CONFRONTING
ACADEMIC
KNOWLEDGE

EDITORS
Sue-san Ghahremani Ghajar
Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini
...many of the most intense battles in the twenty-first century are likely to be fought over the shape of knowledge. The academic disciplines have so disciplined the world...that any intellectual, social, cultural, or economic intervention outside the framework of modern knowledge appears to be regressive... and certainly futile...The disciplines have failed us.

*From Chapter One, By Vinay Lal*

Earlier, intellectual dependence and servility came as a natural corollary of colonial rule. Today it is being welcomed... We are still very much moving along a one-way street – with all movement from the core to the periphery – because that is how knowledge continues to flow in the global university knowledge system.

*From Chapter Two, By Claude Alvares*

Analysis and searching for universals... has reached today a dangerous level which the world cannot ignore anymore... We need to regain wisdom, part of which is having a pluralistic attitude towards life... This means, in practice, retrieving part of education’s budget and using it in diverse settings where people can learn... We need to stress the right to educations (in the plural).

*From Chapter Eight, By Munir Fasheh*
Confronting Academic Knowledge

Sue-san Ghahremani Ghajar
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Preface

This book is the fruit of the International Conference on Academic Imperialism held by the Center for International Scientific Studies and Collaboration (CISSC) in May 2010 in Tehran, Iran. The conference was broadly based on the concern that ways of learning and forms of knowledge are much more diverse than projected by the restricted frameworks of academia. Moreover, a main underlying theme of the conference was that despite the dominant belief in the world today, not only what is known as the West is not the most successful symbol and the origin of best knowledge, education, and progress, but in many cases it is the source of many false understandings of different aspects of knowledge, and has created the deepest and the most disastrous destructions for humanity.

The direction of the moves in academic teaching and research as well as the criteria of success, and basically the fundamental assumptions and mentalities underlying the academic processes in what has been called the Third World or the Global South, are taken form sources other than the historical and cultural roots or transcending human goals that existed in these societies for centuries. Even more troubling is the problem that attempts under rubrics such as change and transformation in this regard (for example, in the academic contexts of Iran) tend to deal with rudiments and ignore the fundamental assumptions. Rudimentary reforms, in effect, act to perpetuate fundamental deviations by distracting attentions from the depth of the problem.

There are many – perhaps with the loudest voice in academia all around the world – who seem to believe in the neutrality and universality of academic forms of knowledge.
From their point of view, higher education, research, and technology should be concerned with pure scientific issues that are not linked with local sociocultural values, especially in an era when the globalization fever has taken the entire world. However, the claim of impartiality and universality of science may well be a myth used as a strong tool to domesticate and exploit communities. This myth has to be challenged and countered, and this is not only true about humanities and social sciences but also about basic sciences and fields of technology.

Therefore, the Academic Imperialism conference was an attempt at revisiting the most fundamental assumptions that dominate higher education and research and the overall processes of knowing, as well as revisiting the history of (academic) knowledge and defining new perspectives independent of dominant Western views in these areas. Further exploring the concerns raised by the speakers at the Academic Imperialism conference, the contributions to this volume address various aspects of the dominance of mainstream perceptions and practices in shaping knowledge in academia and beyond.

The ten chapters of the book are bonded into three parts. The three chapters in ‘Part I’ of the book invite readers to problematize the very concept of knowledge, and call for the reconsideration of the taken for granted perspectives on the development and spread of academic forms of knowledge as innocent and ecumenical factualities. In Chapter One, Vinay Lal starts with a sharp note on the concern that “many of the most intense battles in the twenty-first century are likely to be fought over the shape of knowledge” (p. 3), and puts the ways academic disciplines normally discipline understandings and worldviews at the center of his arguments. He focuses on social sciences including anthropology and, especially, history
and calls for bursting the frameworks and categories deployed by modern academia.

_Claude Alvares_, in Chapter Two, challenges the Eurocentricity of social sciences and proposes that the academic categories of social sciences are European constructions aimed at resolving European social problems, which have come to dominate almost all other societies. He discusses Eurocentrism in specific academic disciplines, including, philosophy, sociology, economics, and anthropology. Defying a middle ground between dominant academic frameworks and alternative perspectives, _Alvares_ also presents specific notes aimed at shaping new constructs in knowledge.

The knowledge encounter between Islam and the West both from a historical and a contemporary perspective is what _Mohammad Hazim Shah_ explores in Chapter Three as the final chapter of ‘Part I’ of the book. While he observes that looking at academic Western science as true knowledge to be adopted by the East, including the Islamic communities, is not a viable agenda, he advocates a perspective that does not reject the values of the modernist ideology of science and at the same time acknowledges the “validity of non-scientific knowledge and cultures, or of indigenous sciences with their own epistemologies” (p. 82).

‘Part II’ comprises four chapters that further question more specific aspects of constructing and disseminating as well as embracing and reproducing structures of knowledge in specific disciplines, nowadays mainly directed by academia as well as mass media. _Yusef Progler_, in Chapter Four, as the first chapter of this part, discusses academic imperialism in education by exploring the curriculum of a prototypical program of the academic filed of ‘education’ itself. He also specifically highlights the role of textbooks in reproducing
and perpetuating mainstream conceptions and understandings in many social arenas.

Chapter Five, which is Vinay Lal’s second chapter in the book, invites a fundamental reconsideration of normalized understandings of global political and socio-historical notions predominantly viewed from a Eurocentric perspective of world history. Referring to several landmark events occurring in different corners of the globe within the past century, he illustrates interpretations and conceptualizations other than the dominant Eurocentric ones.

In the sixth chapter Siti Nurani Mohamed Nor considers bioethics “and how it has been disseminated indiscriminately and has in turn challenged traditional value systems” (p. 130). She raises the concern over ‘moral imperialism’ in the education of bioethics; exemplifies how it has been tackled in Malaysia; and finally, touches upon the idea that Islamic sources of knowledge may be a resource of encountering the related moral dilemmas.

Chapter Seven by C. K. Raju is the only chapter in this volume that extends the discussions on the dominance of Western perspectives to the domain of hard sciences, which are usually more convenient candidates for claims of neutrality and universality of forms of knowledge and more easily accepted as ideologically neutral and culture-proof. Nonetheless, Raju sees these areas as more important areas in terms of the functioning of imperialism of knowledge because the majority of people know too little science or mathematics and because scientists themselves are too inclined towards ‘proof by Western authority’. He investigates concoctions in the history of science and suggests a number of steps for the process of dismantling Western soft power exercised in hard sciences.
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In ‘Part III’ of the book, bearing a title suggested by Munir Fasheh, the chapters attempt to highlight the twinkles of hope, still detectable amidst all the fabricated and imposed understandings of knowledge, within the three contexts of Palestine, Peru, and Iran. Munir Fasheh focuses, in Chapter Eight, on the educational dimension of colonization that is founded on forming perceptions, particularly regarding the perception of the sense of lesser worth through measures that highlight weaknesses and ignore sources of strength in societies. Referring to the inspiring and never-repetitive story of his discovery of his illiterate mother’s mathematics, he explains how he managed to recover from the role of a ‘cultural imperialist’ at home. He also presents personal ideas on overcoming such cultural imperialism, including attempts at healing from measurement and co-authoring meanings.

In Chapter Nine, Jorge Ishizawa and Grimaldo Rengifo write about community knowledge in the Andean high-lands. They discuss how the development project galvanized the minds of university graduates of these Latin American areas along with other parts of the world and how the ways of life of indigenous communities of the central Andes have remained invisible to ‘the colonizing gaze’. They also tell their readers about the agricultural research and training activities of The Andean Project for Peasant Technologies (PRATEC) and its challenges in the context of the dominance of imported academic knowledge of agriculture.

Finally, in our own chapter, we illustrate a quick image of learning and teaching traditions in Iran and the ownership of language in the practices within these traditions. Specifically considering literacy education in the historical context of Iran, we also review the modernized forms of literacy education and the discrepancy between the two trends in terms of the construction, reproduction, and ownership of the language
that shapes basic understandings of knowledge. We also present examples of the dominance of the mainstream global language of academia over apparently alternative academic movements, and finally touch upon sources of hope that may still be sought in the Iranian culture.

Many people have worked within the past year to make the Academic Imperialism conference and this book a possibility: Hossein Mohammadi Doostdar, the president of CISSC, played a crucial role in bringing the conference speakers together in Iran, and later in bringing their writings together in this volume; CISSC staff worked hard throughout the process of inviting and hosting the guests as well as running the conference; the Iranian Higher Education Association offered its help and Alzahra University provided the conference venue and gave its administrative and executive support in holding the conference; the authors of the chapters have obviously had the most important role in giving life to this book, and we do remember the thoughtful presentations of conference speakers whose writings do not appear here for various reasons; and, Markaz-e Nashr-e Daneshgahi (Iran University Press) has helpfully agreed to publish the book. Our thanks to all.

Tehran, April 2011

Sue-san Ghahremani Ghajar
Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini
PART I

THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE
CHAPTER ONE

The Social Sciences and the Oppression of the Global South

Vinay Lal

It has now been clear for some years that many of the most intense battles in the twenty-first century are likely to be fought over the shape of knowledge. By this I do not at all mean what many will suppose they understand from such a claim. National governments, alarmed at the ability of hackers and cyberwar strategists to disable computer systems and seriously disrupt communication networks, have been preparing for cyber infowar. There was a time when paucity of information was feared as crippling the ability of a state to monitor its subjects; today, on the contrary, some commentators are even prepared to believe it is the surfeit of information that might hinder the ability of a state to mount effective surveillance. We may all be drowning in information, but both state and non-state actors are surely thinking of how to submerge the enemy with what is termed ‘information overload’.

The nature of the problem when we speak of the future of knowledge has, however, little relation to formulations about ‘information explosion’. In the late eighteenth century, the

industrial revolution began to change the face of England; over the course of the decades, extending into the nineteenth century, an ethnography, available as much in the novels of Charles Dickens as in the reports of various commissions, of the turmoil – the disappearance of rural lifestyles, the appearance of a class of laboring poor, and new social ills – created in Britain by industrialization began to emerge. Now, as I have already suggested, a similar ethnography for the late twentieth-century documents the information revolution, what has been termed the ‘Third Wave’. Supercomputers have been designed which can perform trillions of operations per second, though whether trillions is within the realm of ordinary comprehension is not an uninteresting question. The internet, we are all aware, relays information at a dizzying speed.

Thus, it is not surprising that clichés should abound, and in this respect the short acceptance speech of Colin Powell, when he was nominated Secretary of State in the US, may be considered representative. Powell spoke of the opportunities opened by ‘the information technology revolutions that are reshaping the world as we know it, destroying political boundaries and all kinds of other boundaries as we are able to move information around the world at the speed of light, able to move knowledge around the world at the speed of light’.® Just why this may be a cliché should be obvious, since we know that the nation-state zealously guards its boundaries, and that even while exponents of the free market strive aggressively to remove all ‘barriers’ to trade, the political elites remain equally insistent on patrolling borders. Let us, however, leave all of this aside for the moment. The authority of ‘experts’, it has also been suggested, might be in jeopardy, since the internet has altered our very conception of

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2. As reported in the *Los Angeles Times* (17 December 2000), Sec. A, p. 27.
democracy, often permitting common opinions the same degree of attention as the credentialed views of political, theological, legal, and other authorities. The argument on the other side is not without merit, some would say: computers and cyberspace might well generate new and more acute forms of inequality, and no one can doubt that just as the ‘industrial elites’ replaced the ‘aristocratic elites’ of a more remote age, they have, in turn, been supplanted by the ‘information elites’.

As we enter a new millennium, however, a still more complex ethnography is called for, and one of the most critical elements of this ethnography is the disciplinary structure of modern knowledge. The academic disciplines are disciplines in more than the commonly accepted sense of the term: they surely represent the division of knowledge, such that the world might apparently become a more manageable, comprehensible, and ordered place, but they also perform the work of disciplining recalcitrant elements of society, often endorsing and justifying inequality, creating new forms of oppression, and stifling dissent. Such a claim is so far removed from the conception of the university as a noble enterprise, charged with giving us the tools that would make the world intelligible and, eventually, a better place that I would not be surprised if this critique is viewed with disbelief. Defenders of the modern university are likely to insist that, more than any other institution, the university remains a haven of free inquiry. This may well be so, though the advocates of the view should also be prepared to recognize

that ‘free’ in ‘free inquiry’ is no more free of the burdens of certain epistemologies than the ‘free market’ is truly free. If, as is now being argued by some commentators, the idea of the ‘free market’ has become one way to homogenize the world, cajole people into consumerist lifestyles, allow immense and unprecedented concentrations of wealth, and impose draconian burdens on states that do not subjugate themselves to international regulatory authorities and lending institutions, then we should be prepared to recognize that the ‘free inquiry’ purportedly encountered in American universities has bequeathed to the world academics, among them Condoleezza Rice and Paul Wolfowitz, who gladly embraced their role as handmaidens of a burgeoning American empire. The cormorant crew of harpies who constituted themselves into the ‘Project for a New American Century’ – another century of American self-aggrandizement – are the embodiments of that same faith in free-market principles and ‘free inquiry’ which have led to the present state of extreme inequity in political and economic affairs.

The academic disciplines have so disciplined the world – one has only to think of the extraordinary legitimacy granted to ‘economic science’ and the role of economists as the pundits of our times, whose very word, when dispensed through such conduits of the imperial financial architecture as the World Bank and the IMF, is law to beleaguered developing countries – that any intellectual, social, cultural, or economic intervention outside the framework of modern knowledge appears to be regressive, a species of indigenism, the mark of obdurate primitives, and certainly futile. The commonsense wisdom about matters pertaining to knowledge recognizes that though there are doubtless ‘national’ traditions of inquiry – such that, to take a simple instance, the analytical tradition of philosophy is more distinct to the Anglo-American world, while semiotics found its most ardent
advocates in France – it is foolish to speak of Indian social sciences, Islamic economics, Hindu anthropology, or Japanese physics. From this standpoint, there is only one kind of physics, though national traditions of inquiry into physics may diverge owing to varying emphases placed on research by national governments, the culture of research, the religious and other personal predilections of the researcher, and so on.

Similarly, the idea of Islamic economics or Hindu economics is almost invariably derided: the former, since it forbids interest or usury, must lead to the end of economics, while the latter, if it at all emulates the example of the other Hindu sciences, must lead to stagnation, negative growth, and the chaos so strikingly present in the Hindu conception of the world. Yet, of course, this commonsense wisdom recognizes that economists in India or the Islamic world are likely to have different priorities in comparison with economists in Europe or the United States, such as a greater interest in development economics – though even these differences, to whatever extent they were important at one time, are diminishing since the universal mantra for our times is captured by the idea of growth, growth, and more growth. If at all countries become richer, the economists might be reminded that a growing number of citizens of those countries will doubtless gravitate towards obesity. Growth has a way of taking its revenge, too, but such associations never crossed the economist’s mind. The received view, which practitioners of the social sciences embrace with only marginally varying

degrees of fidelity, stipulates that within the frame elements can be arranged and rearranged, but that there is only one framework for doing ‘real’ science.

It is all the more remarkable, then, how far the prodigious discussion around globalization has occluded the recognition that in this supposed era of globalization, nothing is more global than the formal frameworks of knowledge which have bequeathed to every corner of the globe a universal and supposedly tested and verifiable recipe for development, technological progress, successful management, and democracy – the last enshrined in the idea of free elections (first cousin to ‘free inquiry’ and ‘free markets’), and further guided by the magical incantation of ‘one man, one vote’, though in that very bastion of electoral and yet oligarchic democracy, the United States, some of the principles of even that impoverished notion of democracy appear to have been controverted in a number of Presidential elections. When, a little over a decade ago, Kentucky Fried Chicken sought to open its first restaurants in India, it faced determined opposition from opponents of liberalization and neo-imperialism in India, and the showdown in Delhi was widely reported in the press. Similarly, attempts by the gigantic agro-business Monsanto to introduce genetically-modified foods, and especially the terminator seed, which self-destructs after the first harvest, have been vociferously contested in numerous countries and have received wide coverage in the media. These and countless other similar gestures against globalization are captured in popular memory, but it is useful to recall that American-style management schools are being embraced around the world; that for well over one generation the economics textbooks of Paul Samuelson reigned dominant around much of the world; and that no one protested when social science in the American or British idiom began to prevail in the developing and under-developed world. Indeed,
the very ideas of ‘development’ and ‘poverty’ with which economists, social planners, sociologists, and politicians in the non-Euro-American world work are sanctified by several generations of Western experts. Far more so than Coca-Cola or Disney, it is the frameworks of knowledge, encapsulated in the academic disciplines, which have become universalized. It is common to speak of the global impact of American-style youth culture, and more than one traveler would have been struck by the ubiquitous presence, in the remotest parts of the globe, of Chicago Bulls’ tee-shirts (sporting the number worn by Michael Jordan), Levis jeans, and baseball caps, but no commentator on globalization has noted the yet greater reach of formal modeling and other mathematized forms of social science.6

Long before the founding of formal academic frameworks, knowledge had been divided into such (usually opposed) categories as natural and revealed, useful and idealistic, practical and speculative, and so on. These divisions would continue to be operative even as the disciplines slowly marked their birth; that these divisions remain with us is attested to by the animus with which the French diseases – poststructuralism, deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, among others – are written off by analytical philosophers and hard core social scientists alike. The story of the emergence of the disciplines, especially those which fall under the rubric of the social sciences, or otherwise bear some family resemblance, begins with the professionalization of such fields of study as geography, history, sociology, and anthropology. Geography acquired prominence in the age of

discovery and exploration, and the rapid expansion of European power into the hinterlands of the great continents of Asia and Africa, which brought forth new responsibilities, including the surveillance of the land and the collection of revenues, ensured that geography would have a long lease of life. History similarly marked its advent after the modern nation-state system began to be put into place following the Treaty of Westphalia; history validated the nation-state. Classical Greek thought had wrought a distinction between ‘history’ and ‘myth’, though the two remained intertwined; and it would devolve upon the Enlightenment to banish myth from the provenance of history, to excise what was manifestly false from what carried the potentiality of truth.

As for anthropology and sociology, in popular parlance they have been seen as complementary: if the true subjects of anthropological inquiry were the primitives and the exotics, whose ‘otherness’ was construed as offering Europeans with the firmest evidence of their own inalienable superiority, the underclass back home furnished sociologists with the subject matter for an exploration into the lifestyles of others who were not so far removed and whose very proximity introduced a discomforting instability. Professionalization of these fields of study, which would turn them into academic disciplines, and give rise to new careers, entailed their location in the university, the creation of new standards for certifying a professorate, a prescribed course of study, the formation of scholarly societies, the founding of specialized journals, and the publication of monographs. The Académie des sciences morales et politiques in France, set up in 1832, was the first of the national organizations that took the enhancement of the social sciences as its mandate; the British followed suit, in 1857, with the National Association for the Promotion of the Social Sciences; and the Americans were not far behind with the American Social Science Association (1867). But one can
think of a good deal else that went into the institutionalization of the social sciences and the development of a critical apparatus. One scholar has described, for example, the pivotal role of the research seminar, first perfected at German universities and then exported to Johns Hopkins and other American universities, in decisively shaping the disciplines: it “was the prime mover behind the multiplication of specialist societies and journals”, she avers, and it is the research seminar that taught students method, the mastery of “esoteric techniques” of interpretation, the necessity of meticulous devotion to detail, and the value of diligence as well as collective discussion.\(^7\)

The story of the growth of the disciplines, and their subsequent fragmentation – whether into other disciplines, or into numerous sub-fields and sub-disciplines – plays a central role in the development of research universities, and has most often been told in the vein of neutrality, as a gradual unfolding in each instance of a field of study whose practitioners built upon their predecessors. The disciplines grew incrementally, and the principal narrative encouraged the belief that the practitioners of any discipline, relentlessly committed to the pursuit of truth, discarded falsehoods along the way. One could argue, for instance, that the vast majority of contemporary sociologists, evolutionary biologists, and historians have rejected the claims of eugenics and racially motivated science that their predecessors in the nineteenth century were so widely predisposed towards accepting. If one were charitably inclined, one could even go along with the view that it is not merely political correctness that has impelled academics and public commentators to jettison a belief in eugenics; rather, some of the more distasteful ideas

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of racial thinking that inform eugenics have been so discredited that they cannot be embraced without putting one’s own reputation in severe jeopardy. But the matter cannot so easily be put to rest: if eugenics is no longer accepted, what might explain the longevity of the idea that one can distinguish people on the supposedly scientific basis of ‘intelligence quotient’ (IQ)? It is not uninteresting that Stephen Jay Gould’s vigorous critique of the racism underlying the idea of IQ, which ranks people “in a single series of worthiness, invariably to find that oppressed and disadvantaged groups – races, classes, or sexes – are innately inferior and deserve their status”\(^8\), was well received by the general population but was panned by scholars as less than compelling.\(^9\) In most matters, one would not be unjustified in concluding, common people display more sensitivity and ethical sense than social scientists. Why is it that every few years something like the Bell Curve finds a new lease of life?

