what the times are?”⁵⁰

The second shortcoming of modernist discourse is that it fails to explain the link between Islam and the development of Islamic civilization and knowledge. Indeed, Seeing the history of science in Islamic civilization as the history of “secular” Muslim scientists, closer to the Western than to the Islamic worldview, is absurd. The reason is that the Muslims view life in balance: *Duniyawī* and *Ukhrawī*, and science is an *Ibādah*, a way of worshipping and serving God by supporting others. Similarly, the commitment to producing knowledge - for practical or worship-related needs - flowed logically from the Islamic worldview that energized them. Indeed, Muslim scientists developed knowledge for worship purposes - establishing the direction of the *Qiblah* of Makkah from every point on the globe, developing mathematics to calculate time or to distribute inheritance, and others. As for practical social needs include establishing hospitals and developing medicine, administration, taxation to manage the common good, and others.

The third shortcoming is that modernist discourse is instrumental in developing the modern Western agenda. Indeed, the modern West instrumentalizes Muslim modernists to develop its agenda: Westernization of the worldviews, languages, knowledge, practices, feelings, and imagination.⁵¹ With these points in mind, what must Muslims do? The discussion on “deconstruction” ensues.

⁵⁰ Brune, François, “*De l'idéologie aujourd'hui*”, In *Le Monde diplomatique* online Journal, (August 1996). <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1996/08/BRUNE/5688>. Translated from French into English by Mohamed Oudihat.

⁵¹ See for instance: Vergès, F, “*Décoloniser la langue française: Pour une politisation de la Francophonie*. *Revue du Crieur*,” Vol. 10, (2018), pp. 68-81. <https://doi.org/10.3917/crieu.010.0068>; Rodenburg C.M.E. *The Francophonie and Decolonization*. A Master Thesis submitted to Leiden University, (2019); Gregor Feindt, Bernhard Gissibl and Johannes Paulmann. *Band 21 Cultural Sovereignty beyond the Modern State Space, Objects, and Media*, (Paris: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2011); Serge Latouch, *Décoloniser l'imaginaire*. (Paris: Parangon, 2011).

The Postmodernist Discourse: There is no Real Knowledge but Deconstruction

Postmodernism was born in a secular modern context of a “big bang” of knowledge and information, where no human being can understand the phenomena of reality, nature, and man together, so fragmented and contradictory is the knowledge and information about them.⁵² Postmodernism has no faith in religion or modernity. It rejects all ideas of religion, of “worldview” or “metanarrative”, and all interpretive frameworks or ways of understanding the world claimed to have universal truth or validity.⁵³ Reading further reveals that there exist two opposite emerging trends among Muslim thinkers who are developing the postmodernist discourse of science “deconstruction”:

1. The first ones are Muslim thinkers who see postmodernity as a way to liberate themselves from modernity, known as “the postmodernist discourse of Modern science deconstruction”, and
2. the second is the Muslim thinkers who see postmodernity as a way to make Islamic thought synonym to modern thought, called “the postmodernist discourse of Islamic science deconstruction”.

The postmodernist discourse of modern science deconstruction is the Muslim critical discourse – like that of Akbar S. Ahmed – toward modern Western intellectual and practical hegemony.⁵⁴ However, even if the “deconstruction” idea has attracted some Muslim thinkers, they have realized the significant difference with Islam as a criticism of existing knowledge. While Islam provides the means to criticize human knowledge of God, nature, and man to help humans access a better understanding of life, the postmodernist deconstruction criticizes all existing knowledge and worldviews to maintain a definitive sceptical stance.⁵⁵ A lucid example is Mohd Kamal Hassan, who argues that “Postmodernism is a form of de-modernization, not of a decolonization.”⁵⁶ In this sense, Postmodernism is the rebelled child of modern Enlightenment. It deconstructs modernity as a worldview and view of knowledge. It considers that there is no more valid or objective knowledge. Nevertheless, that does not change the modern colonial political and economic order. Postmodernism is against all absolute. As the *Qur’ān* contains divinely revealed knowledge, Muslim thinkers cannot be postmodern without marginalizing the *Qur’ān*. In this same conference, Osman Bakar asserts that Postmodernism has no coherent

⁵² Morin, Edgar, *Introduction à la pensée complexe*, (Paris: ESF publisher, 1990).

