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OSMAN BAKAR AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL RENEWAL IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Khairudin Aljunied¹

Abstract

This article examines the ideas of a philosopher-historian, Osman Bakar, and his call for an “epistemological renewal” in the Muslim world. Epistemological renewal involves, firstly, laying bare the knowledge crisis that has plagued contemporary Muslims. Secondly, Osman advocates the reconstruction of modern knowledge through the paradigm of dual consilience to overcome the problems that have been brought about by secularism, materialism and European universalism. Through his interrogation of issues affecting Muslim thought in the modern world, Osman has posed many searching questions for Muslims in Southeast Asia and beyond to consider in their bid to move beyond colonial constructions of knowledge and recover the past legacies of the Muslim civilisation.

Keywords: Dual consilience, epistemology, Islam, knowledge, secularism

This essay explores the writings of a Malay-Muslim philosopher-historian, Osman Bakar. Recognised as among the world’s most influential Muslims, and currently, the second holder of Al-Ghazali Chair at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Malaysia, Osman is the author and editor of close to forty books (including translations into other languages) that centre around the questions of knowledge in Islam.² This essay

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² ‘Datuk Osman Bakar’, <<https://www.themuslim500.com/profiles/osman-bakar/>> [accessed 1 April 2020].

develops the argument that Osman's contribution to Islamic thought in modern Southeast Asia and in the Muslim world at large lies chiefly in what he describes as a "veritable *tajdīd* (renewal) in epistemology," or to put it more neatly and succinctly, epistemological renewal.³ Epistemological renewal necessitates a few intellectual procedures. It entails, first of all, a methodical elucidation of the knowledge crisis that has plagued modern Muslims in the last two centuries. A consequence of the intellectual stasis in the Muslim world coupled with European colonialism and secularism, Osman sees this knowledge crisis as the chief cause of the weakening of Muslim minds and as the main factor explaining why Muslims are unceasingly subservient to Western ideas and ideals.

Epistemological renewal encompasses also a reconceptualisation of knowledge. Osman advocates what I term as a "dual consilience." The first level of consilience is a synthesis of different fields within the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences into a new dynamic form of knowledge that could address the challenges faced by humanity. Colonialism and professionalisation of the academe in postcolonial nation states, according to Osman, has led to the bifurcation of knowledge into watertight fields and the creation of a hierarchy of knowledge, with natural sciences seen as more true to the scientific method than the humanities and the social sciences. A residue of Western imperialism, Osman agrees with decolonial scholars that not only has knowledge been sharply dichotomised between those that are "scientific" and "less scientific", European ethnocentric conceptions of nature and humanity still shape contemporary understandings and production of knowledge.⁴ A way around this epistemicide is a thorough reconsideration and redefinition of the notion and practice of "science" to one that places the humanities and the social sciences within the same plane as the natural sciences. Osman envisions a new

³ Osman Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays* (Gadong: University Brunei Darussalam Press, 2014), 300.

⁴ For a brilliant discussion on how the humanities is still coloured by colonial conceptions of humanity, see: Will Bridges, "A Brief History of the Inhumanities," *History of Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–26.

form of knowledge that projects a more universal standpoint that leans towards pluriversality.

The second level of consilience is the incorporation of divine visions, values and ethics into the reservoir of worldly knowledge. The secularism of global societies since the last two centuries has caused human beings to think and act purely on the basis of utilitarian and exploitative ends. Once regarded as sacred by the locals, the natural environment suffered under the hands of the colonial powers who were devoid of a sense of accountability and sustainability.⁵ To show the applicability of this consilience, Osman appealed to Islamic history and cast light on how knowledge of the divine and the world were incorporated in the writings of great Muslim scholars. These scholars ushered the making of a knowledge-driven, a faith-based, and an environmentally conscious civilisation that derived its mainspring of inspiration from the concept of *tawhīd* (divine unity).

Osman describes this as the “*tawhidic* epistemology or vision of knowledge that affirms the view that all true human knowledge ought to be ultimately related to the unity of God, since all things are ontologically related to their Divine Origin.”⁶ Because unity forms the core of Muslim thought and the *raison être* of the Muslim civilisation, Muslim scholars pursued knowledge to deepen their quest to unveil God’s wisdom. They studied forces, energies, music, arts, nature and wrote mathematical, scientific, historical, anthropological and philosophical treatises to unlock the secrets of nature which they regarded as another form of divine revelation. The laws of nature were, to them, divine laws. Osman believes that the effervescence of knowledge production among pre modern Muslims had much to do with them embodying the spirit of Islam that encouraged *wasatiyyah* (balance) between technological progress and environmental preservation, between material prosperity and metaphysical fulfilment, between universal concern for humanity and particular wellbeing of Muslims, and between skepticism in worldly

⁵ The global impact of colonialism on the natural environment is explored in: Christina Folke Ax and others (eds.), *Cultivating the Colonies: Colonial States and Their Environmental Legacies* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011).

⁶ Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays*, 40.

matters and certainty in faith. Guided by the *tawhidic* epistemology, Muslim scholars and thinkers also outlined the functions of different fields through sophisticated classifications. They all sought to live up to God's divine name, *al-'Alīm* (The Omniscient), and became pathfinders of many scientific discoveries.⁷

Osman's formulation of the idea of epistemological renewal can only be fully understood by contextualising it against the major influences that shaped his life and writing. Trained as a mathematician specialising in Algebra during his Bachelor's and Master's postgraduate studies in London, Osman switched to a life-long immersion in Islamic studies for his postdoctoral degrees at Temple University in the United States of America. This shift from the study of shapes, arrangements and quantities to reflexive analyses of religious thought came about during his interactions with the renowned scholar of Islam, Seyyed Hossein Nasr. To Katherine Nielsen, Nasr exercised the greatest influence on Osman's thought. Nasr's call for the revival of sacred science in the modern world structures a core part of Osman's oeuvre.⁸

My assessment of Osman's works points to a slightly different inference. Granted that Osman utilises much of Nasr's ideas and is well-acquainted with all of his teacher's writings. But unlike Nasr, Osman is not concerned only with the fusion of science and religion. He envisions a total reconstruction of the architecture of knowledge in the modern world where science forms a constitutive but not a totalising part of that reconstituted knowledge. Osman also does not reject modern science which is a key dimension of Nasr's work that has drawn him many detractors.⁹ To be sure, there were a plethora of thinkers that fashioned Osman's ideas on epistemological renewal. Osman regarded the Malaysian intellectual, Naquib Al-Attas, as most prominent in shaping the direction of his early scholarship. During

⁷ Osman Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1999), 69.