Moreover, many academics have failed to realize that the nineteenth-century discourse of race and eugenics was transformed into a twentieth-century ‘development’ discourse, which deploys a similarly evolutionist framework – dividing people and nations into the categories of under-developed, developing, developed, and even over-developed – and has been much more insidious in its effects, reach, and acceptability, since no one wishes to be considered anything but ‘developed’. Similarly, notwithstanding the understandable critiques of the positivist framework of knowledge, the universities clearly continue to be complicit in the notion that science, which is always understood in the singular, is intrinsically more worthwhile than other forms of inquiry.

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That might explain, in part, why even within the social sciences, the practitioners of the ‘hard social sciences’ such as economics and psychology are better funded and better paid than the practitioners of the ‘soft social scientists’, and why both are better remunerated than the humanists. There might be nothing much scientific about library science, but it is instructive why library studies had at one point to transform itself into library science. Once one begins to launch into an exercise of this kind, it soon becomes transparent that many of the most conventional and cherished assumptions about the various disciplines – the story of their increased sophistication, their allegedly clear line of demarcation from each other, and their claim to represent different areas of human expertise and knowledge – are often little more than embellished fairy tales.

Disciplines, categories, and the problem of knowledge

The disciplines have failed us. If it is a reasonable assumption that the classificatory mechanisms of any knowledge system purport to make the world better known to us, and are designed to shut out the noise of the world and so enable us to meditate on a problem and its solution, all the more so that the knowledge derived might become enabling in the quest for an equitable society, then this assumption stands belied at every turn. One elementary way to understand the failure is to examine the disciplinary contributions to the solution of human ills, and to measure the disciplines by their own preferred yardstick of practical success and utility. Someone might well be prepared to argue that the enormous growth in productivity, world trade, national incomes, and individual wealth since the late nineteenth century owes as much to economic theory as it does to material conditions, the exploitation of natural resources, and the enhancements in
science and technology, but then the massive increase in disparities between the nations of the North and the South, the increasing concentration of wealth in fewer hands, and the numerical increase in the number of poor should also be attributed to economic theory. In the ‘developed’ part of the world, tens of thousands of economists, who generally act with supreme confidence in analyzing economic indicators and predicting the economic outlook, were entirely clueless about the severe ‘financial downturn’ that would send the world economy into a tailspin in 2008. But the indictment of economists runs much deeper. For all the massive investment in empirical inquiry, no one can say that economists have succeeded in furnishing a template for alleviating problems of poverty and deprivation; indeed, as I shall have occasion to suggest, economists may have contributed vastly towards aggravating social problems and creating new forms of inequity.

What is true of economics is also true of other disciplines, and anthropology is a case in point. Anthropology originated under conditions of domination and imperialism, and though its raison d’être was the study of the diverse customs and modes of living of people in parts of the world who shared little or none of the intellectual, social, cultural, and political histories of the Western world, so that Western scholars could form a more comprehensive picture of the diversity of humankind, or understand their own past by surveying the present lifestyles of those viewed as ‘underdeveloped’, there can be little doubt that many societies that fell under the anthropological gaze suffered a precipitous decline and very often extinction. There can have been no greater curse for some people than to have become the objects of supposedly benign anthropological inquiry that some scholars still construe as a sign of the Western world’s unique thirst for knowledge. For all its repudiation of its colonial past, its turn
towards self-reflexivity, and its promise to be responsive to the people it studies, anthropology may not have gone very far towards becoming a humane discipline. To cite only one instance from some years ago, Patrick Tierney alleged in his study of anthropological research in the Amazon that the American geneticist James Neel, in the name of scientific advancement, deliberately introduced among the Yanomami Indian tribe a deadly measles virus to which they had no immunity, while Napoleon Chagnon, an anthropologist who took part in Neel’s epidemiological experiment, is said to not only have encouraged the Yanomami to engage in violent behavior in the interest of capturing it on film but to have carved out, in the manner of a late nineteenth century imperialist rogue, a personal kingdom for himself. It cannot be a mere coincidence that the erosion of human social and cultural diversity, whether measured by genocide, the death of languages, or the increased homogenization of lifestyles, has been in tandem with the growth of anthropology. The scores of anthropologists who served in the US Bureau of Indian Affairs, let us remind ourselves, not only suppressed Indian languages, but did everything in their power to eradicate the very people whose life and culture had been placed in their charge. Native Americans, Pathans and the Taliban, and

Muslims in Iraq, all are fair game for an anthropology created in the crucible of power and clearly incapable of divesting itself of its wretched legacy. The anthropologists are there to remind us that some of them have been critical of the ‘embedded anthropologists’ now shamelessly working with military units in Iraq and Afghanistan, but what takes some of them to these parts of the world in the first place?

Scarcely any discipline will be found exculpable, but that is perhaps not the most productive way of understanding the epistemological shortcomings and political conservatism of the structures of knowledge in the social sciences. If the fundamental problem of late modernity is the problem of knowledge, and the manner in which it is embedded in systems of thought that have monopolized our capacity to understand the world, narrowed our options of resistance, assaulted the dignity of particular histories and culture, and compromised the futures of people around the world, then it becomes incumbent to recognize the part played by the disciplines in tightening the noose of oppression while they appeared to have offered lifelines of liberation. Disciplines have generated the categories which have become commonplace in modern knowledge systems. I have alluded to one such category, namely ‘development’, around which there is an extraordinarily good literature, and will very briefly advert to several others – such as scarcity, poverty, and literacy – that have become nearly sacrosanct in our times, and in which the hand of (especially American) social science is most clearly visible.13

Though poverty has always been with us, the contemporary understanding of poverty, almost invariably attached to the economist’s notion of a poverty line below

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which someone might fall, has excised from memory the earlier and richer history of this concept. Historically speaking, many people have chosen to embrace poverty, and the diversity of ideas surrounding poverty is expressed in the fact that Persian has more than 30 words to describe those who ‘are perceived as poor’, while in Latin there were 40 words to cover the ‘range of conditions’ embraced by the conception of the poor.\textsuperscript{14} The saying of Christ, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven”, must appear as something of a joke and embarrassment to social planners, economists, and development specialists, since their expertise has no ostensible purpose but to raise the poor into at least the ranks of the reasonably well-to-do. The poor that social science speaks of are largely a construct of modernity, and of the gap, which all indices show is increasing, between socially induced needs and the resources required to fulfill those needs. Social science pretends that a consumer class only emerges when people are lifted out of poverty; it refuses to register the political observation that consumerism itself aggravates and creates poverty, and not only in the economic idiom. Indeed, linking the idea of poverty to development (which is presumed to lift people out of poverty), the geographer Lakshman Yapa argues that ‘conditions of deprivation experienced by poor people in the Third World are a form of socially constructed scarcity induced by the very process of economic development.’\textsuperscript{15}

Thus the social science disciplines would find incomprehensible Thoreau’s remark, ‘A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone.’


From the point of view of social scientists, it is a self-evident truth that poverty is an economic problem and results from lack of income; it is, in like fashion, obvious to them that literacy is one of the most important and indisputable criteria by which the progress of a people or a nation-state ought to be judged. Yet the word literacy makes its first appearance in 1883, not surprisingly in the United States, which has been in the forefront of developing concepts that, sometimes in place of blatantly oppressive categories, might be used to suggest the higher evolution of some people in comparison to others.

Literacy properly belongs within that cluster of terms which are used to measure, order, evaluate, hierarchize, and condemn; what, after all, is the meaning of measuring the literacy rates of countries, if not to suggest that in the scale of civilization some countries are better than others, and so to chastise those who have kept their people illiterate? The political intent of literacy is to suggest that illiterates have no place in the world, no access to power and the social institutions through which it is exercised, indeed no substantive claim on the attentions of humanity; they exist only to be pitied, a reminder of the darkness, chaos, and poverty from which literates have been rescued. Literacy doubtless opens wide the doors of society to those who enter its portal, but it shuts out many of the ways in which people customarily sought livelihoods and gained the respect of others.

Problems of disciplinary knowledge: The case of History

The world entered into a new millennium not so long ago. I need not belabor the obvious, namely that the millennium which was so widely celebrated in the West and even elsewhere was not a millennium for everyone, except for the fact that the politics of knowledge surrounding the category
that we term the millennium has been quite inadequately explored. The advent of the new millennium may have meant nothing whatsoever to the farmer who tills the land. Howsoever prevalent the Gregorian calendar and the commonly accepted divisions or units of time are in running the affairs of modern nation-states, or in conducting international trade and finance, not everyone in the world is bound by the clock, the week, and the year of 365 days, and much less by the appointment books which construe these as ‘natural’ units of temporal calibration. Though the calendar and the schedule govern modern lives, there is nothing inevitable about this course of history. The standardization of time was first achieved, and that too in a rudimentary form, in the eighteenth century with the emergence of industrialization and the factory clock. In like fashion, the Gregorian calendar inserted itself into the history of the heathens and the primitives, as they were then known, with colonization. The striking of the millennium must have reminded Muslims around the world how far they had become marginal to the affairs of the world; it is not their second millennium that was being celebrated. The politics of millennium mongering is, alas, far more insidious. To put the matter more crisply, the dominant and most widely operative categories of the social sciences remind us, at this juncture of history, that a very considerable portion of the world is destined, in the manner of the proverbial lazy native, always to remain behind. Nothing illustrates this better, I have already suggested, than the term ‘development’, which though very considerably put into question by ecologists, activists, and many others who have become disenchanted with the discourses of modernity, is yet extraordinarily resilient.

Analogously, we might consider that the most eminent difficulty that arises from a consideration of the epistemological framework of the entire social sciences,
including ‘history’, is that it has colonized not only the past and present of what might be called the non-Western world, but the future of that immense segment of humanity. The present of the non-Western world, one surmises from much academic work, is none other than the past of the West; its future is only the present of the West, and one suspects a poor version of that present. That is only another way of saying that the rest – what is not the West, the mere supplement – does not really have a future; its only future is to live the present of the West, or what would have then become the past of the West. History, so to speak, already happened somewhere else; that is, the history that the under-developed world awaits breathlessly. The native, as usual, has a belated arrival; much worse, the native need not bother arriving, since there isn’t a place to arrive at: one of the driving ambitions of colonialism was to homogenize place into space. The native’s attachment to land and his or her conception of it as mother, is, according to the expert, nothing but a case of the bizarre loyalties of undeveloped people that hinder development and progress. What is obscured is the fact that the end of this road to development, the only place the native has to arrive at today, is the shopping mall. One might begin to infer from this why the politics of time implied in the notion of the millennium must leave all those who are concerned with the ecological plurality of knowledges exceedingly uneasy.

What, then, can be the hope that one might invest in the practices of history? Numerous recent developments in the discipline of history have led many practitioners into believing that their discipline has opened itself up to a plurality of voices, to the exploration of various questions – such as those which have alerted us to the relationship between power and discursivity – that were long ignored, and to the restoration of long-suppressed narratives; these developments embolden them with the feeling that the world
– or at least the United States and the developed West – is becoming a more ecumenical place. Yet scarcely any of them have paused to ask how it is that history became enshrined as the preeminent public discourse of our times – there is a history book club, but not one for anthropology, sociology, or economics, and one hears of ‘history buffs’ – and indeed as the discourse which, in some respects, is poised to occupy the place that science has held for the last few centuries? Is there a people that wishes to be without a history?16 The answer cannot be in the affirmative. How did people everywhere acquire a historical sensibility? Why did instruction in history become so integral and important a part of the school curriculum everywhere?

Various developments appear to have liberated history from the older modalities in which it is described as having been trapped in the past – as the history of elites, the history of the white race, the positivist history of Ranke and other pursuers of ‘facts’ whom Charles Dickens lampooned in Hard Times, the history of European colonization civilizing the world, and so on. These new, purportedly emancipatory or ecumenical, developments can be encapsulated in many ways, but I here wish to take up only two developments whose immensely enthusiastic advocates have gained significant victories in the academy. One way of measuring these victories is to stress that higher-level university administrators have everywhere endorsed these developments – which I shall encapsulate under the terms interdisciplinary history or interdisciplinarity and world history – and have dignified these developments as continuing signs of their drive for what is termed ‘excellence’. Not much need be said about ‘excellence’, which is claimed as part of the mission of all

educational institutions, from the most insignificant and parochial to the best of the research universities. As the late Bill Readings argued, ‘excellence’ is an empty concept, it has “no content to call its own”; it is a catch-all word for which the Shakespearean phrase, “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”, appears to be apposite.  

The administrators who have done the most to render the American university system into a bottomless pit of mediocrity are characteristically those who have been the most loud-mouthed about ‘excellence’. Little do university administrators in India, driven in this matter as in everything else by the desire to emulate the West, know how comical is their desire to create ‘world class’ institutions of ‘excellence’. The din of ‘world class’ is drowning out everything else.

To turn first to interdisciplinarity, doubtless all but those scholars who have a Jurassic mentality, or a personal sense of entitlement that makes them view their own discipline as a fiefdom, have in principle embraced interdisciplinarity. To appear to be against interdisciplinarity is much like appearing to be against development, and makes one look regressive, unrepentant, and churlish. At the same time, the practice of interdisciplinarity immediately awakens the gate-keepers from their slumbers and invites retribution. Though the virtues of interdisciplinarity are self-evident, let me unhesitatingly assume the role of the troglodytic native who refuses to recognize a good thing for what it is, and suggest that interdisciplinarity, for all its virtues, is scarcely the way of freeing academic disciplines from their constraints and limitations that it is made out to be. As a definition of

interdisciplinary work, consider that it normally entails replicating the follies of more than one discipline in one’s work. Can that strike any one as a very desirable objective? Secondly, interdisciplinary work can be likened to affirmative action, a half-hearted therapeutic gesture that, even in its implementation, is invariably accompanied by the feeling that one is not ontologically invested in the enterprise. Its import is to create a theory of nominal membership – for example, including a sociologist, anthropologist, historian, and linguist in a single university department, or as is much more likely, including these same practitioners in a research project, such as the study of patterns of philanthropy in a Chinese diasporic community or receptivity to education among immigrants from North Africa in a Paris neighborhood. As the Indian sociologist of science, Shiv Visvanathan, writes, “interdisciplinarity tends to be officiously correct and pious, pointing to this one ‘different’ character like a prized albino in a pack of bronzed tribals… Interdisciplinarity reflects a failure of the political imagination. It seeks to mix subjects without questioning, hyphenating differences by affably denying their incommensurability.”

Thirdly, interdisciplinarity serves as the perfect pretext for market expansion, and it is no accident that interdisciplinary programs allow both those on the left and the right to find some points of convergence; indeed, considering that the modern head of the American university is preeminently a fundraiser, only secondarily a scholar and seldom an intellectual, one can understand why interdisciplinary work receives the constant approbation of administrators. Fourthly, and most significantly, the intent, at least implicitly, of interdisciplinary work is to aim at some notion of

commensurability, or the elimination of substantive dissenting views. In the words of Thompson Klein, “all interdisciplinary activities are rooted in the ideas of unity and synthesis, evoking a common epistemology of convergence”.

In area studies work, where interdisciplinary work has long been prized, interdisciplinarity is unfortunately predicated on the model of the nation-state, which though only one form of conceptualizing political communities, has become the telos of all human history; conversely, the most substantive way that the American academy allows work on India, China, Africa, and other ‘civilizations’ to be conducted is under the rubric of interdisciplinarity, cross-cultural studies, and other sanitized niceties.

The burden of my critique of interdisciplinary history should then be apparent: where its votaries aim at certain forms of transparency and commensurability in the name of civility and conversation, an adherence to the notion of what I have previously termed an ecological plurality of knowledges demands that we strive for incommensurability. Conversation between differing cultures in the present state of extraordinary inequity can only result in the further erosion of plurality and increased homogenization, though the more sensitive of the cultural theorists will defend such conversations as harbingers of liberating hybridities. The fact that interdisciplinarity has no critique to offer of the structures of modern disciplinary-based knowledge, and can consequently be accepted as a laudable objective without opening oneself to attack, is nowhere better instantiated than in the indifference and even contempt with which the idea of transdisciplinarity is often received. To speak of transdisciplinarity in the United States is to raise the specter of the ‘public intellectual’, a figure of

much derision: public intellectuals are the homeless of the American academy. Considering the anti-intellectual propensities of the American past, and the fact that the American idea of the public intellectual takes us no further than Alistair Cooke, Charlie Rose, or at best Bill Moyers, the academic disenchantment with the public intellectual is not entirely incomprehensible. The ‘public intellectual’ also erodes the authority of the ‘expert’, and few social science practitioners are willing to countenance the idea that, paradoxically, knowledge only begins to become interesting when we take it out of the hands of the experts. Indeed, if we may take a cue from Thoreau’s outlook, who played a pivotal role in the development of the modern lead pencil and then abandoned the enterprise precisely at the moment when it would have started earning him loyalties, the moment when one begins to exude authority about a subject, that is precisely the moment when one should abandon it for something else. Interdisciplinarity displays that characteristically American obsession with technique, and seems perfectly apposite for an automotive culture. Its end, Viswanathan suggestively notes,

20. Doubtless, Edward Said was a ‘public intellectual’ to the extent that he became a principal spokesperson for the Palestinian cause, but no one should imagine that this exalted individual, holding the rarified title of ‘University Professor’ at Columbia University, was even remotely a household name in the United States. I have argued elsewhere that both Said and Noam Chomsky had to first establish themselves within their own disciplines, literature and linguistics, respectively, before they could move into the wider public spheres with their critiques of American foreign policy and the like. It is as if their credibility as critics was contingent on a demonstration of their mastery of their chosen field of knowledge. See Vinay Lal, The intellectual as exemplar: Identity, oppositional politics, and the ambivalent legacy of Edward Said, Amerasia Journal, 31(1), 39–42, 2005.

is to reinforce the feeling that (to quote Robert Frost) “good fences make good neighbors.”

Much the same objections can also be made against world history, which is increasingly finding a place in university curriculums. Certainly the same considerations about the increasing approbation given to world history by university administrators and the need to market history graduates readily come to mind. Another set of arguments against world history is commonly encountered: it sets itself impractical goals, the scholarship on the subject is much too vast, a field of specialization in world history is difficult to conceive, it requires mastery of several languages that is increasingly difficult to attain, its practitioners are prone to superficial generalizations, and so on. In short, world history eventually ends up doing justice to no one; perhaps only in that respect is it ecumenical. Of course there is considerable disagreement about how far world history is, and ought to be, more than merely the history of the Euro-American world, with occasional gestures made towards the civilizations of India and Egypt, or the modern ‘miracle’ that is Japan – and increasingly China. Certain practitioners of world history – David Landes, Eric L. Jones, and Michael Mann, to name three – are unabashed supporters of the view that Europe rightfully occupies the center stage of world history, and they have expressed indignation at recent attempts, motivated in their view by political correctness, misplaced feelings of guilt at European colonialism, and a failure to recognize the uniquely European contributions to civilization, to dislodge Europe as the center of world history. More generally, however, the critique of world history emanates from the

22. Shiv Visvanathan, cited above.
opposite end, that is from the perception that world histories are still overwhelmingly Eurocentric.

Doubtless, some of the more mundane arguments against world history are not without merit. We can, however, recognize the debates about Eurocentrism in world history for what they are, as arguments largely about ‘quotas’. Though often critiques of world history put forth the pretense that a serious interrogation of Eurocentrism necessitates questioning how Europe became the lodestar for all historical investigations, my own interaction with many advocates of world history suggests that an additional 50 pages on the non-West in a 500-page tome on world history would go a long way in meeting their objections. The more substantive hazards of world history are seldom touched upon in the literature, and here I shall attempt to suggest why the enterprise of world history is intrinsically unacceptable by considering it from the standpoint of Indian history. The Indian sensibility, I have elsewhere argued, is largely ahistorical, and the greater number of Indians still do not converse in the language of history, nor are they persuaded that, even as a tool of citizenship, historical thinking is desirable. It can even be argued, apropos the destruction of the Babri mosque at Ayodhya in December 1992, when historical arguments were marshaled by both the Hindu nationalists and their secular opponents, that the recourse to historical reasoning may well further aggravate communal tensions. Nonetheless, now that big science and ideologies of development have fallen into considerable disrepute, one suspects that history may have to carry the larger share of the burden of civilizing the

underdeveloped. To encapsulate a long and complex argument in a brief form, with the advent of British rule in India, the conception of the ‘world’ to which Indians subscribed began to become narrower, and the process greatly accelerated under the modernizing tendencies associated at first with the Bengal Renaissance, and subsequently with the Bengali domination of Indian nationalist schools of historical thought. There is nothing on the horizon to suggest, notwithstanding even the greater awareness of an Indian diaspora among historians, that a world history under Indian dispensation would not become, as it generally does everywhere, a history of the West energizing the rest of the world, with doubtless some appropriate digressions on the greatness of the Indian past.