⁵³ Smith, Huston, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, (New York: Crossroads, 1989), p. 233.

⁵⁴ Almond, Ian, *The New Orientalists: Postmodern Representations of Islam from Foucault to Baudrillard*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 2-3.

⁵⁵ Refer to the Conference ISTAC TV, “*Decolonisation and Islamisation of the Social Sciences: Convergence and Divergence*,” April 26, 2021.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

epistemology.⁵⁷ In short, while contemporary Islamic Thought shares a critical view of modernity with Postmodernism, Islam is not postmodern because it proposes an objective and universal vision of reality, wisdom, knowledge, and methodology.

The other opposite trend is “The postmodernist discourse of Islamic science deconstruction”, which focuses most of its criticism on “Islam”: Islamic History, Islamic Thought, the *Sunnah*, and even the *Qur’ān*. In theory, Postmodernism’s call to an epistemic pluralism should help Islamic thought – and other civilizational partners – contribute to a universal understanding of the world. However, paradoxically, as Emad Bazzi analyses the idea,⁵⁸ he clarifies that it withdraws all legitimacy from anything other than modern knowledge. Indeed, postmodern Muslim discourse is postmodern in its critique of Islam (Islamic Thought, the *Sunnah*, and the *Qur’ān*) but modern in its belief in modern knowledge. It juxtaposes total relativism when it deals with Islamic knowledge with totalitarian positivism when it refers to modern sciences. Within these premises, Arkoun calls for a plurality of voices and interpretations of the *Qur’ān*, focusing on context and power relations rather than the Text. However, when he refers to “science”, “history”, or “the hermeneutic method”, he takes it to be absolute nor discusses the plurality of interpretations and context of emergence. In other words, Arkoun, along with other postmodern Muslim thinkers, applies a postmodern approach to the Muslim intellectual heritage while adhering to modernity as a standard and source of universal truths for all Muslims.⁵⁹ If Muslims apply these methods and tools of Arkoun, the validity of the approach is no longer valid. Such is the case with all postmodern Muslim discourse, which lacks epistemological coherence.

This contradiction is not only an individual mistake but a postmodern way of marginalizing others.⁶⁰ Indeed, paradoxically, Postmodernism values epistemic pluralism while invalidating the possibility of diversity providing objective, universal knowledge of the world.⁶¹ The consequence of this paradoxical way of dealing with non-modern views and sources of knowledge is the marginalization of others and reinforcement of Western epistemic hegemony.⁶² From here, the postmodern discourse has accepted Islamic

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Bazzi, Emad, “Postmodernism and Islam: Epistemological Challenges and Sociopolitical Perils,” *The Journal of Rotterdam Islamic and Social Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (2013), p. 1.

⁵⁹ See Benzine, Rachid, *Les Nouveaux Penseurs de l’islam*, (Paris: Albin Michel publisher, 2008).

⁶⁰ Farhatullah, Mohammed Shafiq, *et. al.*, “Islam and Postmodernism: A Study of Ziauddin Sardar’s Perspective,” *PalArch’s Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17 (6), (2020), p. 964.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 965.

⁶² *Ibid.*

knowledge that conforms to materialistic, relativistic, or social constructivism. In so doing, Postmodernism pretends to guarantee a better epistemic pluralism than modernity or any other worldview and allows modernity to rebuild its lost legitimacy and continue to dominate the world. This thought persists with the event of colonialism, as discussed below.

The Decolonial or Postcolonial Discourse: Real Knowledge is Decolonized Knowledge

This trend brings together a variety of Muslim intellectuals and those from other religions or philosophies of life. It tends to see knowledge as an instrument of power. It is a continuation of studies in the history and sociology of science that examine the classic question of the “relationship between the scholar and the political”. It is known that Edward Said is the champion of the critique of Orientalism as a Western machine for producing knowledge to dominate the “Orient”.⁶³ Wael Hallaq supports this point and augments that focusing on the Orientalist phenomenon only leaves out the other academic disciplines that contributed to dominating the “Orient”.⁶⁴ Indeed, focusing only on the “power relations” of one discipline - Orientalism - helps to exonerate and hide the responsibility of other academic disciplines in the activities of domination of the Other and nature. Orientalism has something in common with geography, philosophy, literature, biology, physics, political and social sciences. All these sciences have contributed to the domination of non-Western and nature.⁶⁵

Other decolonial authors have developed a more significant and more fundamental criticism of Modern Western Knowledge and Academy. Indeed, in various academic disciplines, there is a widespread trend towards questioning the universality of Western science. For instance, in history, particularly in world history, decolonial thinkers also criticize the epistemological bias of the modern West. Indeed, the natural and human sciences have primarily accepted the classification of human history into “ancient, medieval and modern”, as stated in Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*.⁶⁶ However, this classification has no basis in scientific history. World history is, in fact, an American and,

⁶³ Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, (London: Routledge Books, 2003).