⁸ Katherine Nielsen, "The Philosophy of Osman Bin Bakar," *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 22, no. 1 (2008): 83.

⁹ Pervez Hoodboy, *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality* (London: Zed Books, 1991); Osman Bakar, "Nature as a Sacred Book: A Core Element of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Philosophical Teachings," *Sacred Web* 40 (2017): 33–59.

his early years as a lecturer in the 1970s, Osman viewed himself as Al-Attas' "student in philosophy and mysticism (*taṣawwuf*), his colleague and friend, and at times also his sparring partner in the intellectual area, that is how I would describe myself in my then relations to him."¹⁰ Al-Attas' sibling and intellectual antipode, Syed Hussein Alatas (1928-2007), too exerted some degree of influence on Osman. Alatas' critique of colonial ideology and the forms of knowledge that it had spawned made Osman attentive to the epistemic violence which Western imperialism has effected on Muslim societies.¹¹

Osman drew on other classical and contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers to explain the applicability of epistemological renewal. Al-Farabi (872-950), Ibn Sina (980-1037), Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi (1236-1311), Mulla Sadra (1572-1640), Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) and Ismail al-Faruqi (1921-1986) pervade Osman's works. Of this list of thinkers, "the Muslim scholar to have a profound intellectual impact on my [Osman Bakar] thought was al-Ghazali since 1971 when I was doing my Masters in London."¹² And yet, Osman is critical of al-Ghazali's ideas. He took it as his life mission to resolve a major problem in al-Ghazali's works, which was al-Ghazali's division of knowledge into the religious and the intellectual sciences. To Osman, this division was an upshot of the dichotomised view of revelation and reason of Muslim theologians. "But this view of revelation and reason is problematic. Insofar as al-Ghazali was committed to this view, he appears not to be consistent in his position as to where the line should be drawn between the religious and intellectual sciences", Osman writes.¹³

Osman found the explanations for consistency and the seamless link between religious and intellectual sciences in medieval Islamic scholarship and also in the writings of non-Muslim scholars.

¹⁰ Osman Bakar, *Advancing Comparative Epistemology and Civilisational and Future Studies* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC-IIUM Publications, 2019), 38.

¹¹ Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

¹² Interview with Osman Bakar, 13 March 2020.

¹³ Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998), 267.

At home with the eminent American historian of ideas, Arthur Lovejoy (1873-1932), Osman utilises Lovejoy's notion of the cumulative traditions of knowledge within and between civilisations.¹⁴ Harry Wolfson (1887-1974), in turn, provides Osman with insights into the expansive and intensive transmission of the works of Muslim theologians and rationalists into the Western civilisation during the medieval era which was made possible by dual consilience that defined the Islamic scholarship of the time.¹⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu's (1914-1993) works, in turn, exposed Osman to the shared features of the Buddhist, Taoist and Muslim civilisations, the interactions and shared methodologies between them, and that dual consilience was not unique to Islam per se.¹⁶ All in all, these Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers provided the intellectual building blocks which Osman utilised to diagnose and disentangle modern Muslims from the knowledge crisis that has beleaguered them.

Knowledge Crisis in the Modern Muslim World

It is almost commonplace nowadays to argue that the knowledge crisis confronting the Muslim world since the last two hundred years has no antecedent in the long history of Islamic thought.¹⁷ Osman is among the modern Islamic thinkers who takes on this debatable view. To the extent that this historiographical interpretation may be true, given the wide-ranging effects that modernisation and secularisation have wrought upon contemporary Muslims, crises of knowledge in Islam are barely unique to the modern age. Such intellectual contestations were ever-present and were catalysts for the development of new disciplines, fresh methodologies and innovative concepts. It would not be excessive to suggest here that Islam thrived on periodic crises of knowledge. Protracted and pugnacious they may

¹⁴ Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam*.

¹⁵ Osman Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1999), 145.

¹⁶ Interview with Osman Bakar, 13 March 2020.

¹⁷ Abdul Hamid A. Abu Sulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993); Hishem Djait, *Islamic Culture in Crisis: A Reflection on Civilizations in History* (Translated by Janet Fouli) (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011); Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

have been, each crisis shepherded the coming into being of reformers and reformist movements, all of which were motivated by the strong desire to appraise outdated paradigms and expose tainted beliefs in the path to push Islamic thought to new and progressive frontiers.¹⁸

It is not my intention here to narrate the repertoires of knowledge crisis in the Muslim world. The major point I am making is that we can only fully comprehend Osman's thought by placing it within the millennium-old genealogy of Muslim thinkers who sought to continuously address the knowledge crisis confronting Muslims in every epoch. Armed with this historical understanding, cognisant that past problems bear some resonances with those faced by Muslims at present and seeing the urgency of epistemological renewal, Osman outlined four intertwining crises of knowledge in the modern Muslim world: secularism, materialism, universalism, and the problem of disequilibrium.

On secularism, Osman agrees with Naquib Al-Attas that the ideology has brought severe deformations in Muslim minds, one of which was the decoupling of spirituality from all intellectual pursuits.¹⁹ The implication of this is that knowledge produced by secularised Muslims is devoid of any reference to and/or any sense of answerability towards God and the hereafter. In marking the dissonance between the sacred and the profane, Osman reprehends secularised Muslims for taking "the step of reducing the meaning of human life to the earthly domain alone and of emptying it of its spiritual content. All the ideals of human perfection and human happiness that religion in general and Islam in particular associates with the post-humus life became transferred at the hands of secularism to terrestrial life in the now-familiar form of a societal quest for progress and peace. A contest for influence between the two notions of societal salvation, one religious and the other secular thus became inevitable."²⁰ Osman's conception of the "secular" and the

¹⁸ See for example: Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999).