I would thus advance the much stronger argument that, at least in the present circumstances, the enterprise of world history, from whatsoever angle it is attempted, must be disowned and repudiated, certainly viewed far more critically than it has been so far. Both terms, world and history, might be interrogated to show the difficulties that lie ahead in the way of Indians who would wish to write world histories. Perforce, too, the enterprise of world history will be one where writing predominates, but as much work on Indian folklore has shown, folklore and orality are far more likely to display evidently counter-hegemonic tendencies. There is little to suggest that those who write world history are

25. For further elaboration of some of these ideas, see Vinay Lal, Much ado about something: The new malaise of world history, Radical History Review, 91, 124–30, 2005.

attentive to the hermeneutics of writing. What is obliterated and forgotten when histories are written? Is the historian prepared to countenance the idea that some histories might induce forgetfulness?

‘World history’ informs the greater part of the people in the world that the only history they have is to catch up to someone else’s history, or else they themselves will become history. Such a history has every potential to be a form of cultural genocide, politically disempowering, and destructive of the ecological plurality of knowledges and lifestyles. Clearly, we must ask who we write world histories for, and with what intent. Like a great many enterprises which are conceived with at least partly a noble impulse – and doubtless that is how many of its practitioners think of it, fired by the desire to expand the contours of historical knowledge, encourage multicultural education, understand the diverse modes through which culture is expressed, and so forth – world history presents itself as an endeavor to increase what in popular parlance is called ‘cross-cultural understanding’. To be sure, one can use more elevated language to describe its ambitions, from the comprehension of history as a form of conflict resolution to an awareness of history as a celebration of diversity. World history will even begin to be used, if that day has not already dawned, as part of what in management circles is known as ‘diversity training’. One of the most eminent practitioners of world history, William McNeill, reflecting on his long engagement with it, recently wrote: “I commend it to you as a worthy and fascinating pursuit, apt for our age, and practically useful inasmuch as a clear and vivid sense of the whole human past can help to soften future conflicts by making clear what we all share.”

I have offered the view that, keeping in mind the enormous inequities in the world system, the vastly different conditions under which research is conducted and produced in the north and the south, and the dominance of modern knowledge systems, there can be no more desirable outcome than to reduce the contact between cultures and reject certain kinds of conversations. In the totalizing conditions of modern knowledge, perhaps best encapsulated now in the primacy accorded to historical knowledge, the intellectual and political imperative must remain one of increasing incommensurability. The intellectual project of the disciplines runs contrary to this dissenting politics, and to aim at a better knowledge of the world from within the framework of the categories deployed by the modern sciences is to do little more than to ripen the conditions under which oppression takes place. Even the most radical historians are unable to write the history of the ahistorical except as a form of pre-history, primitivism, or irrational myth-making, just as the most radical economists, while attentive to considerations of distributive justice, minimum wages, and the like, are unable to bring themselves to an acceptance of the view that the entire paradigm of ‘growth’ may have to be rejected.

The subaltern Third World may be far more recalcitrant to the social science disciplines and their categories than the social scientists themselves are capable of imagining. If there is a millennial prognosis for the social sciences, which might introduce into the dominant frameworks some dissent that has not already been rendered captive by numerous models that are posturing as dissent, it is this: the historical mode may have to be compelled to pave way for the mythic and the ahistorical; the formalized platitudes of the social sciences will at the very least have to be brought into an engagement with folk and vernacular forms of knowing; and the claims of Western forms of universality will have to be adjudged not
only against the strengths of local knowledge systems, but against competing universalisms which are content with a less totalizing reach. That appears to be the only way to discipline the disciplines so that they become the handmaidens of human progress rather than the masters of human destiny.
CHAPTER TWO

A Critique of Eurocentric Social Science and the Question of Alternatives

Claude Alvares

The social sciences and the real world

In January 2010, the Department of Sociology (DoS) of Delhi University formally inaugurated a brand new European Study Center at its premises, funded by the European Union. The Center would help in the ‘re-design of the existing sociology syllabi of the M.A. and M. Phil. program at DoS’ in consultation with European scholars. The Europeans were willing to pay 300,000 Euros for the two year program of the Center. The question we may rather impolitely ask is where was the need for such a program considering that the DoS, like every other university department elsewhere on the planet, has been teaching European sociology now since the days it was first set up.

Earlier, intellectual dependence and servility came as a natural corollary of colonial rule. Today it is being welcomed because it comes buttered with hard cash. For cash-strapped universities mired in the now almost permanent age of structural adjustment, this appears to be the only option left for carrying on academic activity even if it means that one is now forced to continue to make one’s living by canvassing the

1. See www.iescp.org/index.php/events
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products of other peoples’ brains. There is not even a hint in the European Studies Center proposal that Indians will help Europeans deal with Europe’s own social problems of which there is an abundance. Examples could include the integration of minorities, fear of dealing with Islamic communities in their midst, problems of management of aged persons, etc. We are still very much moving along a one way street – with all movement from the core to the periphery – because that is how knowledge continues to flow in the global university knowledge system.

Imperialism may find fierce resistance today (Iraq, Iran, Argentina, Vietnam, Afghanistan), but academic imperialism does not, probably because it is almost invisible. On the contrary, it has increased in intensity and outreach. University departments and faculties in almost all universities of the globe have – voluntarily or involuntarily – continued to pay obeisance to the objectives and methodologies of social science generation prevailing in western academic circles (Farid Alatas refers to the latter appropriately as ‘social science powers’2). Their output even today continues to reflect principally the concerns of western scholars. Much of present day social science in non-European universities is nothing more than the endless study and re-study of the dead corpus (corpse) of sociological knowledge generated in response to ethnocentric or peculiarly European perceptions of situations often decades or centuries old. Even where such academic work may nowadays sometimes reflect local issues due to the efforts of individual researchers who wish to do meaningful, independent work, the methodologies applied and theoretical frameworks still remain firmly Euro-American in

character. Independence from colonial rule has had little or no significant consequences except for opportunities to jockey or to fight to occupy chairs left by earlier intellectual overlords. Naturally, there is very little evidence of creative thinking or work, considering that all move and have their being in an intellectually sterile wasteland.

As the social sciences in the form we know them today are little more than unquestioned European perspectives for resolving European social problems using the peculiar research tools and methods associated with Europe’s intellectual history, can they ever be useful intellectual tools for the study of other societies with a vastly different range of problems as well as human experience?

**The historical evolution of social science studies**

The question few people ask is why do Indians or Iranians or Chinese for that matter allow themselves to continue to be fed a diet of what Europeans or Americans decide is social science? Can one really believe that societies like those of India or China or Iran could survive for thousands of years without intensive know-how about social, political or military organization? Why are we unable to resist the notion that European sociology or anthropology or American political science or psychology is some kind of absolute which cannot be questioned? Is it because it has come to us as inheritance during a period when we were not allowed to think for ourselves?

It may be useful here to inquire (briefly) into how this situation arose in the first place. The intellectual history of societies coming under the political domination of Europe and later, the US, shows two major phases. In the first phase, there is a determined assault on their intellectual and spiritual traditions which is often internalized and often uncritically
accepted by the leading and influential sections of the subjugated population. In any event, they really do not have any choice. Thereafter, in the second phase, there is an overt attempt to completely replace the indigenous systems with ideas associated with the experience of the colonizer – a routine feature of the exercise of power.

In a country like India, for instance, the disruption of the confidence of its intellectual elite in its own traditions of social inquiry occurred gradually over a period of 200 years. The methodology adopted for such cultural assaults was elaborated very powerfully in 1612 by Sir John Davies, British Attorney for Ireland. Though he was writing in respect of Ireland, Davies could have been writing about any other country that came under political subjugation of colonial powers:

The defects which hindered the perfection of the conquest of Ireland were of two kinds and consisted: first, in the faint prosecution of the war and next in the looseness of the civil government. For the husbandman must first break the land before it be made capable of good seed; and when it is thoroughly broken and manured if he do not forthwith cast good seed into it, it will grow wild again and bear nothing but weeds. So a barbarous country must first be broken by a war before it will be capable of good government; and when it is fully subdued and conquered, if it be not well planted and governed after the conquest it will soon return to the former barbarism.\(^3\)

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3. Sir John Davies, *A discovery of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued nor brought under obedience of the crown of England until the beginning of His Majesty’s happy reign (1612)*, in Henry Morley (Ed.), *Ireland under Elizabeth and James the first*, London: George Routledge and Sons, 1890, p. 291.
The simple truth is that there has never been a change in this principal approach of imperialism and its ways thereafter. Similar statements have been made by the more recent marauders involved in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 1835, a profoundly new approach was crystallized in the form of a ‘Minute’ by Governor General Lord Babington Macaulay which became the foundation of the modern academic enterprise and proved to be successful beyond expectations to colonial and post-colonial rulers. In that influential Minute, Macaulay summarily knocked down the entire intellectual output of India and Arabia in well known words:

I have never found one among them [the orientalists] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education. It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the Eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.

Macaulay insisted on installing a new system of education with a very specific set of goals. These are also well known to

4. See www.vvv03.com/Minutes.pdf
all people who have even a summary acquaintance with the history of education in colonial countries:

I feel with them that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.5

It is truly amazing to discover today that so many educated segments in practically every subjugated or colonized society could be so convinced eventually of their own – and their civilization’s – worthlessness, that they would allow themselves to be robbed of everything that their civilizations had to offer and then meekly submit to remold themselves in the ephemeral manner and thinking of those who came from outside their borders. This intellectually humiliating and spiritually devastating story was repeated *ad nauseam* in countries as diverse as Turkey, Indonesia, the Philippines and India, as well as with respect to the people of the south American continent and the Maoris in Aotearoa (New Zealand). These became overnight ‘victim’ societies, ‘defeated’ civilizations and they readily applied this feeling of collective inferiority to the products of their minds as well.

The scale of this human disaster was ultimately restricted for a rare reason: the very difficulty the imperial power faced – as Macaulay himself admitted – in ‘educating’ the entire population. In other words, we survived with our identity simply because most of us did not speak English, we continued to speak in our own mother-tongues, and the majority of our populations did more interesting things than getting themselves certified in Western knowledge systems.

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5. See online Minutes, cited above.
They simply remained aloof, disinterested, unincorporated. They could do this mainly because they retained their own food production systems and generated their own subsistence or incomes, howsoever small. The result everywhere has been the generation of two wholly different societies even if they occupy the same single space. In his remarkable work of anthropology *Mexico Profundo*, Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla made a critical reference to the ‘imaginary Mexico’ imposed on that society by Western scholars. He called it ‘imaginary’ not because it does not exist, but because it denied the cultural reality lived daily by most Mexicans.

All the assessments and evaluations of the West, of Western science, of the alleged dynamism and achievements associated with Western history are made by intellectuals, historians and writers from the West. They unabashedly glory in their own achievements, they become their own historians, they propose their own greatness, and they themselves celebrate the unique quality of their own civilization. The final act of hubris was a claim made fairly recently that the West symbolized ‘the end of history,’ the end of evolution; that there was no further stage of human progress necessary or conceivable except further endless refinements in technology. The ‘genius’ of Orientalist discourse has been in precisely this: the peoples of India, Arabia and other lands are told that the best interpreters of their history, their societies, their traditions are scholars and commentators from the West rather than persons from their own countries. We, from outside the Western imperium, have had to read, hear and face this sort of drivel without remission now for nearly two centuries.

This narcissism prevails despite the fact that Western academic social science is not irrevocable, divine, infallible or bestowed with greater epistemological significance than other intellectual traditions or ethnosciences. It is only made to appear so. The entire corpus of knowledge is accepted as superior only on their word, on their power, on their assumption that this is how knowledge is created if it is to benefit human beings, if it is to be given the label ‘science’. This feeling of inherent superiority in the intellectual capabilities of Western academia was reciprocated by an entire generation of intellectuals from universities from the rest of the non-Western world, with few exceptions. Distressed by this wholesale mental capitulation and surrender, Seyyed Hussein Alatas wrote – several decades ago – a stinging evaluation of what he called ‘the captive mind’ in which he pilloried third world intellectuals for their continuing obsession with imported and handed down theories of knowledge which had little to do with their societies, their experience, and their own intellectual traditions.7

After the US became the dominant force in the world economy, curriculum dominance shifted to American universities and their academic formula became the new testament for the rest of the world, including now England. As the US naturally assumed control over what would constitute higher education, this implied that university content would now be sourced to thinking from a country which encapsulated little more than the worldview and concerns of a predominantly white male population which had established itself there as the dominant economic class through sheer uninhibited violence and which would tolerate

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the growth of only those sections that were in grand sympathy with its views. The problem faced by the white American education system in the nineteenth century was the lack of uniformity in what was being taught at different schools and colleges within the country. The diversity was finally settled by the report of the ‘Committee of Ten’ set up under the chairmanship of Charles W. Eliott, President of Harvard University. The subjects seen as necessary for a proper university education for people growing in the United States were decided by this committee and they would thereafter rule the world of academia everywhere even up to our own times with minor modifications. The subjects and also the duration of time to be allotted for the teaching of these subjects were determined by the Committee.8

What is important to note is that this attempt to create and enforce a uniform diet for all students of education in all countries – most with diverse environments, intellectual histories and cultural traditions – was never questioned and this curriculum was soon adopted as the norm for schools and universities everywhere, whether this suited their societies or not, since the modern university culture has retained a profoundly mimicking character. Ngugi wa Thion’o, for example, relegated most academic scholarship in Africa to exercises in ‘apemanship and parrotry.’9 We must admit, whether we like it or not, that as far as the social sciences are concerned, knowledge has always come to us, packaged and

8. The nine subjects were: Latin; Greek; English; Other Modern [European] Languages; Mathematics; Physics, Astronomy, Chemistry; Natural History; History, Civil Government and Political Economy; and Physical Geography, Geology and Meteorology. For further details, see www.mathcurriculumcenter.org/PDFS.
9. India’s Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, in fact, wrote a telling story about a parrot in which he parodied the educational system a hundred years ago. See the article by Munir Fasheh in this volume.
complete, and we have only been relegated the role of tugging at the strings and opening the package. Efforts to de-colonize, in fact, have often brought strong resistance from those mentally enslaved. As Ngugi wa Thiongo says ‘It is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues.’¹⁰ Imperialism is an intrinsic part of the world science system.

Even today the power to enforce the dominance continues to be exercised in the form of control over the textbook trade, generation and authentication of social science literature, selective use of scholars from their own academic traditions, suppression and discrediting of ideas from other intellectual traditions, unscrupulous misappropriation of such ideas when possible, and control of circulation of ideas through the peer group system which links both the publishing and journal industries. This is the reason why Mahatma Gandhi, Tolstoy, Aurobindo, Mao Zedong and other eminent persons also worked on revamping the educational systems they inherited as an important element of their political work. Gandhi introduced the system of Nai Talim, in which students would work with their hands and learn and earn while doing so.

These comments are about the educational enterprise as a whole. Now we shall take up some of the social sciences individually. But before we do that, we need to examine one specific issue, the problem of the assumptions behind the social sciences of our time. If one is faced with any of the social sciences – for instance, anthropology or political science or sociology – one needs to examine the assumptions on which that particular body of knowledge is based. At present, the assumptions of all social sciences are closely linked with the cultural goals, experiences and objectives of

European or ‘white’ societies. Therefore, it is natural that social or political theory will largely mirror the concerns of the societies in which these versions of the sciences have been generated. So if you want an answer to the question of why we are teaching European social sciences in our societies, there is really no cogent or rational answer, except that everybody is doing it and everybody cannot be wrong.

However, when pushed, we will quickly see that the idea of universalism or universally valid assumptions or propositions in the social sciences is false since such universals are created by human beings and therefore are as shaky and unstable as human beings and their products. The idea that fallible beings can create infallible knowledge about themselves is itself a methodological impossibility, a contradiction in terms. If this is true, then every culture or body of knowledge is enabled to raise its own de-facto universalisms, that is, truths that are valid to guide its own discourse. For the same reasons it may dispute, reject or dispose of the intellectual products of other cultures especially where it is found to be necessary to reject the assumptions on which such knowledge is based or if such knowledge is felt or perceived to be irrelevant. Let us take specific disciplines as examples of academic imperialism in the social sciences and examine now how extensively the structure of Eurocentric knowledge is firmly installed there.

**Philosophy:** Asian and African universities have been offering graduate and postgraduate courses in ‘Philosophy’ for several decades. However, most philosophy departments in India and elsewhere today are facing a student famine. This grim situation is not related only to the perceived uselessness of the subject of philosophy for employment, but also to the actual irrelevance of what is taught under the label of ‘philosophy’ to the country’s concerns; to philosophical
activity in the country; to the pressing issues of our time. Delhi University is a classic instance. This premier university of the capital city of India still teaches a course of undergraduate studies that comprises almost wholly of Western philosophers and Western philosophical issues and methods (dead end philosophies).

Where some papers in Indian philosophy are offered, the coursework available is so sterile and unattractive as to dissuade anyone from taking interest. Indian philosophical thought is conveyed as something of a fossilized system of ideas: archaic, outdated, quaint, with key concepts in a dead language, property of indologists or sanskritists; or there is an attempt to show it as measuring up to modern Western philosophical standards with equivalent detailed analysis of issues, e.g., in Nyaya and Navya Nyaya. Thus for the present day philosophy professors, their diet of issues for active philosophizing comes almost wholly from the Western academic tradition. The situation is hardly different even in countries like Iran where – after the installation of the Islamic Revolution – all universities were closed for three years in order to enable them to revise their curricula. In White Studies, Ward Churchill makes the following observation about undergraduate studies in philosophy in the US:

Consider a typical introductory level philosophy course. Students will in all probability explore the works of the ancient Greek philosophers, the fundamentals of Cartesian logic and Spinoza, stop off for a visit with Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, and John Locke, cover a chapter or two of Kant’s aesthetics, dabble a bit in Hegelian dialectics, and review Nietzsche’s assorted rantings. A good leftist professor may add a dash of Marx’s famous “inversion” of Hegel and, on a good day, his commentaries on the frailties of Feuerbach. In an exemplary class, things will end up in the 20th century with discussions of Schopenhauer, Heidegger and Husserl, Bertrand Russell and Alfred North
Whitehead, perhaps an “adventurous” summarization of the existentialism of Sartre and Camus.\textsuperscript{11}

Those students who have completed their undergraduate (and graduate) studies in philosophy in Indian or African universities will almost readily concede that, with few exceptions, they have been raised on precisely the same diet of exotic materials. From Nigeria, Mesembe Ita Edet wrote:

For four years the students are saddled right from their introductory classes with history of Western philosophy beginning with Thales in the ancient period up to the major characters of the contemporary period of Western philosophy… Students of philosophy… are treated to an overdose of the metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of history, philosophy of religion, of Descartes, Berkeley, Spinoza, Locke, Hume, Kant, Bentham, Hegel, Mill and other Western philosophers.\textsuperscript{12}

What is characteristic of curricula in Indian departments of philosophy is the teaching of Western philosophy without a discussion of its epistemological method or its assumptions or presuppositions. Western and Indian philosophies are studied independently without any attempt to see them as two fundamentally and methodologically different responses to a common problematic, or even as two different formulations of the same problematic. This approach does not permit one to see the Indian philosophical tradition in the context of history, as having a principle of motion, of dynamic reform and constant reformulation; the emphasis remains, by default, on an authentic but essentially fossilized Indian tradition. The overall scheme of Western philosophy and its concerns over the ages remains the framework of philosophy studies in

India. It is taken for granted that this framework is basic, absolute, not to be questioned – the only developed tradition in comparison with which all others are ethnic, quaint, undeveloped, anachronisms.

When one goes behind to the assumptions that underlie Western philosophy, there is an even greater surprise in store. Islamic and Indian philosophies are not considered ‘philosophy’ by Western philosophical schools because they both refuse to grant reason pre-eminence or primacy as a tool for achieving absolute truth. Islamic philosophy is labeled ‘theology’, while Indian philosophy is relegated to the sphere of ‘religion,’ (as it is understood in the West). However, Western philosophy itself bases its own premises on foundationless assumptions that are as fundamentalist, religious or theological as those it feels it can distinguish itself from. One may argue that different traditions (Indian, African, Chinese, Western) are incommensurable, based on entirely separate sets of assumptions, with their foundations based on entirely different and irreconcilable faiths and convictions? These traditions should be brought into the classroom and the implications of the differences discussed.