⁶⁴ Hallaq, Wael B, “*Restating Orientalism. A Critique of Modern Knowledge*,” (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

⁶⁵ See Nandy, Ashis (ed.), *Science, Hegemony and Violence*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), and “*Alternative Sciences: Creativity and Authenticity in Two Indian Scientists*,” (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980); Claude Alvares, *Decolonising History: Technology and Culture in India, China and the West, 1492 to the Present Day*, (Goa: Other India Press, 1991); Ziauddin Sardar (ed.), *The Touch of Midas: Science, Values and the Environment in Islam and the West*, (Manchester: University Press, 1982); Ziauddin Sardar, *The Revenge of Athena: Science, Exploitation and the Third World*, (London: Mansell, 1988); Ziauddin Sardar, *Explorations in Islamic Science*, (London: Mansell, London, 1989).

⁶⁶ Spengler, Oswald, *Le déclin de l'Occident*, (Paris: Gallimard publisher, 1948).

more broadly, a Western projection of history onto the world.⁶⁷ This point is the critique developed by various Muslim and decolonial intellectuals.⁶⁸ The challenge of decolonial critique is not simply to call into question Orientalist discourse on “the East” or the “excesses” and “exceptional” biases of different disciplines towards the Other. Instead, it is to conduct a systematic, transdisciplinary analysis of the “Western epistemic domination.”⁶⁹

Salman Sayyid is the prominent Critical Muslim who launched *ReOrient, The Journal of Critical Muslim Studies*, “to rethink those entities and events considered to lie outside the conceptuality of Western hegemony, culturally, geopolitically and philosophically.”⁷⁰ Under the influence of Salman Sayyid, the Hamad Bin Khalifa University has taken the Decolonization of the knowledge process seriously.⁷¹ The decolonial criticism of modern knowledge also means a systematic criticism of epistemology and methodology in the sciences. For instance, Canada has an emerging critique of the research methodologies used to study indigenous populations. Beyond criticism, a genuine alternative methodological creativity is emerging.⁷² Thus, the decolonial critique of modern Western-centric sciences is traversed by very different currents, ranging from the simple renegotiation of the power to live differently to contesting the dominant epistemological order to propose one or more alternative worldviews. As a sign of the strength of this decolonial discourse, many research laboratories and conferences were raised in universities of the West and the South.⁷³

⁶⁷ Dunn, Ross Edmunds, “*The Global Growth of World History Education*,” *Hesperis-Tamuda LV* (1), (2020), pp. 77-115.

⁶⁸ Abushouk, Ahmed Ibrahim, “World History from an Islamic Perspective: The Experience of the International Islamic University Malaysia,” in *Global Practice in World History: Advances Worldwide*, ed. Patrick Manning, (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2008), pp. 39-55; Blankinship, Khalid, “Islam and world history: towards a new periodization,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 3, (1991); Saleh, Mohsen M.S., “Developing a History Curriculum: An Islamic Perspective,” *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 9, No 1, (2021), pp. 85-100.

⁶⁹ Kerr, Jeannie, “Western epistemic dominance and colonial structures: Considerations for thought and practice in programs of teacher education,” *Decolonization, Education & Society*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (2014); Ahmad, Irfan, “The Time of Epistemic Domination: Notes on Modernity as an Oppressive Category,” *ReOrient*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (Autumn 2021), pp. 72-95.

⁷⁰ *ReOrient, The Journal of Critical Muslim Studies*, Manifesto. Published in <https://criticalmuslimstudies.co.uk/about-us>

⁷¹ *Decolonial thought in Islamic Studies*. Hamad Bin Khalifa University, College of Islamic Studies, (15 Jun 2019). <https://www.hbku.edu.qa/en/news/decolonial-islamic-studies>

⁷² Dawson, A. S., Toombs, E., Mushquash, C. J., “Indigenous Research Methods: A Systematic Review,” *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (2017).