¹⁹ Khairudin Aljunied, "Deformations of the Secular: A Rejectionist Conception and Critique of Secularism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 79, no. 3 (2019): 643–63.

²⁰ Osman Bakar, "Exclusive and Inclusive Islam in the Qur'an: Implications for Muslim-Jewish Relations," *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions* 5 (2010): 8.

“religious” shows striking affinities with that of Al-Attas. Both assume “secular” and “religious” as two fixed categories, distinct from one another. This is deeply problematic. As Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and Elizabeth Hurd Shakman argue, Muslims have historically negotiated sacred and profane domains of their lives. Both domains constituted and shaped one another in everyday settings. Many “secular” Muslims do acknowledge the importance of Islam and the divine in their lives and culture and account for the hereafter although they hold on to the idea that the religion must not interfere in statecraft.²¹

Osman dwells deeper than Al-Attas in his exposition of secularism and the knowledge crisis it has brought forth to the Muslim world. He highlights the prevalence of the perception among Muslims that secular sciences are radically different from and inferior to religious sciences. Such a conception did not exist before the spread of Western secularism into the Muslim world. This is the epistemicide brought about by colonialism which Osman is deeply concerned with. Before the coming of the West, Muslim students and scholars saw both sciences as equally noble and encouraged the pursuit of all branches of knowledge. Because of this, Muslim students and scholars mastered a few disciplines as they were driven by the aspiration to comprehend God’s Grand Design in the world of man. “It was fundamental changes in modern Western beliefs about God, man, reality, religion, divine revelation, reason and knowledge,” Osman argues, “that brought about the secularisation of the intellectual sciences.”²²

Underlining Osman’s take on the effects of secularism Paul Heck observes that “modernity’s elevation of the secular as a guide to life has resulted in the marginalisation of religious knowledge for the functioning of society and has downplayed the religious scholar

²¹ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 25; Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 131; Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 181-207.

²² Osman Bakar, “Interfaith Dialogue as a New Approach in Islamic Education,” *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 1, no. 4 (2010): 702.

in favour of the nation state as a final arbiter of knowledge.”²³ To Osman, the knowledge of religious scholars was not merely modulated by the state. The ‘*ulamā*’ have been conditioned both by modern governments and by their clerical class to propagate the mistaken idea that the religious sciences are of different stature from the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities.²⁴ The marginalisation of the religious sciences meant that the nation state and the knowledge it produces becomes the ultimate arbiter of human life. The implications of this are well expressed by Walter Wink when he wrote that: “The result was the secular state, which acknowledges no higher power than its own idolatrous aspirations, subverts religion to the role of legitimating its claims, and makes its own power the sole arbiter of morality. Whenever the state makes itself highest value, then it is in an objective state of blasphemy. This is the situation of the majority of the nations in the world today, our own included.”²⁵

Materialism forms the second component of the knowledge crisis faced by modern Muslims. Here, Osman foregrounds material wealth and prosperity as driving forces for the production of knowledge in the modern world. Osman sees this as a grave intellectual error on the part of many Western thinkers such as Karl Marx. This error permeates the works of Muslim scholars just as well to a point that they place technological and scientific progress above other equally important aspects of progress. Enamored by the achievements of the West, the modern Islamic thinker “ignores, belittles or denies altogether the metaphysical, spiritual, qualitative and aesthetical aspects of nature.”²⁶ Osman seems to suggest that Muslim scholars during the pre-modern era were barely encouraged by materialism in their scholarly quests. But this is an idyllic view of Islamic history. Pragmatic, political, and economic motives did shape the scholarship of many Muslim scholars. Al-Ghazali, for example,

²³ Paul H. Heck, “Knowledge,” in *The Islamic World* (London: Routledge, 2008), 319.

²⁴ Bakar, “Interfaith Dialogue as a New Approach in Islamic Education,” 701.

²⁵ Walter Wink, “Angels of the Nations?” in *God and Country?: Diverse Perspectives on Christianity and Patriotism*, ed. Michael G. Long and Tracy Wenger Sadd (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 17.

²⁶ Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*, 64.

highlighted the existence of ‘*ulamā*’ (Muslim scholars) with worldly ambitions” who populated the Muslim world during his milieu.²⁷

Notwithstanding this, it may be said the materialistic thirst of the Muslim scholars then was counterbalanced and mediated by the presence of other intellectuals with spiritual and ethical impulses, who wrote a large volume of treatises emphasising the ills of seeking and producing knowledge for worldly gain.²⁸ On the other hand, from the vantage point of the historian of science, Sandra Harding, the global dominance of the West since the nineteenth century brought materialism to its logical conclusion. Knowledge was emasculated by materialist ends. The European used knowledge to justify colonisation, environmental destruction, the creation of weapons of mass destruction such as the use of atomic bombs, the deskilling of labor, and eugenics that brought about genocides, among many forms of broad-scale exploitation and abuse.²⁹ Recent work by Joao Aldeia and Fatima Alves unpacks this point further. They argue that the environmental crisis that the world is faced with today is linked to the Cartesian society/nature distinction which conceives nature as an object to be thoroughly exploited for the material gain of human beings who are seen as “the only true actor.”³⁰

To be added to the issue of materialism is Western universalism that dominates contemporary notions of knowledge. By this, Osman refers to the preponderant domination of European theories and truth claims as yardsticks to assess all civilisations. This claim to universality could be traced to the Enlightenment period and it became even more belligerent with the coming of colonisation and, subsequently, with the Western military, political and economic hegemony in the era of nation states. European forms of knowledge

²⁷ Imam Al-Ghazali (translated by Frank Ronald Charles Bagley), *Ghazali's Book of Counsel for Kings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 19.

²⁸ Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 240-333.

²⁹ Sandra Harding, “One Planet, Many Sciences,” in *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. Bernd Reiter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 40.