**Psychology:** There is no better example of the total disjuncture between university curricula and public perception of useful knowledge than the teaching of psychology. Take a country like India. While literally millions (both from India and abroad) take instruction from gurus or come to India to learn yoga, or to listen to discourses by the Dalai Lama or his cohorts, psychology departments continue to be mired in the teaching and practice of wholly imported American clinical psychology.

This has not gone on without rebellion. During the last 50 years there have been several critics of the teaching of psychology from very different areas, especially Africa and
India. Durganand Sinha was one of the first to raise issues of Eurocentric psychology from India. A recent book on *Indian Psychology* relates:

By and large psychology taught, studied and practiced in India is Western; it is the psychology developed in North America and Europe. Many of the senior psychologists in the country were trained in the West. The textbooks studied were largely written by Western psychologists and published abroad. The key concepts, the main categories and research themes are unmistakably Western derivatives. Even the psychological tools employed are in large part developed and standardized in the West.\(^{13}\)

Scholars in Africa joined the Indians on the critique of Eurocentrism in psychology. Vernon Naidoo, for example, declared that psychology teaching in Africa has been traditionally Eurocentric, deriving its insights for a white, middle class value system.\(^{14}\) The issues and problems concerning other social groups were non-existent among its concerns. He called for an Africentric paradigm of psychology to contest the ‘Eurocentric substrate of psychology’ and its ‘pretension to universality.’ He rejected the myth of sameness – that persons trained in monocultural perspectives could be able to apply their theory to all populations.

Other critics of the teaching of American psychology in Africa observed that white culture continued to serve as a foundation for counseling theory, research and practice. They defined white culture as ‘a synthesis of ideas, values, norms, beliefs and behaviors that have coalesced from descendants of

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white European ethnic groups’. H. A. Bulhan\textsuperscript{15} laid out three principal features of the ethnocentric bias of dominant psychological teaching: the Euro-American worldview is the only or the best world view; positivism or neo-positivism is the only or the best approach for the conduct of scientific inquiry; and experiences of white, middle class males are the only or most valid experiences in the world. He observed that these assumptions also deprecated other psychological traditions without examining them with the same objectivity with which they claimed they used in their own scientific activities. Bulhan also showed how the over-identification of psychology with the natural sciences had led to human behavior being reduced to a study of individual behavior in order to facilitate quantification. A second reductionism was the familiar practice of ‘reducing human psychology to its lower animal denominator.’ This made it easier to describe some humans, especially people of color, as being closer to animals, like the so-called ‘savage tribes’ of Africa or the Maoris.

Undoubtedly things are now changing due to the influence of multicultural studies and approaches in which white psychology is being questioned on grounds of applicability and relevance. The only problem with the multicultural studies approach is when it continues to evaluate and work within the conceptual and methodological bases of Eurocentric psychology. Not only is the European concept of science and research to be contested, according to Naidoo, but the focus on the clinical approach with its overemphasis on diagnosis and treatment of individual mental illness should be

\textsuperscript{15} H. A. Bulhan, \textit{Afro-centric psychology: Perspectives and practice}, Opening Address to UWC Conference on Psychology and Apartheid, November 1990.
challenged as well. Psychology must be involved in broader health promotion. In this sense, in fact, the rule of Euro-American psychology can be said to have not only impoverished insights of people into their own psyches available in their own intellectual traditions, but also led to violent, inhuman and wholly destructive approaches in their own histories.

**Sociology:** If today’s psychology is almost wholly American (with all its displayed pathologies), the field of sociology is firmly entrenched in the methods, concerns, beliefs and experiences of Europe. I have come across Indian sociologists who sincerely believe that they cannot construct a sociology for India without reference to Europe’s sociology founders including August Comte, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, etc., which they unabashedly continue to teach, despite the admission that Indian society had an amazing dynamic social organization that enabled it to survive and flourish for several thousands of years. Since sociologists draw their incomes from their practice of the discipline, it is too much to expect them to ask whether sociology as a social science had any utility or basis in the first place. It is entirely inappropriate, if not ludicrous, to attempt to fit Indian social history into the confines of a sociology that reflected the organization of society in Europe the last 300 years, there being in fact little interaction between the two, and when that happened, never on the basis of equality of any kind.

This mindless dependence on European and later American sociology has had some bizarre consequences. Sociologists in fact have argued that the aim of sociology was to identify those features of modern (read Western, read American) society that were essential and ensure that non-white societies were socially engineered through policies to take on those characteristics. In other words, one simply tried
to make Iranians or Indians or Filipinos adopt the features of current day European societies and everything would be all right. This point of view was in fact seriously argued and promoted. Now we discover what a horror this might have been if the proposal had actually been taken seriously because we recognize that the white American middle class male – the focus of American sociology – is probably one of the most neurotic and undesirable role models available for the US, let alone for the rest of the world.\footnote{For an extended discussion of the extent to which Eurocentric discourse has infected sociology teaching in almost all non-white societies, see the work of Farid Alatas (2006), cited above.}

We need to closely examine the assumptions on which modern sociology is based and thereafter proceed to work on our own framework that links actively with indigenous Asian intellectual traditions so that social science has better emotional resonance with our students. As of today, in Indian universities at least, students opt for sociology when they do not know what to do to pass their time or because they can pass easily and get certified without having to seriously understand anything whatsoever. We could also be emboldened to go further and ask if sociology as a discipline needs to be taught at all.

**Economics:** Western economists have had a great deal of impact on the lives of common people in the non-Western world. Mostly this impact has generated or increased suffering. If the suffering has been meekly accepted, this is largely because of the promise of paradise at the end of the rainbow. By the power of trickle-down suggestion, people have been successfully kept in poverty and powerlessness for more than five decades and the rich have become billionaires.
Most universities today are committed to teaching an economics curriculum in which liberal economics with its doctrine of the markets and competition predominates. The idea of the ‘market’ no longer refers to the diversity of institutions involved in the sale of produce (including bazaars and haats) that continue to thrive, nor is it associated with the liberal culture of the Zamorin of Calicut when he granted equal access to European traders during their first arrivals in India. It is now almost wholly associated with the restricted idea of the ‘free market’ which paradoxically is to be imposed by force. This has been the course ever since the inauguration of the Cold War. Despite living today in a world in which the Cold War is over, the inherited framework of teaching a liberal economics curriculum remains intact even though the grand intellectual arguments or ‘science’ behind the framework have collapsed on several occasions, the most recent one being the obscene manner in which the US and other treasuries have intervened to prevent the elimination of several inefficient and corrupt actors.

Thus the fact that liberal economics continued to be taught as gospel wisdom owes really very little to any association of it with rational principles or with knowledge that can be sourced to any canons of objectivity. This is more of an ideology passed off as science. The bulk of this liberal economics corpus is largely an organized counter-response to another of their economists, John Maynard Keynes, who denied the central tenet of the capitalist system; that it worked best if left alone and kept beyond the interventions of government.

‘Development economics’ was originally invented in the West and then handed over to the South.\(^\text{17}\) Its assumptions

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\(^{17}\) See Claude Alvares, *Science, development and violence*, pp. 95–100.
were the same as those undergirding the economic assumptions of the Western economies. The only difference was their rather uncavalier, unprincipled, irresponsible application to the countries of the South. Today, there is not a single person in the world who is not aghast at the continuing degradation of Africa’s economies. Who trained Africa’s economists? Shamans in the Congo? Is there any convention of economic thinking in the heads of economists from India, Africa, or Brazil which has not been put there by some godfather from the West? Today the diet of economic courses is such a hotch-potch of subjective economic pontificating it is a wonder that it ever claimed the status of a ‘science’ worth teaching in any university anywhere.

**Anthropology:** Anthropology as a science is dead. It has in fact lost its reason to exist. If there are still people doing anthropology in our part of the world, this must be largely because a colonized university teaching tradition cannot change easily, since it is its very nature to simply carry out commands without questioning their political origin or their meaning. The less said about anthropology as a ‘science’, the better. This practice of ‘ethnography’ – what it wishes to be called today – operated in its heyday squarely as an agent and arm of imperialism. After the political unacceptability of imperialism, it lost its purpose and direction and has been floundering in an ocean of turbulence caused by open rebellion especially in countries like Aotearoa, Africa, etc., where anthropology was most abused. This led to the observation that Europe intentionally created two social sciences: the first, sociology, for its own societies, the civilized folk; the second, called anthropology, for the rest of humankind, especially the brutes, the primitives, the savages.

Once this dichotomy was extinguished, it turned up again, as Vinay Lal has proposed, via President Truman in 1949, as a
fresh division of the world into developed societies and underdeveloped or undeveloped or developing societies. The same old gas is now available in a new bottle. The extant literature also confirms that almost all anthropology has been a one-way street, with Europeans descending on the rest of the world with their quaint filters and mirrors and eventually using their experience as little more than confirmation of their own (superior) way of life. This is reflected in the enormous anthropological literature bulk of which is about Noble Savages and Primitive Folk and more recently, undeveloped or developing societies. There are barely a couple of texts or reports that are a result of exercises in ‘reverse’ anthropology. The only way therefore in which anthropology can restore its image as a science worth doing is if it will encourage more of ‘reverse’ ethnography: active study programs in which non-Westerners carry out studies of European societies. Though Western societies are today seen as models of industrial growth, only the most blind will not see that they have become majorly affected by social and familial disruption on a scale unseen in the non-Western world. The Happiness Index also indicates profound unhappiness despite overt material prosperity. In addition, there is the issue of overt and concealed poverty and the compulsory rendition of human beings once retired from a productive role in their economy.

**Is a middle position possible?**

Some scholars display some resistance to the idea of a social science in which the theories generated by the West do not

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have some kind of role. This is an interesting position. The power success of Western social science is precisely in its vaunted ability to conduct its social inquiries without recourse to the cultural endowments of other societies or to their intellectual traditions or experience. The encounter with other societies in fact has been seen as largely a mirror in which their own superiority has been sought to be self-affirmed. We are therefore emboldened to ask why is it that we cannot do likewise, now that we are all politically at least our own sovereigns. If Europe’s version of the social sciences could be constructed by its scholars without reference to the experience or ideas of other societies, there can be no reason why a similar exercise could not be accomplished by others as well. It cannot be intellectually impossible to construct social sciences that refuse to pay allegiance to the key concepts driving mainstream European social science. If this possibility is denied, it can only mean that there is a grudging acceptance of the West as universal, a position that is completely untenable and false. If a scholar wants to say that she cannot think without the support of the so-called prominent thinkers dominating the West’s social science traditions, let her say so, but this need not be raised to a level of a universal dictum nor can it be for others to follow.

The issue finally is whether continuing to teach social science in the categories framed by Euro-American thinkers – even while making serious efforts at increasing the dependence on non-White knowledge systems – does not mean strengthening the former even further at the continued expense of the latter. Every minute, every hour, every day, every year spent within the frameworks of understanding defined and given to us by the West means that much less effort to work within frameworks that are created by us, from our own experience, using categories that we can relate to in more meaningful ways than the imported categories we are
habituated to use today. In other words, the primary agenda for any academic in the non-Western world is resisting imperialism in academia, working to transcend Eurocentric discourse and Eurocentric frameworks of understanding and perception. If the result is social science that is more diverse, plural, less easily intelligible to everybody, more inscrutable to each and every member of the social science community, then so be it. (A good example of this is present-day writing by Maoris in English which is inscrutable unless one also digests and understands key Maori terms.) This would be an infinitely more interesting scenario – and more creative and productive – than the present system in which one homogenized way of thinking and doing, originating from and suitable for one small class of individuals in one or two societies, becomes the norm for everyone everywhere.

Transcending Eurocentrism:
Notes towards new frameworks and methodologies

a) For meaningful work towards a non-Eurocentric social science framework, a firm prior decision or commitment to intellectual de-linking from the existing theories and the corpus of Eurocentric social sciences is required at the level of each academic council or university. I think it is better not to teach at all than to teach Western ethnoscience as ‘mainstream’ science. Serious efforts must be made to discuss culture-rooted and culture-acceptable assumptions for research and methodology, methods that are in harmony with our cultural values, environment and all life. We must re-link critically with indigenous intellectual traditions.

b) Thinking in terms of an ‘alternative discourse’ could be misleading, as this could lead one to assume the continued existence of a ‘mainstream’ discourse. It would be far better to imagine instead a plural discourse – not derivative, not
alternative but plural. This must be insisted on as a matter of right. This would enable hundreds of social science flowers to bloom.

c) Serious reorientation needs to be made towards thinkers who are not from European or American academic or cultural institutions but come from our own regions instead. The sociology department of Singapore University has done some good work in this regard by discussing in its course work thinkers from India and the Philippines which can be emulated. The work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and other Maori researchers is also outstanding in this connection. Borrowing from the Western academic tradition should be gradually replaced with confident foraging from our own traditions.

d) As a practical exercise, encourage the writing of papers without using or citing Western sources or books. If that is not possible immediately, reduce the citation rate from Western scholars and enhance the citation rate from non-Western scholars.

e) Better still, encourage students to write papers without referring to endless sources. The present day academic world is incapable of writing without support of others: this is recognition that most academic knowledge is borrowed. No doubt presuppositionless philosophizing failed. However, citationless writing need not. Mahatma Gandhi wrote 90 volumes with hardly ever citing anyone. The best literature in the world – stories – never carries citations. The truth does not need crutches. If you cannot make out a case based on your own experience and knowledge, no amount of quoting will help.

f) Much clarity would also be available if we encourage a stricter use or labeling of social sciences. Use the words ‘European sociology’ when discussing sociological work from Europe, or American sociology, etc. This will bring balance and confirm the idea that European social sciences are
ethnoscience, on par with other ethnoscience. They may be
good for Europe but may be useless for us.
g) Conventional anthropology departments must be closed
down. If that cannot be done because too many people are
employed in them, their staff should be retrained to do
‘reverse anthropology’. We need a scholarly investigation into
the societies of Europe. Our ‘Europology’ must enable us to
deal with the almost pathological urge that drives the people
of that continent – and now America as well – to trudge to
every corner of the world, seeking to interfere in all human
activities and natural processes, ruining the landscape with
their managed nightmares.
h) Prevalent and still influential Euro-American positivist
methodologies must be critically reviewed and if required
thrown out the window. It is important to aim for the
university as a creative center of knowledge that will matter to
human beings and other forms of life and where the ecology
of the planet is overall respected. The university must be seen
instead as a center for equals to interact. This does not rule out
dissemination entirely, or the conservation of useful and valid
knowledge, but one will be conscious that the act of
dissemination will restrict creative approaches.
i) The idea of textbooks from ‘authority’ professors and
publishing houses needs to be given a severe drubbing.
Academic classes should create their own textbooks and
create their own body of knowledge about their own societies,
always critical, but using one’s own glasses or filters.
Generating our own textbooks would get us firmly out of the
circle of dependence on Western texts presently flooding the
market.
j) Methodologies for research must include dialogue and far
more diverse media than wholesale reliance only on
textbooks. Textbooks are a token of the degeneration of
knowledge. They are a peculiar contribution of the university
in the modern era. Reliance on them for knowledge is not to be placed on the same footing as reading texts like the Koran or the Mahabharata that have guided and inspired societies for centuries. In fact, these classics ought to be made basic texts for most disciplines and taken out of the sphere of mythology or religious texts as they discuss with great deal of competence all the major issues that fall within the domain of the social sciences.

k) Above all, exclude professional, Western social scientists from doing research in our societies until there is a negotiated balance achieved for doing parallel research on their societies. Resist some present proposals that argue for Western science being made more ‘inclusive’, that is, for more effort to include facts from the non-Western world into existing frameworks in which the West continues to predominate. This does not change anything since it leaves the superstructure intact. Mere tinkering with existing curricula here and there will enable us neither to get rid of Eurocentric influence nor bring the spirit of creative science to our academic institutions. De-linking from both Eurocentric social sciences as well as European university teaching models will at least guarantee the prospect of a new beginning in which the universities everywhere re-appropriate their predominant function of being centers for the creation and sharing of knowledge that serves the real life concerns of all the diverse peoples and societies of the world.
CHAPTER THREE

Islam, Science, and the West:
Changing Relationships in Knowledge and Power

Mohammad Hazim Shah

I begin with an interesting and rather lengthy quotation because it addresses an important issue and reflects a certain attitude perhaps typical of Western scholars, in their commentary on the subject of ‘Islam and the West’. Written shortly after the first Gulf War in which Muslim sensitivities vis-à-vis the West was re-awakened, these remarks acquired a fresh flavor in the aftermath of September 11, 2001:

The belligerence of the Islamic East cannot be explained only by this instinctive fear... We can hardly negate that the West constitutes a major threat to Islam... This threat comes, then, from the Western so to say profane civilization, even if in the heat of Islamic criticism of the 1980s the West was condemned for its tabsir, i.e. evangelization. We have been able to prove our profane attitudes not only by colonial aggression but lately also by conducting insane desert storm wars. This creates hatred, since such Western justice hardly ever will be understood by Islam.

The other factor in creating warlike attitudes towards the West comes from the consciousness of the great Muslim past: it only enhances this aggressiveness... Here, the

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attitude is well founded, the Muslims can really boast about their magnificent past. Unfortunately, this boasting leads to exaggeration, quite unnecessary to my mind, and a sort of civilizational totalitarianism is created which the West, and especially the Western scholar, would not accept.

Moreover, instead of rejecting this exaggeration and accepting the grain of truth found in this period of the past, we tend to reject everything indiscriminately, often with a sneer at the Muslim naivete. This creates even greater rage at the other side, and thus the wall dividing both worlds, is slowly growing bringing us to the brink of confrontation...

Now let me turn to the Western view of the Islamic civilization. Here again I would like to see two opposite approaches: one scholarly and another one popular, infested by fear of Muslim fundamentalism. The first one, scholarly, attempts to give as close analysis of Islam as possible, and, depending on research fashion this analysis might be maximally objective... or maximally subjective. Both are potential sources of danger.

The interaction between Islam and the West has had a long history, stretching back to the Middle Ages. The encounters took various forms, namely military battles which

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2. When we speak of ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’, who and what do we have in mind? It is assumed that they are distinct entities with definite forms of interactions. On the one hand, it could be argued that there is no such strict distinction. While I admit that boundaries between the two could be blurred, there exist differences marked enough to make them into two quite separate modes of existence or life-forms. Who we take as being representative of which camp, will determine our response to, and treatment of the subject. It seems that it is more accurate to say that different ‘archetypes’ co-exist simultaneously in any one culture, though different ones predominate at different times or places. However, from a contemporary viewpoint of the relationship between Islam and the West, the social, political, and cultural dimensions tend to get the upper hand, hence denying the possibility of seeking a cultural rapprochement through an approach which privileges scholarly dialogues.
determine political boundaries between the Islamic and Western worlds; the exchange in learning and knowledge between Islam, Greek learning, and medieval Christendom; and more recently through colonialism and imperial expansion. The relationship has rarely been on equal terms, with either side gaining the upper hand at different periods of history. And neither has the relationship between knowledge and power, especially military power, been such that the two are in step with each other within Islamic civilization itself. In other words, the dictum ‘Knowledge is Power’ does not seem to hold true throughout all periods of history.

The relationship between Islam and the West has been marked by both antagonism and mutual respect, tolerance and learning. The antagonisms can be seen in the various battles fought between Muslims and Christians, especially during the Crusades, which had an adverse effect on the Western perception of Islam, including the faith of Islam and its intellectual content. The image of Islam as the religion of the sword is still ingrained in the minds of many Westerners, so much so that Muslim learning and knowledge becomes suspect, and viewed as another instrument of conquest (of the mind?). The present-day Muslims on the other hand, being products of white colonial rule, could only recall their past glory with difficulty, through the medium of history. This is largely because, the forms of institutions which they see around them, and which define their present reality, is shaped by the West and left in their hands as colonial legacy. Thus, the contemporary Muslim, though he might live in a politically sovereign nation, free from Western colonial rule, could not as yet claim to be totally free in either material terms, i.e. economically, culturally, or intellectually. This is because his education too, is borrowed from the West. The Western knowledge tradition, accumulated over centuries beginning with the Greeks, and ironically interspersed with
vital contributions from Islamic culture from about the eights to the thirteenth centuries, was suddenly heaped upon the colonized Muslim world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, resulting in Muslims’ experiencing a lack of confidence in their own roots and cultural dynamism.