⁷³ *Imagined Borders, Epistemic Freedoms Conference*, (University of Colorado Boulder, January 7-11, 2020). <https://www.colorado.edu/cmrc/events/imagined-borders-epistemic-freedoms>; “*Civilizationism and Islamic Decolonial Thought Conference*,” Middle East Studies Association, Turkey, December 3 2022, accessed March 5, 2023, [https://www.ips.org.pk/decolonizing-islamic-studies](https://my-mesa.org/program/sessions/view/eyJpdjI6ImNYT3hneVR6TWWh5SG1hSEFqU3FWUXc9PSIsInZhbHVlIjoizENYSTZaTBqR3ozMTBndjlyYVBIUT09IiwibWFjIjoieMzJhNWY1N2JkMmVlYjY1M2EwMDg0ZTdhNzNkZjAwNTE0ZTIxZWZkNGE5NWYyYjJkN2FjNzQ3MTYxMDA5NjU0MCI5InRhZyI6Ij99; “Decolonizing Islamic Studies conference,” Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad, (31 March 2022). <a href=)

The crisis of the Modern world may be an auspicious moment to think through the bonds between peripheries, linking the “Bandung of the South” and the “Bandung of the North”⁷⁴ or critical and wise thinkers from different corners of the world, to decolonize knowledge by moving towards more structural methods of de-linking from colonial and Eurocentric modes of knowledge production and pedagogy. Modernist critique of the decolonial trend is paradoxical because it denies the Other the right to participate in developing an objective and universal science.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, philosophy, history, anthropology, and sociology of science have shown that modern civilization is biased by the idea that the only true knowledge is Western, which marginalizes and renders invisible the sciences of all other civilizations. By highlighting that science is a social activity, where choices are made, where errors in scientific judgment and social behavior occur, where beliefs become embedded, where vested interests direct the subjects, the results, and their use, the superiority of Western science - over the sciences produced by other civilizations - can no longer be defended. With this idea in mind, what about the status of Islamic discourse on knowledge?

The New Islamic Discourse: Islam as a Universal Source of Knowledge

The following features of the “New Islamic discourse” are partially inspired by Elmessiri’s thought.⁷⁶ However, his work is partial because his comparative analysis of existing Muslim discourses does not focus on their position toward knowledge. There is a significant number of intellectuals with different backgrounds, views, and approaches to “Islam and knowledge”. And there exists an incredible amount of literature to review on Islam and knowledge, its criticism done by Muslim contemporary intellectuals, such as Malik Bennabi, Ziauddin Sardar, Muzaffar Iqbal, Naqīb al-‘Attas, Ismā’īl R. al-Fārūqī, ‘Abdul Ḥamīd Abū Sulaymān, Tāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, Abdelwahab Elmessiri, and Taha Abdurrahman.⁷⁷ At the same time, there is a large variety of institutes and universities where this topic is studied.

⁷⁴ It is an international conference organized by the “*Decolonial International Network*,” to “seal a political alliance between decolonial movements in the West”: <http://bandungdunord.webflow.io/en>

⁷⁵ See Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard, *La “théorie décoloniale” ou l’invention d’un ennemi commun.* In the review *Politix*, (21 janvier 2022). Translated from French into English by Mohamed Oudihat. See also Sandrine Lemaire, Dominic Thomas et Alain Mabanckou. “*Colonisation & Propagande, le pouvoir de l’image.*” (Cherche-Midi publisher, Paris, 2022).

⁷⁶ Elmessiri, Abdelwahab, “*Towards A New Islamic Discourse*,” in IslamOnline.net, (17/07/2003).

⁷⁷ See for instance: Malek Bennabi, “*Le Problème des idées dans le monde musulman*,” (Algiers: Al Bayyinate publisher, 1990); Ziauddin Sardar, “*Explorations in Islamic Science*,” (London: Mansell, 1989); Iqbal, Muzaffar, “*Science and Islam*,” (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007); Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib, “*Islam and secularism*,” (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993); ‘Abdul Ḥamīd Abū Sulaymān, *Crisis in The Muslim Mind*,” (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1997); Tāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, “*Issues in Islamic Thought*,” (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005); Wael Hallaq, “*Reforming Modernity: Ethics and the New Human in the Philosophy of Abdurrahman Taha*,” (Yale: Columbia University Press, 2019).