³⁰ João Aldeia and Fátima Alves, “Against the Environment: Problems in Society/Nature Relations,” *Frontiers in Sociology* 4 no. 29 (2019): 1.

set the standard for the rest of the world. Rapid developments in science and communications in the West have made this universalism even more powerful than ever before. European science positions itself as “the most objective knowledge of the natural world ever attained in the history of human civilisations.”³¹ Osman would have agreed with Immanuel Wallenstein that the most powerful form of European universalism which is scientific universalism, “is no longer unquestioned in its authority.”³² Despite the critical questions that have been raised by scholars globally, Osman censures many Muslim scholars for being enthralled with European scientific universalism to the extent that they view sciences that are developed in Europe as the most authoritative, and regard all bodies of knowledge developed elsewhere as second-tier, traditional and non-scientific.

For Osman, such indiscriminate acquiescence to European universalism is fallacious and a product of colonised minds when viewed from the perspective of the evolution of human knowledge. Science in Europe grew out of its interactions with scientific traditions in the Muslim world which contributed to modernity. Similarly, the Islamic scientific traditions benefited from Greek, Persian, Indian, and Chinese sciences to develop their versions of science. True universalism is one that acknowledges the authoritativeness of many knowledge traditions, theories, and postulations and not the ascendancy of just one of them, in this case, the European variant.³³

Osman’s critique is in line with many postcolonial appraisals and calls for the decentering of European universalism.³⁴ Be that as it may, Osman too positions Islamic universalism as the most matured form of universalism in human history. The Muslim

³¹ Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*, 8.

³² Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 70.

³³ Osman Bakar, *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: The Quest for a Truly Universal Civilization* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1997).

³⁴ Sandra G. Harding, *Is Science Multicultural?: Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe, Provincializing Europe* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism, Africentric Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

civilisation produced the “first universal science in human history that was truly global in nature and scope, and which later greatly influenced the birth of the European Renaissance and the rise of modern science in the West.”³⁵ Osman does not clarify what he means by “truly global in nature and scope.” The idea of the global during the premodern period was not as comprehensive and as far-ranging as it is today.³⁶ My reading suggests that what he is denoting is the cosmopolitan nature of Muslim civilisation and its receptiveness towards other societies and sciences. In other words, Islamic universalism is an open-ended form of universalism or what could be characterised as true “universal universalism.”³⁷ Such universalism rejects all forms of triumphalist universalism. Such universalism is also in line with the decolonial notion of the pluriverse in that it considers different universalist ideas towards a fusion of paradigms to realise the liberation of all of humankind from the residues of colonialism.

Osman’s stance stems from his conviction that Islam is a superior religion and that the knowledge produced in the Muslim world is at once more universal than what Europe has offered to humankind. He reveals this standpoint most forcefully in the following assertion: “While every civilisation necessarily possesses the two faces of universalism and particularism, some civilisations are essentially and generally more universal than others. It is our contention that doctrinally and essentially speaking, Islam is the most universal of all civilizations.”³⁸ In arguing for the primacy of Islamic universalism, Osman falls into the same pitfall of triumphalism. To be fair, Osman is critical of Muslims in the contemporary period, including himself who was once part of the Islamic revivalist movement.³⁹ He reprehends revivalist Muslims for their emphasis on

³⁵ Osman Bakar, *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: The Quest for a Truly Universal Civilization* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1997), 13.

³⁶ Luke Martell, *The Sociology of Globalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 43–66.

³⁷ Krzysztof Gawlikowski, “Krzysztof Gawlikowski,” *Dialogue and Universalism* 14 no. 10–12 (2004): 31–58.

³⁸ Bakar, *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: The Quest for a Truly Universal Civilization*, 11.

³⁹ Khairudin Aljunied, “Demarginalizing the Sharia: Muslim Activists and Legal

particularism more than universalism. The global spread of Islamic revivalism has made particularist tendencies even more pronounced. Revivalist Muslims equate most ideas that come from the West as un-Islamic and consequently to be repudiated. Osman sees this as objectionable given the spirit of Islamic universalism. He finds such tendencies to be an obstacle in bringing together Muslims and non-Muslims to combat the ill effects of colonialism and to collaborate in the wider project of deimperialisation.⁴⁰

Finally, Osman punctuates the problem of disequilibrium and, in this, he draws from Seyyed Hossein Nasr.⁴¹ By prioritising science and technology over other aspects of civilisational growth, Osman castigates modern Muslims for relegating religion, morality, ethics, culture and values into becoming mere shibboleths. The Scientific Revolution that happened from the sixteenth century onward was, to Osman, imperialism of science and technology over the entire humankind. The world became subservient to the West. Muslims, in particular, became consumers rather than producers of Western science and technology, imitators rather than inventors, and a party to the very forces that held them hostage. Osman laments:

Contemporary civilisation whether in the West or the East is not well and is abnormal, because it has lost its equilibrium through various kinds of disorders and disproportions. Some of the diseases are unique to Western societies, some others to Eastern societies, and there are diseases that are common to both. The problem of restoring equilibrium in contemporary human societies is made worse by the fact that those individuals, institutions or functional groups on whom

Reforms in Malaysia,” *ReOrient* 1, no. 2 (2016): 128.

⁴⁰ Bakar, *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: The Quest for a Truly Universal Civilization*, 11.

⁴¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993), 45-52.

society traditionally relies to undertake the task are themselves in a state of crisis.⁴²

Science and technology have become the primary goals of development in all Muslim countries so much so that no difference could be found between them and the West.⁴³ Together with the problems of secularism, materialism, and universalism, Osman sees the knowledge crisis enveloping Muslim societies affecting all domains of knowledge. The devastating ramifications are evinced in the spiritual, moral, intellectual, political, social and cultural decadence of the Muslim world as a whole. Muslims have lost their unique sense of identity and a leading place among civilisations.⁴⁴ An epistemological renewal is needed to extricate the *ummah* out of this crisis and this, according to Osman, is to be found in dual consilience of knowledge.

Dual Consilience

Dual consilience, which is the synthesis of all sciences with knowledge of the divine, was a hallmark of the Islamic approach to knowledge before the coming of modernity. Muslim scholars with different shades of opinion saw all disciplines as mutually supporting and symbiotic spheres. For most Muslim scholars in the premodern age, as Franz Rosenthal explains, “all the sciences, and all the crafts do not differ greatly from each other; their apparent differences concern only details and fine points. The attitude underlying this view may be turned into a plea for an intensive, non-discriminatory cultivation of all recognised branches of learning. All ‘*ulūm* (sciences) must be considered interdependent. Therefore, it would be foolish to cultivate one and neglect the others, for the purpose of all of them alike is man’s salvation.”⁴⁵ In Osman’s vision, dual

⁴² Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays*, 320.