**The medieval roots of Western modernity**

To be sure, the term *Western* need not necessarily denote a monolithic entity, constant and uniform throughout history. The West itself has undergone major changes throughout its history so much so that the contemporary Western culture, characterized mainly by its secular modernity, contrasts sharply with its ‘religious’ medieval past. But be that as it may, there is no denying of the continuity between medieval science and the beginnings of modern science in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the process of dialogue, negotiation, compro-mise, and rationalization between the old and the new – the old being mainly inspired by Christianity and the new by the secular – was an ongoing affair in the history of Western thought, as evidenced in the Leibniz–Newton debates, efforts by Boyle to *Christianize* corpuscularism and ridding it of atheism and materialism, the efforts of Hegel to provide a philosophy of the spirit seen by some as ‘Protestantism by other means’, the philosophy of Heidegger whose idea of ‘Being’ closely resembles the idea of God, and more recently the efforts of apologetic historians who tried to restore some measure of respect and credibility to the old idea of ‘natural theology’ which was unpopular largely as a result of religion’s failure in its two important battles against science, namely the Galileo and Darwin affair.

This ongoing attempt by Christian inspired thinkers to salvage some measure of respectability to the Christian worldview in the wake of a universe that is becoming increasingly materialistic and secular both in its intellectual perspective and social practice, makes it impossible to discount totally the influence of the Christian perspective in the evolution of contemporary Western thought. In other words, the old opposition between Islam and the West still applies even in its previous forms, insofar as the present Western intellectual perspective and moral position did not completely abandon its Christian roots. To be sure, the contemporary relationship is more complex, since a large part of the old religious sting has been removed, making way for the more modern and rational scientific perspective which was largely a child of the Enlightenment. But it would be a mistake to see contemporary scientific-industrial Western culture as being purely Enlightenment in its origins and motivations, and ignoring the sort of thesis that sees the influence of religion in the rise of modern science.

The continuous or continued engagement of religion with science, carried out to be sure, not by the Church, cleric or clergy, but by a new breed of thinkers and philosophers sensitive to both the spirit of Christianity as well as to the rational intellect, as can be seen in Locke for instance, means that the West, despite suggestions of a break with its religious past, continues effectively to be informed by its Christian conscience, perhaps at a deeper level. The Western spirit that

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4. In this respect, even the political liberalism of someone like Isaiah Berlin has a close affinity with Christianity, albeit of a non-dogmatic kind. In any case, in principle one can find common grounds between the teachings of Christ and of Islam, although in historical reality and social practice they are often at odds. Even Muslim saints such as Al-Ghazali (who opposed the Trinity) and Ibn Arabi, were favorably disposed towards the teachings of Jesus whom they regarded as a prophet of God.
has evolved, is one which has gone through ‘a baptism of fire’ and thus able to morally, cognitively, and emotionally support a scientific-industrial culture and society. Even the protests and rumblings from within that society are manifestations of its Christian conscience and not, as is commonly thought, the product of a rebellion against Christian values and morality. Thus philosophical ‘movements’ such as Existentialism, Phenomenology, and even Post-modernism, could be legitimately counted as being within ‘the Christian fold’, and not as its antithesis. One needs only remind oneself of the incident in which Christ openly invites ‘those who have never sin, to cast the first stone’, to see the affinity between Christian values and morality, and contemporary Western moral and ethical thinking. Furthermore, Christ’s rejection of the establishment – represented by the Pharisees of his times – and his urgings to find the Truth from within oneself, and not to rely on external authority, fares well with such ‘post-modernist’ philosophies. In this regard, the Catholic Church and its official pronouncements cannot be taken as truly indicative of the Christian conscience, especially when we realize the political interests of the Church and the way Church authorities pursue those interests in the long history between Church and Empire in the past.5

In contrast, there was no sustained dialogue between religion and science within the Islamic world after about the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. Ibn Rushd, writing in the twelfth century, was perhaps the last Muslim to seriously engage in such a dialogue, and it is no surprise that Ibn Rushd, or Averroes as he was called in the West, exercised a greater influence in the West than he did in the Islamic world. What exactly were the reasons that brought about this state of

affairs is a matter for further research, or perhaps of conjecture. Some argued that the political disintegration of the Islamic world in the thirteenth century (or perhaps even earlier) affected political patronage of scholarship within the Islamic world, a thesis well worth considering, when one thinks of the flowering of learning and knowledge in the Islamic world under the Abbasids. Others pointed out the devastating criticisms made by Al-Ghazali on Greek science and philosophy, with the resulting effect that Greek knowledge became suspect and marginalized by the religious orthodoxy, nipping in the bud any hope of the further renaissance of Greek science and learning through the Muslim world, even though it did enjoy a period of about four centuries of growth in the Muslim world. But even though the growth of knowledge declined in the Muslim world, to be picked up again by the West in the thirteenth century onwards, this did not mean a decline of Muslim political power altogether. Even though there was a decline or rather a stagnation in learning in the Muslim world, the impulse for conquests and military power went unabated especially with the Ottomans in Turkey and the Moghuls in India. Similarly architectural splendor continued to manifest itself in these lands, which showed the extent to which learning has become applied, and that the Islamic sense of values favors the utilitarian aspect of knowledge, perhaps at the expense of theoretical speculation.

But the Western investment in useless knowledge, i.e. theoretical and with no foreseeable practical application, began to pay dividends several centuries later, beginning with the scientific revolution which saw the pragmatic aspect of knowledge claims, especially in the use of experimental methods, and the ensuing industrial revolution of the eighteenth century which saw the entry of science in the process of economic production through the marriage of
science, engineering and technology. By the seventeenth century onwards, the state of knowledge was such that the West was far advanced to the point that it was impossible for the Muslims to regain both the lead in knowledge as well as the power that now ensues from it. Military superiority is now to be determined along completely different lines, and the age of Western colonialism and imperialism had begun. Concomitant with their new power in ‘hardware’, is a mode of reasoning and social organization that can only be characterized as ‘rationality’ or ‘rationalization’. This mode of approach is later to become more and more prominent, to the point where nineteenth century European scholars such as Durkheim and Weber took this as the central focus of their social analyses. What underlies this approach is the reliance on the ability of the human mind to lead him to safety, power and control. Humanity, by drawing on the precious resources of the so-called ‘mind’, need not look back over his shoulders for divine approval or sanction, in adopting his course of action. Of course, here too all sorts of ‘rationalization’ occur, so as to make the new approach morally acceptable to Christian Europe.

Knowledge relationships in the Middle Ages

Europe went through the period of the so-called ‘Dark Ages’ from about the fifth to the tenth century A.D., with the collapse of the Roman empire. With the coming of the religion of Islam that darkness was partially extinguished through the Muslim recovery of Greek knowledge beginning from about the eighth century, till about the twelfth century. The development of knowledge occurred in the Islamic world in both its eastern half, centered in Baghdad under the Abbasids, as well as in its Western half under the Ummayyads who left the eastern half of the Islamic world upon defeat by
the Abbasids. Under the Abbasids, there was an institutionalized form of transmission of Greek learning, as evidenced, for example, in the setting up of the Bayt-ul-Hikma (House of Wisdom), in which the work of translating Greek knowledge into Arabic was systematically done. The task of retranslating from Arabic to Latin was later carried out in Spain by Christian scholars such as Gerard of Cremona, upon the retreat of the Muslims and the reconquest of Spain by the Christians. The achievement in knowledge by the Muslims during this period was twofold: one, the ‘institutionalization’ of Greek learning into the Islamic world, which has the effect of keeping alive the sciences and the philosophy of the Greeks which proved to be vital towards the revival of the West later on, and two, its further development and elaboration by Muslim thinkers and scientists such as Ibn al-Haytham in optics, Al-Khwarizmi in algebra, Ibn Sina in medicine, Ibn Shatir in astronomy, Al-Razi in chemistry, and Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd in philosophy. Whether such knowledge is cordially accepted as part of mainstream Islamic learning or whether it sits uncomfortably in the margins of the Islamic mind, has been a matter of debate and contention among historians of Islamic history. For instance, David Lindberg

6. There was a dynamic flow of knowledge between Islam and the West in the Middle Ages. There occurred both institutional and individual modes of transmission. It was a two-way traffic. Despite the Crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, interactive learning between religious groups was possible. However, it is interesting to ask whether the Christian pursuit of Muslim knowledge is linked to political motives, in that the acquisition of knowledge might be seen as instrumental to one’s cultural ascendency, which would finally tip the balance of power (military inclusive) in the West’s favor? In other words, was scholarship then, a handmaiden of imperialism? The final defeat of the Muslims in Spain in the hands of the armies of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in 1492, not only ended such episodes of learning, but provided some grounds to the view of the political motivation of knowledge acquisition.
What, then was the fate of the foreign sciences in Islam? No simple answer, applicable to all times and places, is possible. Indeed the historical situation was so complex that historians who specialize on Islam cannot agree on how to characterize it. Two quite different interpretations are currently in circulation. According to one of them, the foreign sciences never ceased to be viewed by the great majority of Muslims as useless, alien, and perhaps dangerous... The undeniably great achievements of Islamic scientists and natural philosophers, therefore must have emanated from isolated enclaves of scholars protected from the pressures of orthodoxy (as at a royal court during a period of unusual tolerance) or willing, for reasons only known to themselves, to swim against the cultural stream. This has been called the “marginality thesis”, because of its claim that science in Islam was never more than a marginal pursuit.

The alternative theory views the Islamic encounter with Greek learning in a quite different light. While acknowledging that suspicion and hostility existed, this theory maintains that on the whole Greek science and natural philosophy enjoyed a reasonably hospitable reception in Islam. After all, Islam did not reject the fruits of foreign learning, but despite conservative opposition, undertook a remarkable program of recovery and cultivation. Moreover, one can point to many examples of the integration of Greek disciplines into traditional learning and Islamic culture more generally... According to this interpretation, Islam successfully appropriated large portions of foreign learning, despite opposition; let us call this the “appropriation thesis”... the foreign sciences did not conquer the traditional disciplines, but made peace with them by agreeing to serve as their handmaidens.
The argument from history

Muslims have often argued for the compatibility of science and technology with the Islamic faith and culture by pointing to the glorious achievements of the Muslims in science, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. Examples abound and a casual survey would reveal to us names such as Ibn Al-Haytham (physics), Al-Khwarizmi (mathematics), Ibn Shatir (astronomy), Ibn Sina (medicine), Al-Razi (chemistry) and Ibn Rushd (philosophy). In fact the Islamic world took the lead in those fields of learning until about the fourteenth century. Had Islam been incompatible with the study of the natural sciences, it is often argued, then the scientific leadership of the Islamic world which lasted for about five centuries in the medieval period, would not have been possible. What are we to make out of this? Can this historical argument be validly used in order to argue for a similar compatibility between Islam and modern science and technology? Unfortunately, the inference from the success of medieval science in the Islamic world to a similar success in the modern world cannot be easily made. Two problems stand out, which I will briefly discuss here. The first deals with the status of Greek scientific knowledge in medieval Islam. The second deals with differences in the character of medieval science as compared to modern science.

The status of Greek knowledge or *ilm awwal* as it was known in Arabic, has been somewhat problematic in Islamic civilization. Though some names stand out as beacons of science and knowledge amongst some contemporary Muslims today, their status then were not assured and dependent on the inclination of the political leadership. The tolerance and patronage accorded to scholars such as Al-Kindi for instance, was partly due to the Mutazilite caliphs such as Al-Ma’mun.
When the orthodox caliph Al-Mutawakkil rose to power, Al-Kindi was punished for what was considered as heretical philosophical views. According to scholars of Islam who espoused the ‘marginality thesis’, the status of Greek knowledge was not assured in the Islamic mainstream.

The significant differences in the nature and character of medieval science as compared to Western science, also makes irrelevant the analogy between past glory and present success with regard to science in the contemporary Muslim world. The lack of integration between science and technology in the medieval period and the relative insignificance of technology for scientific development in the Middle Ages, makes modern science a different enterprise from its medieval past, despite similarities in its intellectual structure. Medieval science was yet to witness the integration between natural philosophy, mathematics, and the experimental method, which gave rise to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century.

Muslims seeking to recover their previous scientific glory in their attempt to cope with modernity and Western civilization cannot therefore seek to simply emulate its medieval past, without coming to terms with contemporary realities in all its complexities. The relationship between science both as a belief system, as a form of knowledge, and as a source of technology, together with its relationship to technology, society and culture, must be well understood before we can successfully embark on a mission of revitalizing the Muslim ummah using the contemporary resources of modern science and technology. Unfortunately, current attempts towards the ‘Islamization of Scientific Knowledge’, often retreat into the medieval past as its source of paradigm, and hence fail to come to terms with contemporary realities. The attempt to relate Islam both as a

7. See Leif Stenberg, The Islamization of science: Four Muslim positions
doctrine and as a way of life, to contemporary society, science, technology and culture, must avail itself of the intellectual resources provided not only by the Islamic world, but also by the non-Islamic, especially the Western world, in order to secure any measure of success for itself. The Muslims did it in their confrontation with Greek knowledge in the past. There is no reason why they cannot achieve a similar feat at present, even with the changing circumstances.

Recent events however, especially September 11, 2001 and its aftermath – Afghanistan and Iraq – have complicated this issue further. The now problematic relationship between the Islamic world and the West needs to be addressed, if we are to hold any sanguine prospects for either Islam or the West. In fact, this ‘fear’ of the West regarding non-Western domination of the West has been echoed long before September 11. Here I quote two examples, both from the Western academic establishment. Even as early as the 1950s, C. P. Snow has foreshadowed and articulated such a fear:

I do know this! That, if we don't do it, the communist countries will in time. They will do it at great cost to themselves and others, but they will do it. If that is how it turns out, we shall have failed, both practically and morally. At best, the West will have become an enclave in a different world – and this country will be the enclave of an enclave. Are we resigning ourselves to that? History is merciless to failure. In any case, if that happens, we shall not be writing the history.

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developing and Islamic modernity, Lund, Sweden: Lund University, 1996, and Bassam Tibi, Culture and knowledge: The politics of Islamization of knowledge as a postmodern project? The fundamentalist claim to de-Westernization, Theory, Culture and Society, 12, 1–24, 1995.
Meanwhile, there are steps to be taken which aren't outside the powers of reflective people. Education isn't the total solution to this problem: but without education the West can't even begin to cope. All the arrows point to the same way. Closing the gap between our cultures is a necessity in the most abstract intellectual sense, as well as in the most practical. When these two senses [the sciences and the arts] have grown apart, then no society is going to be able to think with wisdom. For the sake of the intellectual life, for the sake of this country's special danger, for the sake of the Western society living precariously rich among the poor, for the sake of the poor, for the sake of the poor who needn't be poor if there is intelligence in the world, it is the obligatory for us and the Americans and the whole West to look at pure education with fresh eyes...

Contrary to popular representation of Snow’s *The Two Cultures*, which is usually interpreted as a plea for bridging the gap between the Arts and Sciences, Snow has a larger aim in view. His fear is that the West might no longer be able to retain its scientific and technological supremacy because of the growing miscommunication between its ‘technocrats’ and its ‘literati’. His plea for bridging the gap between ‘the two cultures’ is really a panic cry of a Western intellectual. A similar sentiment was expressed by Gillespie in his otherwise sober book on the history of scientific ideas:

In its early days, science was distinct from technology, springing rather from thought and philosophy than from craftsmanship. Nowadays, however, and indeed for the last century and more, science has merged ever more intimately with technology, so arming it with power, so enhancing its capacities, that no words, nor any fears or dreams, may exaggerate what depends upon the employment... The hard trial will begin when the instruments of power created by the West come fully into the hands of men not of the West, formed in cultures and religions which leave them quite devoid of the Western
sense of some ultimate responsibility to man in history. That secular legacy of Christianity still restrains our world in some slight measure, however self-righteous it may have become on the one side, and however vestigial on the other. Men of other traditions can and do appropriate our science and technology, but not our history or values. And what will the day hold when China wields the bomb? And Egypt?¹⁰

Like Snow, Gillespie was articulating the fear of the Western intellectual towards non-Western domination of the West, through the mastery of science and technology. Should this fear dominate the thinking of the West today, then there is every likelihood that we will be witnessing a new kind of ‘cold war’ in an otherwise ‘Post Cold War’ era. Unfortunately, the advances in science and technology have not been paralleled by similar advances in the humanities, cultural, and international relations. While the Muslims need to be re-awakened to contemporary realities and exhorted towards the acquisition of modern science and technology, the West needs to be reassured that such acquisitions will not be to their detriment. For the West, measures such as ‘nuclear arms control’ over countries such as North Korea and Iran, will only be the tip of the iceberg. We can expect more stringent controls over technology transfer in the decades to come. Perhaps what both Islam and the West need is a genuine understanding of their past legacies and how they are to be played out within the contemporary setting. Here the humanities, which include the history and philosophy of science, religious philosophy, cultural studies, and anthropology, will indeed have an important role to play.

Post-sixteenth century developments

Though Islamic civilization led the rest of the world in science and technology for about seven centuries beginning from the ninth century A.D., by the sixteenth century, Europe was clearly ahead of the Islamic world in science and technology. The last vestiges of development in the Islamic world occurred during the Mongol period of Islamic rule in Central Asia (especially in astronomy), in India under the Muslim emperors or the Mughals, in Iran under the Safavids, and in Ottoman Turkey. Turkey was perhaps the first of the Muslim polities to realize the superiority of the West in science and technology, especially military technology, and this awareness led its leaders to carry out a frantic effort towards reform aimed at reducing whatever deficit Turkey had in comparison to Europe. But it was a case of ‘too little, too late’, and that the changes were at best ‘cosmetic’ and not deep-rooted. Turkey did not undergo a scientific revolution, or an industrial revolution, unlike Europe, in which the changes which occurred in science, together with changes in the economic and cultural spheres, can be seen as organic and interrelated.

While science and technology stagnated and declined in the Islamic world after the sixteenth century, Europe on the other hand underwent a series of revivals beginning from the Renaissance of the sixteenth century, the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, the (First) Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, and a Second Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. An important development in the West in the seventeenth century was the Scientific Revolution which arose as a result of the integration between natural philosophy, mathematics, and the experimental method. This prepared the ground for the further integration and application
of science to technology. Although the First Industrial Revolution did not yet see the direct contribution of science to technology – with the invention of the steam engine being due to Watt’s technical ingenuity and innovation rather than an application of thermodynamic principles – but by the Second Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, scientific knowledge provided the foundation on which some of the industries were built, for example the telecommunication and power industries that were dependent on developments in physics, especially in electricity and electromagnetism. Thus by the twentieth century we find science directly contributing to technological and economic growth through R&D.

By the second half of the twentieth century, we find economists beginning to speak of technological innovation through scientific research and development as a new factor of production. With the growth of the ICT industry in the second half of the twentieth century, we have now moved on to what has been described as the ‘post-industrial society’. All these developments have led to what is now known as ‘the K-Economy’ in which the role of technological innovation through R&D becomes pivotal in the economy. Such developments which occurred in the West from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, which saw the integration of science, technology and the economy, did not occur in the Islamic world since the decline of science and technology in the sixteenth century, and the subjugation of Muslim lands by colonial powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But even if the Muslims had not been subjected to colonial rule, it is doubtful if science and technology were to progress in the Islamic world since its stagnation and decline preceded colonization by the West. In fact the reverse could be argued; that Muslim weakness in knowledge, science, technology, economy and military power, made them vulnerable to colonization by the West. Although Islamic science flourished
in the Middle Ages, its character was different from post-
seventeenth century science. It is doubtful if continuing
according to its own trajectory, and without a revolutionary
change in the nature, character, and contextual practice of
science, Islamic science could have led to integration with
technology and the economy. In fact, had such an integration
occurred, it is questionable to what extent it would remain
Islamic, since Islamic natural philosophy, being tied to
Islamic cosmology and theology, retains an enchanted and
religious view of the world, which would preclude it from
being subjected to empirical testing or experimental
verification. Islamic science it seems, retains its enchanted
view of the world, spurned materialism and mechanism, and
in the process remains essentially separate from technology.

In Europe, the changes that occurred were holistic and
organic in nature. Not only did changes occur in the fields of
science and technology, but also in other spheres such as
politics, government, and education. In politics and
government, we find the French Revolution of 1789, and the
American Declaration of Independence of 1776, after which
the American system of government modeled itself on the
French Republic. As mentioned earlier, the series of changes
that occurred in Europe was organic and changes in thought,
politics, culture, economics, science, and technology moved
in tandem and in synergy with one another. This phenomenon
has sometimes been studied under the rubric of modernization
and rationalization by sociologists such as Max Weber. The
changes were to revolutionize Europe and it created Western
powers such as Britain, France, Holland, and Germany, which
went on an imperialistic venture outside Europe to inaugurate
the ‘Age of Empire/Imperialism’. The Islamic world, which
spanned not only the Middle East, but also North Africa and
parts of Asia, fell victim to European imperialism. Western
military superiority, by this time, was clearly based on their
superiority in science and technology. As Eric Hobsbawm observed:

Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 had pitted against each other French and Mamelouk armies with comparable equipment. The colonial conquests of European forces had been achieved not by miraculous weaponry, but by great aggressiveness, ruthlessness and, above all, disciplined organization. Yet the industrial revolution, which penetrated warfare in the middle decades of the century… tilted the balance even further in favour of the ‘advanced’ world by means of high explosives, machine guns and steam transport.  