Such institutions are the Aligarh School, the International Institute of Islamic Thought, the Institute of Objective Studies, the Center for Islamic Sciences, the Islamic Foundation, the International Islamic University of Malaysia, the International Islamic University of Pakistan, and others. Despite the existence of these varieties, this intellectual diversity does not mean that they do not share specific key ideas in common, which makes it possible to understand them as part of significant current unifying ideas. It can be summed up as follows:

1. Modern science is not neutral: it is not separated from Western society, from the dominant religious, metaphysical, cultural, epistemological, political, and economic order.
2. Secularisation of life and knowledge is part of the Modern crisis. Secularisation has a common general meaning: rejecting religion as a universal source of wisdom and knowledge, reducing life, ethics, and knowledge to materialism, positivism, or constructivism.⁷⁸ The modern spiritual crisis, the Western global wars and colonizations, the ecological crisis, and the current health, food, and education crises all have the same modern secular view of the world, of knowledge and ethics. It is this fundamental worldview that needs to be reassessed and reformed with the help of an Islamic worldview.
3. Neither modernists nor traditionalists nor the double criticism of modernity, Islamic civilization, and traditional sciences. Intellectual openness must not be confused with blind conformism to the West.⁷⁹ Islam is a universal source of knowledge, ethics, and wisdom that aims to build a civilizational and intellectual partnership with relevant Western and other civilizations.
4. Nor positivist nor relativist: the process of secularizing the Western world and modern knowledge has resulted in a double countertrend: positivism on the one hand and relativism or constructivism on the other.⁸⁰
5. Islam is a worldview that has implications on life and knowledge (on epistemology and methodology): Islamic revealed knowledge, concepts, and categories of thought are vital tools to rebuild an Islamic view of knowledge.⁸¹

For Elmessiri, to face the global crisis of the modern world and knowledge and its destructive impacts toward human beings, the Other and nature, we need a “New Islamic discourse”:

The bearers of the new Islamic discourse realized, from the very beginning, the dark aspects of Western modernity. It had embroiled the entire world in

⁷⁸ Ziauddin Sardar, “*Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come*,” (London: Mansell, 1985), p. 19.

⁷⁹ Euben, R, “Premodern, Antimodern or Postmodern? Islamic and Western Critiques of Modernity,” *Review of Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 3, (1997), pp. 429-459.

⁸⁰ See for instance: Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, (Tome 1 Rouen Frères publisher; Tomes 2 to 6, Bachelier publisher, 1830 à 1842); S. Joseph Tham, LC., *The Secularization of Bioethics: A Critical History*, (Publisher Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, 2007); R. STARK, “Secularization, R.I.P.,” *Sociology of Religion* 3 (1999); Marc Jacquemain, Bruno Frère, “*Épistémologie de la sociologie. Paradigmes pour le XXI^e siècle*.” See Chapter 5. Christophe Schinckus, “*Constructivisme et relativisme ou l’expression de la postmodernité dans les sciences sociales*,” (De Boeck Supérieur publisher, 2008), pp. 97-120.

⁸¹ See Tāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, “*Criticism of the Contemporary Islamic Discourse*,” Lecture given in Arabic, Part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9z10Sy5Dek>; Al-Fārūqī, Ismā’īl Rājī, *al-Tawhīd. Its Implications for Thought and Life*, (Virginia: IIIT, 1982).

two Western wars (called “World Wars” because it was dragged into the arena of conflict). The promise of modernity to stop violence historically triggered by religious sentiments was not fulfilled, and modern regimes could commit genocide more professionally than ever thought. Reason could commit its crimes too - not only religion. In the so-called time of “peace”, the world was caught in a frenzied arms race.⁸²

The Sixties represents a new turn in the emerging awareness of the necessity to go beyond modernity:

By the mid-sixties, the critical Western discourse of modernity was crystallized, and the works of its critics, such as the Frankfurt School thinkers, had become widely available and quite popular. Many studies revising the notions of the Enlightenment were published. Works on the standardization that resulted from Western modernity and about its One-Dimensional Man, such as Herbert Marcuse, sought to demonstrate the existence of a structural defect that lies at the very heart of the modern secular project of Western civilization—a defect that goes beyond the traditional division of its ideologies (and stretches itself into a socialist and a capitalist camp). Many revisionist historians, rewriting the history of modern Western civilization, tried to underscore the enormity of the crimes committed against the peoples of Asia and Africa and the colonial pillage of their lands. Many studies, radically critical of development theories, appeared during the same period.⁸³