⁴³ Osman Bakar, “Science and Technology for Mankind’s Benefit: Islamic Theories and Practices – Past, Present, and Future,” in *Islamic Perspectives on Science and Technology: Selected Conference Papers*, ed. Daud Abdul-Fattah and Batchelor Rugayah Hashim Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Osman Bakar (New York: Springer, 2016), 20–21.

⁴⁴ Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays*, 287.

⁴⁵ Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval*

consilience in the contemporary era must begin with a judicious blend of overlapping methods, theories, themes, concerns and questions posed within the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences; the three domains of knowledge that are often regarded as distinct from each other. Such a vision parallels with the line of reasoning of his contemporary, Edward O. Wilson. To quote Wilson here:

If the natural sciences can be successfully united with the social sciences and humanities, the liberal arts in higher education will be revitalized. Even the attempt to accomplish that much is a worthwhile goal....We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom. The world henceforth will be run by synthesizers, people able to put together the right information at the right time, think critically about it, and make important choices wisely....The search for consilience might seem at first to imprison creativity. The opposite is true. A united system of knowledge is the surest means of identifying the still unexplored domains of reality. It provides a clear map of what is known, and it frames the most productive questions for future inquiry.⁴⁶

I find it astonishing that, despite some similarities between their ideas, both scholars did not make any reference to each other's work. This oversight, or else, strategic distancing on Osman's part may partly have to do with his reservations over Wilson's point that all religions are a mere "ensemble of mythic narratives that explain the origin of a people, their destiny, and why they are obliged to subscribe to particular rituals and moral codes. Ethical and religious beliefs are created from the bottom up, from people to their culture. They do not come from the top down, from God or other non-material source to the people by way of culture."⁴⁷ From Osman's perspective, Islam is barely mythical but that it is a genuine

Islam (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 44.

⁴⁶ E. O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 294 and 326.

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, 270.

religion that inspired a flourishing civilisation of knowledge. Moreover, Osman expands the notion of consilience to also include the religious sciences. His main audience, unlike Wilson who is writing mainly for a Western audience, are contemporary Muslims.

That said, Osman shares Wilson's point that the coming together of different fields and disciplines is possible even in an age of deep specialisation. In other words, Muslim scholars and thinkers were still experts in their respective fields while keeping their minds open to contributing to and benefiting from other fields. Arguing along the same grain as Osman, Jerry A. Jacobs notes that "the march toward specialisation does not necessarily doom academia to intellectual fragmentation. Ideas continually percolate between fields, and powerful forces push in the direction of fusion as well as specialisation."⁴⁸ The practical question then is: What are the necessary intellectual steps to be taken to induce Muslims who are experts in separate fields within the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and religious sciences to work together?

Foremost is by advancing the historicist position that the Muslim civilisation was a "middle civilisation" before the onset of modernity. The concept of middle civilisation is derived from the Quranic verse in Chapter *Al-Baqārah* (The Cow) verse 137 which states: "Thus we appoint you a middle nation, that you might be a witness to the people, and thus the Messenger might be a witness to you." To Osman, the Muslim civilisation was one that cultivated a synthesis of different fields of all forms of knowledge and that encouraged multiple specialisation. The outcome of this vibrant environment of consilience was the formation of successive generations of Muslim polymaths. They grafted the *al-'ulūm al-naqliyyah* (the transmitted sciences) with that of the *al-'ulūm al-'aqliyyah* (the rational sciences), writing works that incorporated both sciences. It is therefore important here to paraphrase Wael Hallaq extensively for his acute observations of how Muslims viewed knowledge in the premodern period:

⁴⁸ Jerry A. Jacobs, *In Defense of Disciplines: Interdisciplinarity and Specialization in the Research University* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), 74-75.

Unlike modern education, where “expertise” tends to segregate fields of specialization (resulting, in late modernity, in the pervasive call for interdisciplinarity), Islamic learning was generally *constituted* by cross-fertilization through what may be called dialectical traditions. Whereas a modern historian typically studies and writes about history, and may perform a scholarly incursion into another subject when her field intersects with that subject, a typical Muslim historian normally undertook his basic and main training in other fields, nowadays considered outside of history... This trenchantly “interdisciplinary”—or indeed *predisciplinary*—education also explains certain modes of academic training and learning: it was often the case that a professor (*shaykh*) of hadith might sit as a student in the study circle (*halaqa*, somewhat like a classroom) of a professor, at times his junior in age, who taught, say, logic, or that a logician might attend, as a student, the teaching circle of a law professor or a linguist. Such practices were not just external forms; rather, they were indicative of profound dialectical relationships between the various fields of knowledge.⁴⁹

Antedating Hallaq’s reflexive take on knowledge in premodern Muslim civilisation, Osman accentuates the lively cooperation between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Together, they infused philosophical thought into the study of religion thus creating the new branch of knowledge called *‘ilm al-kalām* (Islamic scholastic theology). At the same time, medicine, astronomy, botany and chemistry were studied through the perspective of ethics which generated works that incorporated the concern for human welfare and environmental sustainability. Nowhere was this ideal of middle civilisation and synthesis of knowledge most evident than in the eighth century when the Abbasids established the *Baitul Hikmah* (House of Wisdom). Muslim thinkers immersed themselves in Greek

⁴⁹ Wael B. Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 73-74.

and other intellectual heritage. Their works were then translated and appropriated by proximate civilisations. In Europe, for example, the works of Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Al-Kindi, Ikhwan al-Safa, Omar Khayyam, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, among many others, were studied and used by Christian philosophers and scientists.⁵⁰