Thus the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the tide swinging in favor of the West, when Muslim lands were conquered and colonized by European powers. The utilization of science and scientists for war purposes continued into the twentieth century, in which the First World War was described as ‘The Chemists’ War’, and the Second World War as ‘The Physicists’ War’, because of the deployment of scientists (chemists and physicists) by the State in the two world wars.  

The West not only ruled politically, but installed their political, economic, legal and educational institutions in the lands they ruled, and virtually wiped out or marginalize the previous indigenous systems, including the Islamic. Thus by the time we reach the second half of the twentieth century, when the tide of colonialism was once again reversed and the world entered into a post-colonial phase when countries were liberated one by one from their colonial masters, the imprint had been so deep that the post-colonial states (now defined in terms of colonialism, and not independently) could only hope

to preserve their sovereignty by continuing the colonial legacy, which seemingly promises power, as opposed to a return to a pre-colonial phase. Science and technology, I submit, now becomes part of the colonial legacy, and no longer a continuation from where the Muslims had left in the sixteenth century. The newly liberated Muslim polities (including ones like Pakistan), now become satellites of the industrial West.

With the fall of socialism since the end of the Cold War, the enmity or rivalry between Islam and the West once again came to the fore. But now the balance of power is tipped heavily in favor of the West, with its superiority in science, technology, and the economy giving weight to its technological and military superiority. This new alignment did not escape the attention of the American scholar, Samuel Huntington, who however, mistakenly attributed the rivalry in terms of the West versus the Islamic-Confucian alliance 13, when what was involved was merely an exchange in military technology between Iran and North Korea, and not an ideological alliance between Islam and Confucianism. But by now, it is no longer accurate to depict the rivalry in terms of ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’, for both had undergone transformations, which would nullify the earlier distinctions and identities. The West has been modernized and secularized while the Islamic world had seen the dissolution of the Caliphate long ago, and that it is not a monolithic entity.

The impact of Western colonialism on the Muslims was not only felt at the institutional or physical level, but also at the intellectual or epistemological level. This elicited various

13. In his own words, “A Confucian-Islamic connection has emerged to challenge Western interests, values and power” (Samuel Huntington, A clash of civilizations? Foreign Affairs, 72(3), 22–49, 1993). Today we know that there is no such connection. Also, to describe China and North Korea as culturally ‘Confucian’ is itself a misnomer if not ‘confusion’.
responses to the modernity brought by the West, as can be seen in the writings of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) in India, Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani (1838–1897), and Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) in Pakistan. Confronted by the seemingly superior scientific knowledge brought about by the Western powers, they took it upon themselves to provide an Islamic response to Western science. Ahmad Khan for example, tried to accommodate modern science within the Islamic frame-work, while Al-Afghani in his reply to Ernest Renan’s critical remarks about science and Islam, argued that there is no inherent incompatibility between science and Islam. By then, Muslim intellectuals such as Ahmad Khan, Al-Afghani, and Iqbal were aware that an Islamic response has to be given to the science which has evolved into a central pillar of modern Western thought and culture. That the West had to transform itself in order to accommodate and facilitate the development of science in its own society and culture, was something that it had undergone since the seventeenth century, highlighted by the conflict between Galileo and the Roman Catholic Church. Islam, which had not experienced such convulsions and epistemic ruptures implicit in such cultural encounters, now has to face what the West had earlier experienced, but now under conditions of colonization.

Concluding remarks

Although the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had its critics, and despite critiques of science and modernity by philosophers such as Nietzsche in the nineteenth century, and Husserl in the twentieth century, mainstream Western thought was largely in favor of science and modernity. Thus the dominant philosophy of science in the first half of the twentieth century was that of Logical Positivism or Logical Empiricism, followed later by Popper’s
philosophy of science. Despite the differences between Popper and the Logical Positivists, they both upheld the Enlightenment ideal of science and modernity. This situation changed however, with the onslaught of critiques of science by philosophers of science such as Kuhn and Feyerabend in the 1970s. More generally, critics of science have largely been associated with the ‘postmodernists’. This situation has been described as ‘the science wars’, in which the position set up was between those who are critical of science and modernity, and those bent on defending the old virtues and positive image of science. As a result of this crisis, science no longer enjoys its previous privileged status epistemologically, and as a cultural bearer of modernity. Its ‘tattered image’ has left the modern West with what might be described as a ‘legitimation crisis’. In fact some even saw the whole exercise of trying to give a philosophical defense of science as ‘the project of legitimation’. Although the intellectual crisis on science in the West can be said to be safely contained with the confines of the academic and intellectual circles, with no serious spillover in the education or industrial system, such continued debates in the intellectual and cultural realms nevertheless have the potential of eventually spilling over to other spheres of Western society, resulting in an erosion of its will towards science and modernity. So far we have not witnessed a change in the science and technology policy of Western countries as a result of its ‘softening’ towards the image of science.

What about the situation in the East, or more specifically, in the Islamic world? Like its Western counterpart, there is no consensus or a monolithic position on science amongst Muslim intellectuals. The positions adopted range from the metaphysical-mystical, pragmatic but critical of science, and pro-science, to official government support for science and technology.17 As far as most governments in Muslim countries are concerned, the official position is to support the development of science and technology for national development. On the other hand, amongst Muslim intellectuals, we find critical voices against what is perceived as not only ‘modern’ but also ‘Western’ science, and hence the need to ‘Islamize science’, as found in the ‘Islamization of Knowledge/Science’ movement. While critiques of science in the West are based on secular humanist thought and philosophies, in the Islamic world critiques of science are often based on Islamic thought, however one might interpret them. Thus, there cannot be an ideological alliance between the Islamists and the postmodernists, in their critique of science18. However, the critical stance taken by both towards science, and the epistemology of science, opens the doors for rapprochement between Western and Muslim intellectuals. Also, the ambivalence towards science can be found in both West and East, and that the dichotomy or binary ‘West-Rational/East-Mystical or non-rational’ is a false dichotomy which hides subtle differences and similarities across the so-called Divide.

Although it is still rather early at this stage to speculate on the possible repercussions of such critical stance taken by intellectuals in both the East and the West on science,

especially in terms of the impact on science and technology policy, it nevertheless signals a loosening of the previously tight epistemological grip which the previous modernist image of science had on the contemporary globalized world. To some, ‘scientific epistemology’ is identified with ‘Western imperialism’ insofar as the West’s physical power is presumed to have been based on its scientific mode of cognition embodied in modern science and technology. On the other hand, critics of science such as Feyerabend, have invoked non-modernist and non-Western epistemologies in their critique of science (e. g. the success of alternative medicine), thus undermining the presumed unique connection existing between scientific success and the scientific method/epistemology. In Feyerabend’s critique of science for example, he explicitly pointed out to the connection between politics and epistemology in science, and argued for an epistemological pluralism which would in fact be more faithful to the spirit of political liberalism. ¹⁹ However, understandably most governments in Muslim countries seek to acquire and develop modern science and technology for their own nationalistic purposes, and in this process downplay the so-called ‘imperialist epistemology’ dimension, seeking instead to emphasize the compatibility between Islam and science.

My own view is that the relationship should not only be conducted at the official level of national policy on science and technology, where the dominant approach is to go for the most advanced science and technology and to play the ‘catching up’ game in international economic and technological competition. The negotiation should be conducted at the intellectual and cultural level too, where a broader understanding of science involving so-called

‘critiques’ of science, should be tolerated and understood. Critiques of science on both sides of the divide could bring about a sort of ‘détente’ and rapprochement between cultures; one which is not dominated by imperialist modernist ideologies, but which is more humane in character. It would be human-centered rather than ‘truth’ or ‘nature-centered’, and hence would truly fulfill the ideal of science for humanity. The task therefore is to develop an intellectual and philosophical perspective on science which does not reject the objectivity, rationality, and universality of scientific knowledge – virtues associated with the modernist ideology of science, admittedly – but at the same time acknowledges the epistemological validity of non-scientific knowledge and cultures, or of indigenous sciences with their own epistemologies. We can draw on the insights from contemporary discourses in the history and philosophy of science, and also by looking at the rich scientific traditions found in Islamic, Chinese and Indian civilizations, among others in developing such a perspective. Whatever the case might be, we cannot persist in the old way of looking at science as objective, rational and true knowledge developed by the progressive West, and compelled to be adopted by the East for their own survival. The history of humanity has been a history of intellectual and material exchanges and borrowings across cultures and civilizations, not a perpetual imperialist domination of one culture over the rest.

While there exist similarities and parallelisms between Western and Islamic critiques of science, there also exists an international competition in the political economy of science and technology. Despite what the cultural critics of science and technology on both sides of the divide has to say about

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science and technology, the political, economic and technological elites of nation-states – who are in the mainstream of society – pursue an aggressive policy of scientific and technological advancement and innovation, which is seen as instrumental for economic growth in a highly competitive world where international economic competition is shaped by R&D, commercialization and innovation. Thus, while on the one hand, the cultural critics of science and technology, who might be portrayed as the ‘doves’ in this case, argue for a ‘humane’ (in the case of the West) or a ‘religious’ (in the case of the Islamic world) approach towards science and technology, those in official policy circles are bent on utilizing science and technology for national power, and can be considered as the ‘hawks’. In terms of scientific, technological and economic power, the balance is very much in favor of the developed West. Statistics on economic growth or on science and technology indicators clearly show the dismal performance of most Organization of Islamic Conference countries in relation to the developed West. Thus, underdeveloped countries, when measured and evaluated in terms of such ‘universal’ indicators, begin to play the ‘catching up’ game so as to be at par with the developed West, if not better. Those who are keen to catch up with the West know the obstacles that they have to face in what is essentially the ‘political economy of science and technology’, where the key word is ‘power’ rather than ‘knowledge’. The Mertonian norms do not seem to operate at the international level.

Given the reality of both the concern for national security and sovereignty and the reality of international competition, and the concern for the socio-cultural implications of science by cultural critics, there will remain this odd duality in the approach taken towards modern science and technology. This duality however, exists because of the existence of the two
different groups in society. Now, going back to my earlier remarks about cultural and social rapprochement through science and technology, I think more attention has to be paid to the second group, because they act as a counter-balance to the aggressive approach by the ruling groups. However, as cultural critics, they lack legitimacy and power in the governance of society, and hence incapable of fulfilling their potential function as ‘peacemakers’. Their only source of power, as it seems to be, lies in the extent to which they could influence public opinion. But as intellectuals, they are handicapped in not being able to have broader mass appeal, unlike politicians. But although the cultural critics do not inform policy directly, they do have a role in shaping the minds of society, especially the young. It is in such influence that their contribution can leave its mark. But this is all in the long term – through its influence on legitimation, just as how environmentalists who were considered ‘idealistic’ at one stage, is now seen as having an impact on policy through the currency of ‘sustainable development’. But it all began as an ideal, which then served the purpose of legitimation. Maybe someday, our science and technology policy, too, will be influenced by such ‘soft’ considerations – and pushed by something like ‘climate change’, ‘global warming’ or other disasters – whether man-made or man-induced. But until then, we have to cope with this duality the best we could, and hopefully see that the aggressive pursuit of science and technology, whose pinnacle is epitomized by the arms race, is a futile policy after all, and competition has to be replaced by co-operation for our long-term survival.
PART II

QUESTIONING ACADEMIC IMPERIALISM
CHAPTER FOUR

Imperialism in Education:
Observations on Curriculum, Institutional
Structure, and the Use of Textbooks

Yusef J. Progler

Those seeking an education in schools and universities outside the Euro-American zone often find themselves in a double bind. On the one hand, social norms and values proceed from a notion that the only path to happiness and success is through getting an education. On the other hand, such an education invariably involves attending an institution within which the tacit assumption is that the only forms of knowledge with any real value are those developed in the Euro-American academic system. To make matters worse, despite the social norms linking schooling with economic prosperity, there are often few opportunities upon graduation for gainful, meaningful or satisfying employment, except for a select few students. Education has become more of a long-term hope or promise, relying on a great act of faith on the part of those who are consigned to years of institutionalized learning. Beside the more or less inevitable disappointment at the outcome of this process, in which only a fraction of those who seek an education can reap the promised rewards, all students are subjected to a form of voluntary indoctrination, since most of what passes as an education today is wrapped up with paying allegiance to the Western way of understanding the world, as well as to the dictates of the state and
market in whatever locale one is seeking that type of education, which are also often informed or heavily influenced by the West. These factors suggest that while older forms of direct colonialism and imperialism may have retreated, indirect imperialism (ironically adopted by the colonized) has become increasingly pervasive.

This facet of academic imperialism can be illustrated by looking at the curricular content of a typical contemporary university education, where for the most part the primary form of knowledge being offered is Euro-American in both form and content. A case in point is the study of Education itself, which is useful to examine for two reasons. It has an impact on those pursuing this degree in universities, many of whom become school teachers or educational administrators, and who will then in turn have an impact on the students and communities within which they will work following their graduation. In other words, an examination of degree programs in the field of Education tells us something useful about the norms and values of primary and secondary schooling, while also suggesting how academic imperialism extends its influence downward from tertiary or higher education.

Students pursuing a degree program in Education often begin with foundation courses that involve reading from the Greek classics on Platonic idealism, Aristotelian dialectics, and the Socratic Method. This might be seasoned with a few references to local sources, such as selected classical Indian or Islamic works on the philosophy of knowledge\(^1\), but these are primarily of historical or nationalist interest and do not really infuse the curriculum, which remains for the most part West

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directed. After planting these Eurocentric roots, most courses of study will leap forward past the rule of the Church, the ‘Dark Ages’ and the European Renaissance, and resume with readings from Rousseau and other founders of Western Humanism. The usual eighteenth and nineteenth century works will occupy a significant part of the curriculum, including Pestalozzi’s notion of the child, Froebel’s kindergarten, the British Lancaster method, and the American common school movement.² Twentieth century readings are very often shaped and guided by the political preferences of the particular entities that are offering the schooling, due to educational philosophy having become increasingly embroiled with state politics. So, for example, Dewey’s notion of ‘democracy and education’ would not be welcome in places where the state is hostile toward democratic decision making, nor would Freire’s ideas about ‘critical consciousness’ be promoted where state power seeks blind obedience from its citizenry. Meanwhile, the political economy of globalization has added several other demands to curricular discussions with increasing emphasis on the skills deemed needed for maintaining a competitive edge in the global economy. Beyond the details and local variations, it remains important to keep in mind that the roots of modern schooling and universities in the Third World were planted with European imperialism and colonization, and that despite various forms of national liberation, the curricular norms from the West remain for the most part uncontested. Even reforms are often seen through the prism of modernist re-workings of Western theories, many of which have now become canonical.

As our hypothetical students get grounded in the foundations of Education, many will move on to studies in Child Psychology, another core course for Education majors, but with some overlap for first year Psychology majors. Both will often focus heavily on the work of Sigmund Freud\(^3\), followed by readings from Jung and Adler. After further surveying the other founding fathers, Psychology majors will often dwell at length on the work of Jean Piaget, followed by a rigorous course of study in behaviorist and cognitivist theories with readings from Skinner and Benjamin Bloom. A higher university degree in Education will likely progress along the same trajectory, painstakingly learning selected theories of education as developed in the West. Graduates from such programs teach, often as servants of various ministries of education, what they have learned to their own students, and the cycle of colonization by education continues unabated. Ironically, the degree in Education is one of the few that often guarantees a job upon graduation, but one cannot help observing that this is further evidence of its imperialist roots, in that colonization often proceeded through offering schooling to the colonized for such jobs.\(^4\)

Professors working in non-Euro-American universities are often more valued if their degrees are from Western universities, and many will reproduce that narrow vision in their own teaching back at home. Remaining with our case study on Education, such professors will no doubt lecture on Dewey, Kohlberg or Vygotsky (as the situation may permit), all to some degree or at some point faddish in the West, as well as sampling from the buffet of technocratic knowledge

on notions of effective teaching, various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication, instructional technologies and classroom management, large and small group and individual work, teaching methods and techniques, objectives and planning, simulations, role playing, problem solving, testing and assessment, performance and portfolio based assessment, professional growth, reflective teaching, and action research – in short, the whole gamut of what is taught as Education in a Non-Western context has emanated from the West. These topics would typically be spread out over an entire course of study on the foundations, philosophy and methods of education, perhaps with more depth and extra assigned readings but never veering very far from the source. The gist would be the same: contemporary educational theories treat most problems as either technical or personal, borrowing from psychology, especially Skinner, Piaget and Freud, in a scheme to objectify students in ways similar to how Western medicine treats patients.

Where the behavioral and clinical approach has fallen out of favor, other recent modern educational thinking has created a host of notions about human development drawn from humanistic philosophy. While this is often offered with honesty and good intentions as an antidote to the technocratic norms, many contradictions emerge, such as lecturing about ‘critical thinking’ without encouraging or practicing it, or emphasizing ‘constructivist methods’ or ‘cooperative learning’ in a strictly didactic format. It seems that if professors of Education want to be taken seriously with all of these theories, some of which may be meaningful and useful, they ought to at least use them in practice in their own seminars and workshops. However, a more severe omission from such

standardized presentations is that they lack any social or cultural awareness. There seems to be a general belief that theories are not born of any particular social setting and are applicable within any setting, or that the ‘human sciences,’ including social sciences like economics or sociology, and ‘hard sciences’, such as biology and physics, are neutral, universal, and value free, even though work has suggested that these views are no longer tenable.5

In making an attempt to comprehend how academic imperialism in education might be evident in the day-to-day procedures of schools and universities, one consistent theme that will likely emerge is the growing realization that schooling is a form of (implicit or explicit) socialization. One of the fundamental attributes of this socialization is in regard to the meaning, role and purpose of education. In the West, and in America particularly, there is a broad definition of education, especially that which is undertaken in formal and institutional settings. Contemporary American education is rooted in Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, and scientific-humanist norms. Originally founded to educate Protestant ministers and the ruling elite of America during the colonial era, Harvard, Princeton and Yale soon emerged as the epitome institutions of a modern liberal education, the norms of which are embedded to this day from kindergarten to advanced graduate study. To be considered ‘educated’ in such a system, one is assumed to have taken an array of courses in the humanities, arts and sciences. However, there has also been a tension between academic and vocational education. Partly as a result of social stratification, vocational schools proliferated during the twentieth century. Their impact is evident when,

for example, secondary schools and colleges track students into vocational courses with various professional certificates, as is general practice in many European educational systems.\(^7\)

In America, the tracking is not so rigid, but the tensions are no less acute. Some American schools expand even beyond the liberal and vocational norms, offering instruction in athletics or in something as basic as learning to drive a car. Oddly, and despite its roots in the Protestant mission, much of American schooling is secular on the surface, although the question of it imparting a sort of ‘civil religion’ can be raised.

The overarching system of theory and practice evident in modern schooling was further developed to serve colonization, and continues to embody many of its contradictions and assumptions. No matter how educators reform them, in the end the theories of education are Western theories that rely on Eurocentric assumptions about human nature and how the world works. But before this corpus coalesced at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, what guided teaching and learning in the West? More significantly, how did non-Western peoples and societies engage in teaching and learning before Western norms became universal norms? Or, more fundamentally, what does it mean to be ‘educated’ outside the norms of the modern Western institutionalized system? It seems prudent, if not necessary, that formerly colonized peoples step back and take some time to evaluate their own training and education – which includes careful assessment of their community needs and aspirations – before further importing an educational system from the West. At best, introducing the Western system was like laying a thick

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socio-cultural membrane over indigenous society and norms, creating a sort of cultural schizophrenia. At worst, imposing the Western system of education built a support mechanism for direct colonization, which has plagued Third World peoples for several centuries. Ignoring any consideration of these issues cannot be seen as simply remaining ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’. Rather, in the early twenty-first century aggressive climate of American triumphalist neo-imperialism, ignorance and passivity may amount to self-degradation and could further the process of what might be called indirect colonization.