For al-Fārūqī, since Allah (SWT) has placed human beings on earth as *Khalīfah* (vicegerent) endowed him with *al-Amānah* (Trust), human beings need knowledge to understand Allah (SWT)’s will and to implement it in all individual and collective situations of life on earth. So, knowing the *Sunnat Allāh fī al-Kawn* or Allah (SWT)’s patterns on the cosmos, nature, history, and human life..., and knowing the wisdom to be implemented is a vital existential need. In other words, knowing revealed knowledge, natural and social sciences is a human necessity and duty. Al-Fārūqī presents all this view in his major book, *al-Tawhīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life*.⁸⁴ He asserts that it is true that much of what modern science has accomplished is truly astounding. However, this development also appeared to have another equally concerning effect. Indeed, the problem is that the natural and social sciences we learn in all universities are biased by a Western worldview that is not synonymous with science and reality. Al-Fārūqī insists on this Western knowledge bias, which does not allow a good understanding of Islam and Muslims “The humanistic studies of Western man and the social analysis of Western society by a Western scientist are necessarily ‘Western’ and cannot serve as models for the study of Muslims or their

⁸² Elmessiri, Abdelwahab, “Towards A New Islamic Discourse,” in *IslamOnline.net*, (17/07/2003).

⁸³ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁴ Al-Fārūqī, *Al-Tawhīd. Its Implications for Thought and Life*.

society.”⁸⁵ According to him, the need for the reconstruction of knowledge begins with the recognition that Western social sciences and humanities are problematic for Muslims because they represent an ‘alien vision’, which is evident in the very ideas of reality, nature, man, and society. He, thus, identifies three main shortcomings that necessitate an Islamic reconstruction.⁸⁶

1. Western social science has not developed the tools to understand the moral and spiritual realms, which must be studied in their own right since they form an integral element of social reality;
2. by reducing reality to its material level and by arguing for the distanced, value-neutral observer, Western social science presents a false claim of objectivity;
3. the division of social knowledge into the humanities and social sciences violates the Islamic principle of the unity of truth because questions of ultimate value become the sole domain of the humanities, which pose their inquiry in purely subjectivist and individualist terms. The social sciences, in effect, no longer deal with questions of ultimate value, “except those based on instrumental ends”⁸⁷.

By cutting themselves off from the reality of God, the modern natural and human sciences have cut themselves off from *Tawhīdī* metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical principles to guide the production and use of knowledge. Herein lies the heart of the crisis, which the new Islamic discourse strives to address.

Conclusion

The Mapping of the Islamic Discourse on Knowledge is a valuable way to assess strengths and weaknesses, philosophical and epistemological biases and choices made by various Muslim thinkers, and their conformity to the Islamic worldview. The major finding of this study is that the “New Islamic Discourse” is relevant in opening a new philosophical, epistemological, and ultimately civilizational and practical order. Its strength is based on its general stance on knowledge namely: (1) Modern science is not neutral; (2) Secularization of life and knowledge is part of the Modern crisis; (3) Islamic view of knowledge is neither modernist nor traditionalist; (4) Islamic view of knowledge is neither positivist nor relativist; and (5) Islam is a worldview that has implications for life and knowledge (on epistemology and methodology). This general position opens a new path for Islamic Thought in the service of Muslims and humanity, thanks to the development of a thought rooted in the Islamic

⁸⁵ Al-Fārūqī, Ismā’īl Rājī and Naseef, A. O., *Social and Natural Sciences*, (Jeddah: King Abdul Aziz University Press, 1981), Chapter 1, *Islamizing the Social Sciences*, pp. 8-21.

⁸⁶ Al-Fārūqī, Ismā’īl Rājī, *Islamization of Knowledge. General Principles and Work Plan*, (Virginia: IIIT, 1981), pp. 11-17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

worldview, open to the world and to the contribution of different human civilizations, with which it cultivates critical and creative relationships. This new path encompasses a diversity of Muslim thinkers that deserves to be explored through in-depth research.

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