Islam as a middle civilisation displayed another central characteristic: inclusiveness. It was inclusive of all knowledge wherever it may come from. Osman appeals for the return of such a spirit of inclusiveness to achieve consilience. Inclusiveness must begin, first of all, within Islam. Muslims ought to study and appreciate different schools of thought that developed within their civilisation. Following that, they should be acquainted with knowledge produced by all other civilisations. Osman cautions Muslims who are parochial and sectarian by stating that their outlook is contrary to the spirit of the Quran. “In terms of knowledge sources used, it is permissible – in certain cases even encouraged – to employ sources as varied and diverse as these can be, including ‘non-Islamic’ and even ‘non-religious’ sources as long as these are not opposed to Islamic teachings.”⁵¹

Above and beyond its intellectual inclusiveness, Osman Bakar attributes the Muslim civilisation’s potential to emerge again as a middle civilisation that blends different fields of knowledge to the force of geography. The Muslim civilisation, according to him, was “a bridge between East and West, between North and South...It is Islam’s destiny to be the “middle nation” not only in a geographical sense, but also, as we shall see later, in a theological, cultural and civilizational sense. In other words, Islam is both a geographical and a civilisational bridge between the four inhabited extremities of our planet Earth.”⁵² But such a geographically deterministic viewpoint is contestable. All nations and civilisations tend to view themselves as the center or hub of history and accordingly place themselves within the center of the geography of the world. The Chinese, for example, believed that they were a “Middle Kingdom” and structured their

⁵⁰ Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*, 131-155.

⁵¹ Bakar, “Interfaith Dialogue as a New Approach in Islamic Education,” 703.

⁵² Bakar, *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: The Quest for a Truly Universal Civilization*, 7.

maps to reflect their importance and centrality. Similarly, Marshall Hodgson maintains that Muslims have, for centuries, held that “it was only in the central, moderate climes, like the Mediterranean lands or Iran, that minds were most active and civilization most advanced; from there the blessings of Islam were gradually being brought even to the remotest areas, among the Negroes in the hot south and the white men in the cold north.”⁵³ Osman’s claim that the Muslim civilisation is geographically central is hence more perceptual rather than real, an argument common among many scholars to embellish the greatness of their civilisation.

Aside from recovering the idea of a middle civilisation, Osman proposes a rethinking of the idea of “science” to achieve consilience between different fields. Modern science, in Osman’s appreciation, departs from science as it was understood and practiced by Chinese, Indian, Islamic, and other civilisations in the premodern period. These civilisations did not separate natural sciences from the humanities, social sciences, and religious sciences but ensured that these different fields drew upon and influenced one another. Within the Muslim civilisation, “all branches of knowledge are harmoniously interrelated by virtue of the fact that all human knowledge ultimately comes from God, although man may acquire it through various ways and means. There could not be any conflict between any two branches or bodies of knowledge.”⁵⁴ Recent research refutes Osman’s point about the differences between modern and premodern science in the West. In his book *Divine Variations*, Stephen Keel documents the manner in which Europeans unceasingly used “Christian patterns of reasoning about the abrupt solemnity of creation, human difference, and the universal applicability of a Christian worldview” to develop modern sciences, especially the science of race and human variation.⁵⁵

But what about the differing standards of objectivity between these sciences and different methodologies which they each utilise?

⁵³ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 31.

⁵⁴ Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays*, 56.

⁵⁵ Terence Keel, *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (California: Stanford University Press, 2018), 5.

Osman rejects the assumption that only the natural sciences alone can be objective and that all other fields of knowledge are pseudo-sciences. All knowledge is but products of the human intellect and is subjective as they all are continuously revised when paradigms change which has been shown in the classic work of Thomas Kuhn.⁵⁶ There is thus no such thing as absolute objectivity and that it “is very important to impress upon students that rationality and objectivity are inherent in all branches of knowledge and not just in the natural sciences inasmuch as all branches of knowledge are concerned with some aspects of objective reality and products of the same processes of thought.”⁵⁷

Osman adds that all branches of knowledge are sciences in the widest sense of the word because they all agree on the importance of rational analysis in uncovering any facets of life. Through the use of reason and observation, premodern Muslim scholars devise experimental procedures and verified their findings through quantitative and/or qualitative analyses. Within the religious sciences, *ijtihad* (analogical reasoning) is a critical tool used by Muslim theologians and jurists to address any germane issues. Muslim theologians and jurists also depended on empirical investigations of societies and consulted scientists working in laboratories to dissect matters relating to health. Premodern Muslim scholars also “extensively employed both the rational and intuitive faculties in a balanced manner within a unified worldview.”⁵⁸ Osman acknowledges that intuition is accepted by modern scientists as a methodological tool to ask searching questions and provide path-breaking ideas. Even so, he criticises modern scientists who view intuition as something that can be derived solely from their intellect through experience and continuous research and less so from divine inspiration. Premodern Muslim scholars believed the opposite of this. Intuition was, to them, connected to their reason just as it was a consequence of their connection with a higher being. They

⁵⁶ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

⁵⁷ Bakar, *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: The Quest for a Truly Universal Civilization*, 113-114.

⁵⁸ Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*, 37.

embraced the consilience between their intellectual energies and intuition inspired by the divine. In making such a stance over intuition, Osman reiterates the views of perennial philosophers in the likes of Frithjof Schuon who emphasised divine inspiration in the unlocking questions regarding science and other forms of knowledge.⁵⁹

Osman is not only critical of the partial understanding of “science”, but he is also against the wrongful idea of knowledge among most present-day ‘*ulamā*’. They have mistakenly used the Arabic term *al-‘ulūm al-Islamiyyah* (Islamic sciences) in a restricted way to include only the studies of Quran and Prophetic hadiths, ‘*ilm uṣūl al-dīn* (science of principles of religion), ‘*ilm al-fiqh* (sciences of Islamic jurisprudence) and ‘*ilm uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence). Osman sees it as a form of epistemic sectarianism. Consilience can only be revived when the *al-‘ulūm al-Islamiyyah* encompasses the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. The humanities, social sciences and natural sciences are to be considered as part of *al-‘ulūm al-Islamiyyah* if they conform “to the most universal epistemological criteria of Islamicity.”⁶⁰

Using this same line of argument, one may then question Osman’s repeated use of the term “Islamic science.” That is to say, if all knowledge that conforms to the most universal epistemological criteria of Islamicity can be deemed as “Islamic,” the term “Islamic science” becomes redundant and merely decorative. In Osman’s defence, he uses the term “Islamic science” “not just because it happened to be largely produced by Muslims but more important because it was based on the universal and particular principles of the Quran.”⁶¹ It follows then that Osman’s definition of Islamic science stands in stark contrast from a noted historian of science in the

⁵⁹ Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam’s Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 110-114.