Returning to higher education, a typical course of study in virtually any other academic discipline at most Third World universities will likely follow a similar trajectory, by first identifying the great White men of each field and then drilling their theories and practices as universal holy writ, while ignoring or undermining indigenous knowledge. Thus, in Biology, genetics reigns supreme, supplanting cell biology after Western scientists isolated the double helix, while completely ignoring indigenous biological knowledge. Physics dwells on Isaac Newton’s model, with a taste of Einstein’s relativity and quantum mechanics for the adventurous, but neglecting the pre-Newtonian physics that enabled ancient architects to build magnificent structures. The staple of any Math major is calculus, but with indigenous knowledge like the Asian roots of algebra carefully filtered

through the Newtonian worldview. Philosophy majors ruminate on Western thinkers from Plato and Descartes, through Kant and Sartre, with little more than a passing wave to the philosophers of other civilizations. Western medicine is based on a mechanistic Cartesian model, with mastery of surgical and pharmaceutical technique as the ultimate goal, undermining the varieties of indigenous medicine developed in Africa and Asia. Western Chemistry strips away the self-edifying and spiritual aspects of its Muslim forebear, alchemy, and becomes a mainly material endeavor. Sociology begins with the work of Durkheim, while Weber is seeing a revival, but Ibn Khaldun – sometimes called the founder of sociology – receives little more than a footnote. Those students studying Economics will learn all about Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes, and perhaps even Marx, before delving into Milton Friedman, neo-liberalism, and the techniques of transnational capitalism, but rarely will any course of study consider local knowledge, such as the economic implications of the Islamic ban on usury. In short, from History and Political Science to Agriculture and Medicine, Western knowledge is the only knowledge. Native American scholar Ward Churchill aptly dubbed this complex of Western thought and practice as ‘White Studies’. Among other things, pursuing an education in White Studies means adhering to a set of norms and allegiances largely developed with the emergence of Western modernity and its spread through colonization.

Toward further understanding forms of academic imperialism, one could also look at the institutional structure of modern schooling, which in higher education has been highly successful in normalizing Western knowledge systems. Much of modern higher education relies on a rigid compartmentalization and departmentalization of knowledge, developed in its present form during the nineteenth century and further modified during the Cold War. Supposedly rooted in Western civilization by way of the Seven Greek Sciences, the Roman Quadrivium, or the Enlightenment’s Useful Arts, White Studies as presently configured in many universities suggests that the task of the disciplined mind is to make sure that no one ever sees the big picture, how the Useful Arts fit together, how the Quadrivium meshes with the Seven Sciences, and so forth. Oddly, compartmentalization was perfected in America during the Manhattan Project, under the direction of General Leslie R. Groves, who later noted that his main achievement was to compartmentalize, and thus control, the scientific research involved with development of the atomic bomb.\(^{14}\) Universities seem to have adopted his tactics, as the Western world launched its fifty-year Cold War. This period of time corresponded with the so-called independence of most Third World nation states, the leaders of which eagerly welcoming the compartmentalized discourse of modern schooling as their normative mode of theory and practice, ironically around the same time that Eurocentric disciplines began to grapple with the post-modern turn.\(^{15}\) In any case, in such a system non-Western knowledges become compartmentalized and further marginalized.

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Graduates with a degree in a White Studies discipline will often use their limited sense of empowerment to reproduce Western modernity, sometimes finding solace in the pious orthodoxy that Western knowledge is the sum total of human knowledge. The resulting pathological condition, often referred to as being ‘educated,’ means that one must take Western science and technology as the sole arbiters of truth. It means that unlimited technological progress and economic growth are the keys to human happiness.¹⁶ It means that quantity is better than quality and that technique and efficiency must govern all aspects of a desacralized life.¹⁷ Teachers, students and graduates seeking guidance and prosperity through White Studies may find that the best they can hope to attain is to keep their own cultural norms and traditions in private and let the West do the rest in public.

This is not to suggest that these ideas are new or somehow revolutionary. In fact, there are many efforts afoot today to reform education, all proceeding from a realization that education has in some sense lost its way. For example, academics in the West itself have realized that modern education, in ascendency for two centuries, has grown obsolete and lost sight of its purpose.¹⁸ They point to an increasing sense of uncertainty about education in the West, whether it should serve the old industrial order, or the new information order, and whether it should continue to be a

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public trust or become a business venture. But for others, there is actually an opportunity to escape the modern schooling system, which came to the Third World via colonization, and to put something else in its place that speaks to the interests and needs of local cultures and societies. The question is not necessarily how the West will benefit from the new systems it is trying to develop; the question should really be, ‘Why follow the West again, at all?’

It is possible to say that old-style imperialism ended with the dismantling of the British Empire in the middle of the twentieth century. The new imperialism, led by America, has tried to appear more benign, using education and the economy in preference to guns and cannons (although the latter tactics have returned with a vengeance in Iraq and Afghanistan). Imperialism today involves intruding upon different cultures and societies with a particular logic bound up with globalization and neo-liberal economics. The imperial project was begun anew because the old imperial order was collapsing. Consequently, while the West remains more unsure than at any other time in history this uncertainty may be an opportunity for the peoples of the Third World to regain a sense of purpose on their own terms, to rediscover the wisdom of their own traditions, and to see how they might help form responses to the challenges of the day. This is less about reconstructing grand civilizations or golden ages, and more about being honest with the current situation and seeing what those traditions have to say, and where they may point.

It may be useful at this point to make some distinctions between schooling and education. Schooling is that form of training developed in Europe and America in the nineteenth century and spread around the world with colonialism. It is

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largely about social control, partly in the name of serving the industrial order and partly in the name of creating the modern nation state. Education, generally speaking, can have a more flexible meaning that is culturally defined, and it need not be institutionalized. Half the curriculum of modern schooling, after all, is in the structure of the school system itself, with its bells and drills, desks in rows, six hours a day, five days a week, ten months out of the year, for twelve or more years, much like a long jail-sentence or a career in the military, only for children. In other words, structure does much of the teaching; the subjects are secondary.20

Eventually, the whole system of schooling may need to be dismantled to make way for education. Changes in the existing system are not likely to help much. Some Third World peoples, having tried to modify it, are realizing that the result is still the same system, and that such modifications go nowhere. Yet, it may prove difficult to persuade parents and children to involve themselves with a new approach to education that may or may not work, since they will often say that at least the colonial system ‘works’ (works at what is another question altogether, of which no-one is quite sure). So there is a need for a redefinition of education so that it can be de-institutionalized. This will at first need a core of bold and adventurous people who are willing to walk out of the system and build something else. Actually, this is already tentatively happening with the ‘school walkout’ movement in India, ‘school refusers’ in Japan, and with the growing tendency toward ‘home schooling’ in America. Perhaps the existing system can be left as it is, to rot and fall apart, so that people can see it for what it really is. In the meantime, viable small-

scale alternatives can be built elsewhere. This is beginning to happen in pockets all over the world, out of sight of the global media. People are taking control of their lives, leaving colonized schooling aside for something else, or in some cases gaining more influence over existing educational institutions when abandonment is not feasible or politically expedient.21 The details vary but often involve children spending less time in the artificial cells known as ‘classrooms’ and more time with parents, farmers, businessmen, artists, craftsmen or whoever, to learn what it really means in practice to be human, to be a member of a particular culture, to work, to create, to have fun, and to learn in ways that are not possible or imagined in the modern institutionalized system. All this can start small, locally and quietly, without building another system, it can try to rescue some people who may only be submitting their children to modern schooling because they have no other options, but who at the same time do want something better, something culturally relevant, ecologically sustainable, ethically and morally defensible, and spiritually calming and satisfying, for themselves, their children and their future.

A final word needs to be added here on the role of textbooks in schools and universities, especially in light of current political discussions about revising textbooks and national curricula. Textbook revision has multiple meanings for those who are seriously concerned about education and knowledge in today’s world. The use of a textbook implies that there is an agreed upon and centralized process of knowledge construction in a particular society, and that the debates about knowledge and education have ceased.

Textbooks are more in the realm of unquestioned knowledge, almost like a strange kind of secular revelation. Textbooks are issued by state authorities and get wrapped up with state politics. They are not about seeking knowledge; they are about controlling it and selling it as a package. Advocates of textbooks, most often the authorities in various state controlled ministries of education, claim more benefits than are actually apparent, while at the same time ignoring their detriments. In an age of the corporate takeover of public services, some of what used to be done by public ministries of education is turned over to profit motivated private companies, many of which often do a worse job. However, these developments matter little in the broader view, and are more about who will control public assets and their accompanying market shares.

Most textbooks, whatever the cultural outlook of a particular society, promote uniformity of thought, and in that sense they do seem to hold some power in determining the course of social development, if the goal of a society is uniformity of thought. But this is also an overstated claim, and it gives too much emphasis to schooling as the sole site of social and cultural development. Increasingly, many people learn how to fit into their society and the world in which they live from the media and other haphazard mass-market channels. In fact, one could easily argue that children and young adults learn much more about life, culture, history and politics from the Internet, the news media, television and the entertainment industries than they do from school and textbooks, or even families. Textbooks, of course, claim to have the ‘correct’ knowledge about such things, and that may or may not be true, but looking at the results, they seem to

have a decreasing impact even within the institutionalized system that spawned them.

Before talking about revising textbooks, it seems necessary to reflect on their existence in a more general and broad sense. Revising textbooks implies that they are somehow the best way to teach and learn, while, in reality, they circumscribe one of the most human of activities. State bureaucrats and corporate executives are obsessed with textbooks, and their obsessions spill over into the rest of society, the members of which in many cases have ceased to think for themselves, and who have instead turned over their learning to corporate or government bureaucracies. This is the condition termed by Ivan Illich as the ‘schooled society,’ a malady that afflicts most modern technological societies, the major symptom of which is addiction to programmatic and externally directed forms of learning and human development.23 So, the first conversation that needs to be developed is on this general level, and some deep thinking is necessary here to re-assess the overall modern dependency on textbooks and schooling, as part of any broader efforts at ‘de-schooling’ society, and to develop meaningful, organic and humane ways of teaching and learning.

Of course, as long as societies are addicted to schooling and textbooks, questions of their control will continue to be raised, and so there is a sort of theatre being played out today wherever discussions of revising textbooks are seen. Within this theatre play, there can be found governments and businesses vying for control, with various narrow special interest groups urging the power structures to adopt one or another pet position. While religious education is certainly

one site for this power struggle, it is not the only site. Important critiques of textbooks have been launched from several quarters, many of which have little or nothing to do with the issues currently being publicly discussed, and they rarely reach the headlines. For example, the ecological educator C. A. Bowers has written eloquently about how science and social studies textbooks at bottom embody an ethos of environmental destruction, that they are promoting anthropomorphic thinking and a naïve assumption that humans are somehow above or exempt from the laws of regional biotic communities, and that human beings are not a part of or dependent upon nature, but that they are in control of nature and may simply use it as they please for any sort of selfish and materialistic ends. On a global scale, such narrow thinking is far more fearsome and detrimental than parochial debates about ethnic, religious or national identity. Bowers has also noted how school textbooks promote forms of economic development that are, in the end, highly destructive and threatening to humanity and its shared biospheres.  

Perhaps everyone is asking too much of textbooks. After all, they are a recent and rather limited innovation in the annals of schooling and education, when seen on a global scale over time and across cultures, having only arisen with the modern nation state system and the advent of what some have called ‘mega-technic society’25, which is at bottom a dehumanizing entity. Instead of focusing attention on selected symptoms of the schooled society, broader discussions are needed that will seriously question the viability of modernist doctrines about knowledge and social development. To the

extent that textbooks embody those doctrines that blindly encourage a predatory economic system and the accompanying anthropocentrism, both of which are leading the world to ecological catastrophe, not to mention the severe psychological problems arising with the tendency toward ongoing dehumanization and the rapid spread of the modern technological social order, maybe the entire idea of mass schooling needs to be revised or even eventually abandoned. From the standpoint of human and biotic survival, limiting discussions of educational reform to textbook revision is fruitlessly spinning around the wrong questions. In fact, it may be nothing more than a way for state and corporate bureaucracies to exert more control over social and economic programs, while congratulating themselves that they are spearheading a new wave of ‘reform,’ which is really just a destructive form of global maldevelopment.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Concentration Camp and Development: The Pasts and Future of Genocide

Vinay Lal

A long prolegomenon to an allegedly short century

One of the more recent works of the esteemed British historian, Eric Hobsbawm, takes as its title *The age of extremes: The short twentieth century, 1914-1991*. Though European powers were at war with each other over several centuries preceding the nineteenth century, their rapid acquisitions of overseas territories, their drive towards industrialization and nation-building, and the revolutions of 1848 all had the cumulative effect of shifting the terrain of war from Europe to the colonies. It was not only the scale of the war that engulfed Europe between 1914 and 1918, a war whose very characterization as World War I suggests how far European conflicts are routinely assumed to have meaning for the rest of the world, but rather the shattering of the dream

1. A different version of this article was published in *Patterns of Prejudice*, 39(2), 220–243, 2005.
3. It is true that many countries not involved in the conflict were, in one manner or the other, dragged into the war (See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947*, Delhi: Macmillan India, 1983, pp. 168–172, and Indian National Congress, Punjab Subcommittee, *Report of the Commissioners*, Vol. 1: *Report*, Bombay: Karnataka Press, 1920) but my larger argument is that Europe unthinking remains the template for the history we do.
that violence could, both casually and systematically, be inflicted upon colonized peoples while Europe itself remained inured to its effects that perhaps justifies marking 1914 as the inauguration of a new century. It is also during the war years that the Bolsheviks gained power in Russia, and so brought into being an experiment that placed in strange but not atypical apposition the ideas of emancipation and orchestrated terror, and crumbled only with the decimation of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Apparently reasonable as is Hobsbawm’s framework for understanding the twentieth century, it remains resolutely Eurocentric, as well as driven by a rather conventional notion of history as the unfolding of events – events tethered, in particular, to violence and revolution. At this juncture of intellectual history, the charge of being Eurocentric is an all too familiar one, often levied to score polemical points rather than from serious intellectual intent, but its commonplace character or abuse makes it not any less serious when the object of the critique is a scholar of extraordinary repute with pretensions to being progressive, ecumenical in his conception of history, and having the world at his fingertips. One wonders why, for example, the twentieth century should not be viewed as having been inaugurated in 1905 when Japan dealt Russia a crushing blow and so became, to nationalists in India and Indonesia, a wondrous sign of resurgent Asia. “Japanese victories stirred up my enthusiasm,” wrote Nehru in his autobiography, “and I waited eagerly for the papers for fresh news daily... Nationalistic ideas filled my mind. I mused of Indian freedom and Asiatic freedom from the thralldom of Europe.”

the white race, and that there has seldom been so momentous an awakening. If Japan’s victory over Russia in 1905 be proposed as one possible way, among many others, of imagining the beginnings of the twentieth century, one can similarly be tempted into marking its close with something other than the fall of the Soviet Union, most notably and ominously the Rwandan genocide of 1994. For years the Western powers, chastened by the nightmarish experience of the holocaust perpetrated upon the Jews, had been shouting themselves hoarse over the slogan, ‘Never again’. And, yet, despite mounting signs of the fratricidal conflict between Hutus and Tutsis, and with full knowledge of the atrocities that began to be perpetrated before their very eyes, France, the United States, and the United Nations mutely partook, by their permissive indifference, of the ferocious killings that in a little over three months had left 800,000 Tutsis dead. The former European colonial powers and the United States furnished a new meaning to the phrase, ‘free world’, a world that frees one from moral responsibility and yet insists that borders that are not one’s own should be free to trafficking by multinational corporations and arms dealers. On the one hand, as has been indisputably documented, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda was ordered to wind up its operations in the midst of the killings; on the other hand, the French, who had inherited the colonial mantle from the Belgians, were supplying arms to the Hutu-led Rwandan army even as their ambassador to the United Nations was describing France’s objective as “naturally exclud[ing] any interference in the development of the balance of military forces between the parties involved in the conflict.”

5. Philip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda*, New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1998.

The phrase, ‘primordial conflicts’, is all too easily available to those who are predisposed to viewing certain conflicts, whether in the Balkans or in Africa, as not merely intractable but as opaque to the enlightened West. The West, one had every reason to believe from what was allowed to transpire in Rwanda, had given up on Africa. The Cambridge School of historians famously wrote about the ‘scramble for Africa’ among the colonial powers towards the end of the nineteenth century, but a century later Western powers all seem to be ready to disown that troubled legacy. The scramble now is to get out. Africa had a way of inserting itself into the Western consciousness then; it still does so today. Africa cannot be forgotten nor can it be forgiven. The gruesome violence of the twentieth century seems, then, to have served no purpose other than to warn us, brutally and unceremoniously, that it had no purpose. The precise terror of Rwanda is that our moral sensibilities appear to have been diminished rather than enhanced over the course of a century.

That Hobsbawm treats history as ‘event’ rather than ‘category’ is, as I have already hinted, a problem of a different order, one to which I shall turn in due course. Much more nuanced than the more commonly known pretenders to the enterprise of world cosmologies, Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, Hobsbawm never quite declared that history has come to an end, and that it only remains for people belonging to the underdeveloped or developing worlds to embrace the multiple and related virtues of globalization, electoral democracy, and free enterprise. Nevertheless, he has come precipitously close to embracing this view, as the brackets he places on his twentieth century suggest. The inexorable and iron laws of history that Hobsbawm’s Marxism trumpeted were surely not vindicated with the demise of the Soviet Union, but the moral support that many so-called progressives have offered to political and military
interventions as necessary humanitarian gestures, from the bombing of Serbia to the invasion of Iraq, suggests that the free world’s achievements are seen as the telos of all human history. At the end of the cold war, as we might recall, there was considerable rejoicing that the entire world could gain from what was termed the ‘peace dividend’. One view which quickly gained wide currency was that since most of the wars fought between 1945 and 1991 were, to varying degrees, engagements that the United States and the Soviet waged through their proxies, the fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism throughout the Eastern bloc would necessarily diminish the resort to violence.

That we would have anything but peace should have been clear from the fact that the demise of the Soviet Union and the decimation of Iraq went nearly hand-in-hand. Indeed, the Gulf War was conducted partly with the justification that it was the most desirable and morally efficacious way of putting into effect what Bush Senior termed the ‘new world order’. In each of the three principal military engagements of the United States since the Soviet Bloc disintegrated and before the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the American-led and comically-named ‘coalition of the willing’ – the Gulf War, NATO’s bombing of Yugoslavia, and the war to hunt down Osama bin Laden – the word ‘genocide’ lurked in the air, occupying in the discursive space the same place as does an uninvited guest who is neither inside nor outside. In each instance, the chief villain of the piece – Saddam, Milosevic, and bin Laden –

7. Some readers may ask why I should deplore the failure of the West to intervene in Rwanda while critiquing the interventions that did take place in Iraq and Serbia. This quest for consistency can become another mode of evading the politics of knowledge behind all such phenomena. It is more important to probe why the West does intervene on some occasions and not on others. See also Samantha Power, A problem from hell: America and the age of Genocide, New York: Harper Collins, 2003.
could be viewed with some justification as evil incarnate, indeed as a person full of genocidal intent. Saddam had gassed the Kurds; bin Laden harbored genocidal fantasies against the Americans; Milosevic, transformed from the good communist into the Serb nationalist, became one of the principal architects of the destruction of the culture of Bosnian Muslims and Kosovars. Even the Taliban were, to all practical purposes, genocidal towards their women, if by genocide we mean that members of a specific group, here chosen on account of their gender, were targeted by a political regime and systematically stripped of their rights to education, health, livelihood, and everything else that ordinarily makes possible a fulfilled life. And, yet, in each case there seemed some reluctance to encompass the villains under the rubric of ‘genocide’. Only a few thousand Kurds had been killed; both Saddam and bin Laden had, at one time, been befriended by the Americans, and the Americans were not keen on being viewed as partners in crime. The Taliban had brutally sequestered their women, but no one could say that their numbers had been drastically reduced.