⁶⁰ Osman Bakar, ‘Towards a Postmodern Synthesis of Islamic Science and Modern Science, the Epistemological Groundwork’, 2020 <<https://www.themuslim500.com/guest-contributions-2020/towards-a-postmodern-synthesis-of-islamic-science-and-modern-science-the-epistemological-groundwork/>> [accessed 25 March 2020].

⁶¹ Osman Bakar, “Islamic Science, Modern Science, and Post-Modernity: Towards a Synthesis through a Tawhidic Epistemology,” *Revelation and Science* 1, no.3 (2011): 17.

Muslim civilisation, George Saliba. Saliba uses the same term “Islamic science” to represent a body of knowledge that should be decoupled from *al-‘ulūm al-Islamiyyah* (Islamic sciences). The term “Islamic” is used in a “more complex civilisational sense and not in the religious sense.”⁶² Both Osman and Saliba are on the same page in maintaining that Islamic science – whatever the definition might be – reached its apogee by the seventeenth century. Decline happened when Muslim empires gave less emphasis on philosophical and scientific pursuits than on religious dogma that promoted blind obeisance to authoritarian caliphates and, following that, autocratic colonial and postcolonial regimes. They part ways concerning the resurrection of an eclipsed Islamic science. Osman believes this is possible “by virtue of their [Islamic science] universal and perennial worth.”⁶³

Aside from making a case for consilience between different fields and sciences, Osman champions the return of the divine into the heart of contemporary knowledge. Osman again uses historical evidence to demonstrate the possibility of achieving this second level of consilience. He argues that the scientific traditions of all civilisations before the dominance of the secular West were permeated with religious beliefs. That the divine had a place within the substance of various sciences in the premodern period did not at all stifle the development of knowledge and advances in science and technology. Osman nevertheless aggrandised premodern science. He asserts: “In premodern civilizations, science was *never* divorced from spiritual knowledge [*italics mine*].”⁶⁴ This is not accurate. The Japanese civilisation, for example, did practice some form of premodern secularism that shaped statecraft and the production of knowledge. Of course, the divine and spirituality remained as essential pillars of the Japanese way of life before modernity. Still, the Japanese were pluralist in that they were religious when it came

⁶² George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007), viii.

⁶³ Bakar, “Towards a Postmodern Synthesis of Islamic Science and Modern Science, the Epistemological Groundwork.”

⁶⁴ Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*, 61.

to rituals and customs while being secularist in the areas of governance and intellectual productivity.⁶⁵

Osman is correct about the omnipresence of the divine in knowledge formation in the period of premodern Muslim civilisation. Faith and spirituality influenced the research and writings of Muslim scholars specialising in all fields of knowledge. Ahmad Dallal underscores Osman's generalisation in his illuminating collection of essays on Islamic science. He tracks the more than seven centuries of scientific activity in the Muslim civilisation which "developed in the context of Islamic culture and not despite this culture, as many historians have asserted; specific developments in religious thought corresponded to and reinforced the conceptual developments in scientific thought."⁶⁶ Similar to Ahmad Dallal, Osman shows the cross-fertilisation between religious sciences and other bodies of knowledge. He marshals a revisionist viewpoint that goes against the narrative that it was Greek thought that generated scientific thinking in the Muslim civilisation. The opposite was true.

More generally, it could be maintained that the revealed teachings of the Shari'ah contributed to the origin, development and progress of science in Islam in at least three main respects. First, the religious sciences of the Shari'ah helped to give birth to the scientific spirit in its most comprehensive sense as we know it today. It is important to note that the origin and development of the scientific spirit in Islam differs from that in the West. In Islam, this spirit was first demonstrated in the religious sciences. In the modern West it was conceived in rebellion against religion. Many modern scholars attributed the origin of Islam's scientific spirit to the foreign sciences inherited especially from the Greeks. A study of the early Islamic religious sciences, however, would reveal that by the time Muslims became deeply interested in the Greek philosophical and scientific

⁶⁵ Kiri Paramore, "Premodern Secularism," *Japan Review: Journal of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies* 30 (2017): 21–37.

⁶⁶ Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History*, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 112.

heritage in the ninth century, they were already in possession of a scientific attitude and a scientific frame of mind, which they had inherited from the religious sciences...In short, the early religious sciences of the Shari'ah sought to emphasise both the critical exercise of reason (*ijtihad*) and empirical investigations.⁶⁷

It is important to mention here that since the 1970s up until the turn of the twenty-first century, Osman was part of the emergent group of Muslim scholars who promoted the idea of the Islamisation of Knowledge (IOK) which, to them, could address the problems of colonial epistemicide and bring about the dual consilience as discussed above.⁶⁸ Osman was a recipient and, for a while a promoter of, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's and his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim's, state Islamisation programmes which reached its zenith in the late 1990s when the two politicians fell out.⁶⁹ The political crises in Malaysia may partly explain why Osman soon changed his mind over the IOK project. Another more plausible reason was his appreciation of the radical global transformations, especially in the realm of knowledge. The IOK project, in his appreciation, has fulfilled its basic aim of highlighting the problems of modern knowledge and agitating for the recovery of the role of values and faith in various sciences. The project has, however, lost its relevance and should go beyond its limited objectives.⁷⁰

Ziauddin Sardar, a British-Pakistani intellectual who was among the most influential proponents of the IOK, shares the conclusion of Osman. Like Osman, Sardar embraces the idea of a synthesis of all forms of knowledge which is a profound departure from his earlier writings that advocate the Islamisation of disciplines.⁷¹ Like Sardar, Osman has no illusions that the

⁶⁷ Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays*, 115.

⁶⁸ See Mona Abaza, *Debates on Islam and Knowledge in Malaysia and Egypt: Shifting Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁶⁹ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105-129.

⁷⁰ Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam*.

⁷¹ Ziauddin Sardar and Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, *Rethinking Reform in Higher Education: From Islamization to Integration of Knowledge* (London: International

decentering of European epistemological dominance is indeed happening in different parts of the world. Having participated in many intellectual exchanges with scholars from different religious faiths, such as the Hokkaido Symposium held in July 2007, he is convinced that the prospects for dual consilience are bright. A new synthesis beckons. Osman calls for the marrying of traditional *tawhidic* epistemology and the best of modern and postmodern epistemologies.⁷²

For Osman, this synthesis or consilience of *tawhidic*, modern and postmodern epistemologies will eventually be the intellectual springboard for scholars to formulate viable solutions to some of humanity's intractable challenges such as poverty, diseases, environmental degradation, climate change and mass conflicts. A riposte that could be made against this consilience would be that both *tawhidic* and modern epistemologies lean on the proposition that there are universal truths, laws and maxims to be uncovered and rationalised. Postmodernist epistemologies, on the other hand, seek to reveal the ontological groundings of such grand narratives while revealing the contingency and historical context of ideas and concepts.⁷³ Whether this synthesis of incompatible epistemologies is at all possible remains to be seen. Osman believes one of the feasible domains to realise dual consilience which would eventually bring about an epistemological renewal is the Malay-Islamic world, also known as "Muslim Southeast Asia", which consists of modern-day Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Thailand and South Philippines. But why not the Arabian-Persianate world, a historic terrain where great Muslim scholars such as Ibn Sina and al-Shirazi which Osman had spent much ink writing about, used to reside? Osman explains that the Malay-Islamic world is steeped in cultural and intellectual achievements that fuse Islamic principles with local knowledge. The stability of the region in comparison to many other parts of the Muslim world today coupled with the balanced and

Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017), 86-140.

⁷² Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays*, 54.

⁷³ Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism* (London: Routledge, 1994); Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (London: Routledge, 1995); Simon Malpas, *The Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 2005).

moderate nature of Malay-Islam are essential elements for the scholars and thinkers to be at the avant-garde of epistemological renewal.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Osman's proposal for an epistemological renewal in the Muslim world fits squarely within a budding wave of scholarship that promotes the creation of a pluriverse, that is, "a world where many worlds fit." More abstractly perhaps, the pluriverse signals struggles for bringing about "worlds and knowledges otherwise"—that is, worlds and knowledges constructed on the basis of different ontological commitments, epistemic configurations, and practices of being, knowing, doing.⁷⁵ A pluriverse would undo the negative ramifications of colonialism. Even though optimistic that the Muslim world would eventually come out of the current knowledge crisis and manifest dual consilience of all sciences, Osman registers the effects of economic imperialism of the world's superpowers that have stifled intellectual reforms. "The most appropriate response to this challenge of economic imperialism," Osman contends, "would be for the Muslim world to attain economic independence and self-sufficiency, at least in those areas and sectors considered to be of vital or strategic interests to their overall well-being."⁷⁶

A cursory survey of the state of knowledge production in the Muslim world today shows that economic imperialism is one but not the most significant factor that hinders epistemological renewal. Despite their abundant wealth, rich Muslim states are still not at the forefront of research and innovation. Only a select few among the ever-growing number of universities in the Muslim world are at all interested in synthesising religious and other sciences into a new and dynamic form of knowledge. The reality of today's academe is such that most scholars in Muslim-majority countries work within established paradigms and work within the silos of their respective

⁷⁴ Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays*, 95.

⁷⁵ Arturo Escobar, "Transition Discourses and the Politics of Relationality: Toward Designs for the Pluriverse," in *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 75.

⁷⁶ Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*, 243.

disciplines, specialisations, and interests, and are still reliant on Western ideas and theories.⁷⁷

All said and done, Osman's interventions into the question over what went wrong in contemporary Islamic thought and how it can be set aright cannot be glossed over. He is among the few Muslim intellectuals based in Southeast Asia who has consistently sought to address epistemological as well as ethical, cosmological, and ontological problems in contemporary knowledge that have shaped Muslim minds. By highlighting the knowledge crisis in the Muslim world and the possibilities of realising a dual consilience of various sciences, Osman points to some interesting pathways of thought. Indeed, he has posed many searching questions for Muslims in Southeast Asia and beyond to consider in their bid to move beyond colonial constructions of knowledge and recover the past legacies of the Muslim civilisation for the betterment of humanity at present.

⁷⁷ Ehsan Masood and James Wilsdon, 'The Deferred Promise of Islamic-World Science', 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2017/nov/16/the-deferred-promise-of-islamic-world-science>> [accessed 31 March 2020]; Muzaffar Iqbal, *Science and Islam* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007), 188.

ARTICLES

- OSMAN BAKAR AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL RENEWAL
IN THE MUSLIM WORLD 1

Khairudin Aljunied

- IBN ARABI AND HIS CHALLENGES ON THE ISSUE OF FREE WILL
A REVIEW OF THE ISSUE IN LIGHT OF TWO OF HIS THEORIES 29

*Saeideh Sayari, Mohd Zufri bin Mamat
and Maisarah Hasbullah*

- RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY, IFTĀ' CULTURE, AND SECTARIANISM IN
MODERN PAKISTAN 53

THE IMPACT OF ITS INTRA-ISLAMIC PLURALISM

Muhammad Kalim Ullah Khan and Osman Bakar

- AWARENESS TOWARDS WAQF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MALAYSIA
AND INDONESIA: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION 77

*Nisful Laila, Ririn Tri Ratnasari, Shafinar Ismail, Mohd Halim Mahphoth
and Putri Aliah Mohd Hidzir*

- QURANIC EXEGETICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO
A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW 101

Nadzrah Ahmad

- CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM DURING EARLY
ISLAMIC CIVILISATION: A CRITICAL STUDY OF SELECT CONCEPTS 123

Thameem Ushama

MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

- AN INTRODUCTION TO PERSIAN SEALS:
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DEVOTIONAL SEALS FROM
AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MANUSCRIPT 153

Amir H. Zekrgoo

REVIEW ESSAY

- ON PRAISE AND VIRTUES OF BOOKS IN THE ISLAMIC TRADITIONS 171

Azenita Abdullah

- BOOK REVIEWS** 187