Arguably, then, the fall of the Soviet Union was much less the definitive moment than the commonly accepted

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8. With respect to Kosovo, it is now clear that stories of the mass disappearance of Albanian men, and of mass graves, were grossly exaggerated, perhaps planted by NATO and the American administration. Moreover, the Kosovar Liberation Army, hailed in the West as the supreme liberator of Albanians from the monstrous grip of Serbia, carried out as many killings as did the Serbian armed forces and their supporters. 9. I refer only to the chemical attack on Halabja on 16 March 1988, which caused between 4000 and 7000 fatalities. This received far more coverage than the entire Anfal campaign in Northern Iraq over a 7-month period in 1988, estimated to have led to the loss of as many as 100,000 Kurdish lives. See Middle East Watch, *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal campaign against the Kurds*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993, also online: www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal
readings of it suggest, and the bookends that Hobsbawm places around the twentieth century, 1914 and 1991, derive from the received view of history – a view in which, as shall also be seen, history itself remains the supreme uncontested category. The twentieth century is now recognized as an exceptionally violent period, and estimates of those killed in wars, insurrections, and genocides run to at least 200 million. In the 1980s, 60 percent of scientists were described as being engaged, directly or indirectly, in defense research\textsuperscript{10}, a fact that, however much scientists, defense officials, policy experts, and counter-terrorism specialists may wish to resist its implications, has some bearing on the totalizing nature of violence in the twentieth century. If we take the twentieth century to be a category not so much of time as of mentality, a category signaling disposition towards a certain kind of violence which was eroding the restraints that societies had often times placed upon themselves, then it may be much more fitting to think of the twentieth century as interminably long, a century that began well before its allotted time and shows few signs of receding. Terror has a much longer history than ‘terrorism’, and the unknown soldier of ‘World War I’, who has come to epitomize the anonymity of modern warfare, was already lurking in the unmarked graves of the American Civil War. However, the Civil War had been fought between near equals, and victory, allowing for certain contingencies, could well have gone to the other side. What often furnishes a genocidal edge to total violence is immense disparities of power, and the late nineteenth century witnessed a number of developments that heralded the formal arrival of the genocidal twentieth century. Advances in military technology had in

part facilitated the expansion of colonial rule. As a British officer fighting in Multan in western India at the end of 1848 confided to his diary, there was much cause to exult in the triumph of ‘that true weapon the bayonet, which never yet failed to bring success to the British soldier’. Yet the bayonet could only go so far, as the introduction of the machine gun so amply demonstrated. The disequilibrium in military strength, these days suggested by images of F-16s in the Israeli air force pounding Palestinian settlements from the air, was beginning to acquire a new meaning.

The bullets fired from the Maxim gun in rapid succession tore into the flesh, splintering bone, puncturing large holes in the body. Mounted on a gunboat, the Maxim gun appeared to Winston Churchill, who took part in Kitchener’s campaigns that led to the conquest of the Sudan in 1898, as a “beautiful white devil” that floated “gracefully on the waters”, wreathed in smoke. The ‘mere physical act’ of firing ‘became tedious’, noted Churchill, as one Dervish after another was cut into pieces: this was ‘the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians’. A huge army, what Churchill described as “the strongest and best-armed savage army yet arrayed against a modern European Power”, had been almost effortlessly destroyed in the space of a few hours with minimal loss of life to the victors. But had Churchill been more prescient, he would perhaps have underscored the ‘tedium’ experienced by white men as they buried black bodies under mounds of bullets rather than the enormous chasm opened up by Western arms between the ‘civilized’ and the ‘savages’. Hannah Arendt had a different phrase to

capture not only the bureaucratization of killing, but the moral distancing that takes place when the pulling of the trigger and the filing of papers become tasks akin to each other.\footnote{12}{See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*, New York: Penguin, 1977 [1963].}

Evidently, ‘the banality of evil’ has many forms: once Herbert Kitchener had dealt with the Dervishes, and a number of other recalcitrant savage tribes, he eventually turned his attention to the troublesome Boers further south. Unlike the Dervishes, who had appeared in battle *en masse*, and died likewise, the Boers engaged in guerrilla tactics. Kitchener sought to decimate them with what one writer has described as a “double sweeping operation”: one measure consisted in flushing them out through systematic drives, “organized like a sporting shoot, with success defined in a weekly ‘bag’ of killed, captured and wounded”\footnote{13}{Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer war*, New York: Random House, 1979, p. 522.}. This was not wholly exceptional, considering that hunting for the scalps of Native Americans was an immense past-time for the white man. Scalps were exhibited to an admiring public, and the trophy hunters were local heroes. Kitchener was somewhat more innovative with his second measure, arguably showing himself in numerous ways to be the forerunner of the Nazis. To prevent civilians from offering material and moral support to the guerrillas, Kitchener conceived of a plan to sweep the country clean of them, and he herded Boer women and children in refugee camps as though they were cattle, sheep, or horses.\footnote{14}{There is an important distinction between camps intended to hold or sequester civilians, and the extermination camps established by the Nazis. One effect of such distinctions has been to reinforce arguments which plead for the uniqueness of the Holocaust. ‘Concentration camps’, as used by Arendt (see below) and myself encompasses a broad semiotic register.} Their rations were set absurdly low in the hope
that the men would be encouraged to surrender, and disease was rampant in the camps. Thomas Pakenham is remarkably forthright in his assessment of the contribution of Kitchener, once lionized as one of the greatest proconsuls of Empire, to civilization: “Today, Kitchener is not remembered in South Africa for his military victories. His monument is the ‘concentration camp’, as it came to be called. The camps have left a gigantic scar across the minds of Afrikaners: a symbol of deliberate genocide.”

A short prolegomenon to an interminably long past

The twentieth century, then, might have been much more than the short century that has been described by Hobsbawm, and that it is assumed to be by all those who jointly mark the disappearance of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of the space of the internet as a radical possibility for the fulfillment of the ideas of democracy and liberty, as the twin signs of the inauguration of a new period in human history. Hannah Arendt was among the first scholars to recognize that concentration camps were not an invention of totalitarian governments, having been used not only in South Africa but in India for the retention of “undesirable elements”. But she was even more perspicacious in her identification of concentrations camps as sites of total domination of an unusual kind. She described them as “the laboratories in which the fundamental belief of totalitarianism that everything is possible is being verified”: here the intention was not only to “exterminate people and degrade human beings”, but to eliminate, “under scientifically controlled

conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior and of transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not”. The vast scale on which the Nazis committed their crimes made them improbable to others; equally improbable, the Nazis might have thought, would be the accounts of survivors. Those who dared to speak the unspeakable would be viewed with suspicion: having returned to the world of the living, Arendt writes, the survivor who bears witness “himself is often assailed by doubts with regard to his own truthfulness, as though he had mistaken a nightmare for reality.”

It is just reasonable to ask what the concentration camp of the future might look like. Is the concentration camp only a thing of the past, or has it metamorphosed into different forms? When Adorno declared that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, could he also have meant to say that we did not, after all, survive the concentration camp? Dazed women, men, and children walked out of the camps, but did civilization outlive the onslaught? “The idea that after this war”, reflected Adorno, “life will continue ‘normally’ or even that culture might be ‘rebuilt’ – as if the rebuilding of culture were not already its negation – is idiotic. Millions of Jews have been murdered, and this is to be seen as an interlude and not the catastrophe itself. What more is this culture waiting for?”

Has the concentration camp, unmoored from its precise location, shorn of its physicality, freed from its chains, bounded no longer by barbed wires, come to occupy a different space? If the concentration camp never really disappeared, even as the only form in which we ‘knew’ it vanished, might that point to an ominous future for genocide

17. The quotes are from Hannah Arendt, cited above, pp. 437–439.
and the categories through we have hitherto understood it? Will it suffice to speak of genocide as the willful elimination, in part or in whole, of groups of people, whether conceived through the categories of nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, or linguistic identity, and point to continuing violence in the Sudan, Chechnya, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and elsewhere as instances of genocide in our time, or do our times call for some radical rethinking of genocide? Does our present understanding of genocide permit us to recognize the numerous forms, institutions, and sociocultural practices, many cast as benevolent interventions, through which it might be practiced?

I am by no means merely adverting to the argument, considerable as its merits indubitably are in some instances, that many recent military engagements have been tethered on the slimmest ideas. The ‘New World Order’ of 1991 gave way to the notion of ‘humanitarian intervention’ in 1999, and this in turn was succeeded, in the war against terror, by the terrifying notion that “if you are not with us, you are against us”.19 It is the Gulf War (1991), as well, which serves as the template for what has now become firmly enshrined as the philosophy of American military engagement, namely the notion that the loss of lives on the other side is acceptable if not desirable ‘collateral damage’ so long as no lives are lost on one’s own side. The triumph in the Balkans was trumpeted with the observation that not a single American life had been lost to enemy gunfire. That is one principal reason why bombing from altitudes of 10,000 feet or more, where it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish military targets from the civilian infrastructure, is now considered normative, even a form of moral bravery.

These forms of ‘humanitarian intervention’ are, let us recognize, just as asymmetrical as those colonial wars of expansion, conquest, and self-aggrandizement which decimated entire tribes or communities in the Americas, Australia, and Africa. One might argue that each age has its own form of benevolent violence, and that ‘humanitarian interventions’ have only supplanted the discourse of ‘civilizing mission’ that was rampant in the nineteenth century. Civilizing missions entailed punitive expeditions to bring ‘unruly’ tribes to their senses and the ‘pacification’ of warlike people and entire villages, and humanitarian interventions now appear to operate in somewhat similar idioms. What, then, should strike us as distinct in the idea of ‘humanitarian intervention’, and why should we think of it as anything other than a very contemporary form of state politics that has been with us for a long time?

I have elsewhere advanced the argument that, as we move along in the twenty-first century, oppression will increasingly be exercised through the categories of knowledge, and that naked force, military might, and the brutal class oppression of industrial society will be less visible instruments of violence. This may seem a particularly inopportune moment to put forth such an argument, considering the instances of contemporary violence, whether genocidal or otherwise, that I have already enumerated in this chapter. Besides the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the conflicts in Rwanda, Uganda, Congo, Sudan, and the Ivory Coast, there are more complicated cases of violence targeted at specific groups which appear to fall short of ‘genocide’ as the term is commonly used by scholars. Many human rights activists in India have not been reticent in describing the pogrom which

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was directed at Muslims in Gujarat in early 2002, which took the lives of at least 2000 people and left another 150,000 homeless, as genocide. The evidence is indisputably clear that the violence, though perhaps not instigated by the state in the first few hours, was then carried out with the full force of state power and with the active participation of functionaries of the state charged with checking the violence.\(^{21}\)

The genocides of the future will likely be directed not at entire populations, but rather at what one might term sufficiently symbolic portions – and not necessarily, as one might be tempted to infer from previous genocides, intellectuals, political elites, or the wealthy – of the targeted group. Human rights activists who have investigated the killings in Gujarat found that the murderers and arsonists directed their wrath not only at Muslim-owned shops and buildings but at a disproportionately large number of mosques and, even more ominously, at *dargahs*. In Gujarat, as in many other parts of India, the burial sites of Sufi saints attract Muslim and Hindu worshippers. That the perpetrators of violence viewed *dargahs* and other sites associated with Sufis as particularly deserving of destruction is illustrative of the argument, to which I shall return in closing, that the fear of oneself is often greater than the fear of the other. Hindus who worship at *dargahs* are not only, from the perspective of militant Hindus, apostates, traitors, and friends of Pakistan: they are palpable reminders of the syncreticism that has historically characterized what later assumed the corporate identity of Hinduism, uncomfortable reminders indeed of everything that advocates of a masculinist (and often genocidal) faith masquerading as Hinduism have disowned in

their own past. The genocide perpetrated against Muslims masks Hindutva’s genocidal impulses towards Hinduism.

While it is transparent that sheer military might subjugated the Taliban, the stubborn resistance of the Palestinians in the face of the overwhelming military superiority of Israel, who have not denied themselves such obscene advantages as the deployment of F-16s in Palestinian neighborhoods, should alone give some pause to reconsider the supposedly inevitable success accompanying the application of military force. Consequently, in suggesting that oppression and genocide should increasingly be understood as an aspect of the imperialism of categories, it becomes necessary to inquire into the origins of these categories and how they operate. These categories are the handiwork of social scientists and other academic workers, and it is my submission that in the era of globalism, when the same icons of popular culture proliferate everywhere, trade disputes universally come under the jurisdiction of economic regimes such as the World Trade Organization, and financial markets are inextricably linked, nothing is more global than modern knowledge and its categories.

The modern academic disciplines, especially the social sciences, are now replicated in universities around the world, though the prodigious discussion around globalization scarcely gives a hint of this development. The formal frameworks of knowledge have bequeathed to every corner of the globe a universal and supposedly tested and verifiable recipe for development, technological progress, successful management, and democracy – the last enshrined in the idea of ‘free elections’, and further guided by the magical incantation of ‘one person, one vote’. Gestures against globalization are captured in popular memory, but it is useful to recall that American-style business schools are being embraced around the world, that for well over one generation
the economics textbooks of Paul Samuelson have reigned dominant around the globe, and that no one protested when social science in the American, British, or French idiom began to prevail in the developing and underdeveloped worlds. Indeed, the very ideas of development, growth, scarcity, and poverty with which economists, social planners, sociologists, and politicians in the non-Euro-American world work are sanctified by several generations of Western experts.

Even more so than Coca-Cola, Disney, or manifestations of American-style youth culture, formal modeling and other mathematized forms of social science have reached into every corner of the world. Economists in dictatorships, democracies, and dukedoms are, insofar as their work as social scientists is in question, fundamentally alike, however acute the degree of variance in the constraints placed upon their ability to contribute to scholarly literature. The well-meaning protestors in Seattle and Genoa may have been echoing popular sentiments about globalization, but when we speak of the growing polarities, the extension of the ranks of the very poor as well as those of the very rich, it becomes incumbent to reflect upon how the categories of ‘poverty’ and ‘scarcity’ themselves operate to produce oppression.

Not all categories are alike; they have greater or lesser epistemic force, by which I partly mean that some – poverty and scarcity, to name two – have become so naturalized that the discursive fields generally concerned with inquiring into such phenomena, among them economics, geography, and sociology, no longer feel they have to perform much explanatory work. Some categories are provisional, others are more enduring; some, such as development, have an extraordinary tenacity. Some categories are of recent vintage, ‘the international community’ being a notable case in point. If today the United States acts to subjugate, chastise, or warn another people, it attempts to do so in the name of the
international community. That was never much of a consideration when the United States fought in Vietnam, initiated the bombing of Cambodia, or mined the harbors of Nicaragua. Other categories have been invested with newer meanings and have received different and revived forms of circulation. The idea of being literate, to take one example, has been in circulation since at least the late medieval period, and it set up a hierarchy between literates and illiterates; however, the category of literacy is much more modern than we might suppose. Literacy is a form of measurement, one used to browbeat nations into shame, contrition, or submission.

Modern, largely invisible, holocausts are being perpetrated upon significant sections of the world’s population. I have so far desisted from establishing a catalog of genocides, partly because the twentieth century has been particularly fecund in this respect, and we are in any case far from completing the catalog. Hitler infamously precipitated the elimination of the Jewish population with the observation that no one remembered the extermination of the Armenians, and there is every possibility that the twenty first century might be richer still in other, hitherto still invisible, holocausts. Nothing furnishes more vivid illustrations of this argument than the idea of development, which remains indubitably the clearest example of the genocidal violence perpetrated by modern knowledge systems upon the integrity of human communities. The saga of Soviet terror originated in the brutal collectivization of Russian agriculture and in the impulse to industrialize rapidly, and consequently increase productivity, by the use of forced labor. Millions of deaths were achieved, not by superior forms of armament, but by coolly and rationally conceiving of these deaths as the necessary price to pay for development. In a similar vein is the Chinese Communist Party’s heartless embrace of ruinous economic
policies, the attempt by political functionaries to make the subjects of the state partake in the ‘Great Leap Forward’, and the consequence of this extreme folly: 25–30 million people died from starvation.

Yet these starvation deaths are not routinely thought of as constituting a genocide or an holocaust, and they have not impacted our memory and sensibility with anything even remotely resembling the force and effect which the ‘the holocaust’ has nearly everywhere become part of the awareness of diverse political communities. On the one hand, denying the veracity of the Holocaust is a criminal offense under the law in Germany, and Holocaust-deniers face considerable opprobrium in various other countries as well. On the other hand, demographers and specialists in Chinese history and politics aside, the world has never been very much bothered by the history of famine mortality in modern China. Nor were these starvation deaths the only ones that took place in the name of development, or in the interest of proving right the pet theory of some economist. The famine mortality in India from 1876–1902 alone, to take one further illustration, has been estimated, quite conservatively, between 12–29 million, and at least one progressive British commentator who had the misfortune of witnessing the 1876 Madras famine prophesized that when “the part played by the British Empire in the nineteenth century is regarded by the historian fifty years hence, the unnecessary deaths of millions of Indians would be its principal and most notorious monument”.

We are likely to see starvation deaths and the killings in concentration camps as discrete forms of violence, when in fact they are equally derived from the categories – development, bureaucracy, progress, instrumental rationality – of modernity. The victims of social engineering will surely not care to choose between different forms of death, but some victims are assured at least of monuments in their name.
There are no monuments or memorials to the victims of development; ironically, they remain singularly underdeveloped even in this respect. Many people would insist on knowing how one can at all speak of development’s victims, and there are even scholars who, while claiming to speak as progressive spokespersons on behalf of the ‘genuinely’ oppressed, can barely disguise their scorn at groups on behalf of whom victimhood status is sometimes claimed.22 The very word, development, perpetually unsings its own grave, so to speak; every parent is rightfully persuaded, for instance, that nothing should obstruct the development, or growth and well-being, of her or his child. A battery of experts exists in most modern cultures to provide the optimum conditions under which the development of children can transpire, and no reasonable person considers the objective as less than laudable, though we all are also aware that many of the experts are entirely dispensable.23

What passes as commonsense impedes the placement of development alongside the holocaust, genocide, wanton killing, destruction, and dispossession. That is one obstacle to the construction of a political archaeology of the idea of development. Moreover, by the second half of the nineteenth century, if not earlier, social thinkers in the West had largely come to accept the idea that civilizations were to be placed alongside a scale, and a form of evaluative scale still survives,

22. A particularly good example of such extreme insensitivity to, and mockery of, victims of development is Meera Nanda, Prophets facing backward: Postmodern critiques of science and Hindu nationalism in India, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003.

indeed thrives, in the idea of development. For this idea to be at all meaningful, it must presuppose that there are nations which are developed, others which are developing, and yet others which doggedly persist in remaining underdeveloped, a testament to ‘Oriental laziness’ or the ‘savagery of a dark continent’. Frequently, these terms are substituted by others, though each set has its own particular resonance. The term ‘third world’ had extraordinarily wide currency until very recently; among other terms that abound, one hears of ‘post-industrial societies’, of nations in the throes of ‘advanced’ or ‘flexible’ capitalism, and of countries, which when not outright ‘backward’, are merely ‘industrializing’. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa are sometimes called ‘failed’ states, and we know what remedies – structural adjustment, subjection to a regime of sanctions, even recolonization – lie in wait for those who fail. At the other extreme, the proponents of the development lexicon are reluctant to use the word ‘over-developed’ to describe some of the ‘developed’ states, though that description seems apt for at least some countries whose appetite for consumption and self-aggrandizement is also reflected in their obesity rates.  

24. Some of these terms have other insidious histories: to take one example, ‘flexible’ capitalism is a short-hand for the corporate strategies that have led to ‘downsizing’, increase in part-time labor, the reduction of the permanent work force, and the emasculation of labor unions. The discussion of development in this paragraph and the following draws largely upon my Empire of knowledge: Culture and plurality in the global economy, London: Pluto Press, 2002, pp. 111–113.
reflected on Gandhi’s observation that if a small island had to occupy a good deal of the world to satisfy its wants and vanity, one shuddered to think what the consequences would be for the world if a large country such as India resolved to imitate Britain. Had Gandhi been alive to witness the burgeoning economic development of China and (to a somewhat lesser extent) India, one can be certain that he would have, far from wanting to recant his assessment, been firmly convinced that the ideology of development always hungers for sacrificial victims. Amidst widespread disease, hunger, and malnutrition, numerous world organizations, such as the Department of Social and Economic Affairs at the UN, boldly inferred that rigorous demands, from the forfeiture of traditional livelihoods and the rejection of religious values to the painful adjustments required by the erosion of the moral economy and the conception of the commons, could be placed upon those who wished to join the irresistible calls to development.

By the mid-1950s, the idea of development had achieved the status of unimpeachable certainty, global in its reach and totalizing in its capacity to order and evaluate human relations. This was unequivocally the way to the future, and all who dared to reject development as an ill-thought panacea were condemned to become pariahs, the burnt carcasses and rejects of history. Yet the violence perpetrated under the name of development was never recognized as violence, and not merely because it makes for poor media coverage or non-sensational journalism. In what was more than a fleeting moment of fancy, Nehru conveyed the idealism that allowed his generation to view dams as the future ‘temples’ of humanity. Little thought would be given, over the next few decades, to the 40–80 million people conservatively estimated by the World Commission of Dams to have been displaced from their traditional homelands by dams — a displacement
that, for people whose attachment to their land cannot be measured by monetary worth, was often tantamount to loss of soul and life. Developmental violence on this scale has every characteristic of ethnic cleansing – the open targeting of a particular group, in this case the poor and the underdeveloped, drawn largely from the ranks of ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples, and their subsequent eviction – but it is not recognized as such. Unlike practitioners of open genocide, who may have to face the gallows or the humiliation of trial before an international tribunal, the stalwarts of this form of ethnic cleansing are often feted for their humanitarian contributions to human welfare. As Ivan Illich has suggested, what is particularly insidious in the idea of development is that, following the Nazi practice of employing Jews in unpaid labor as their own contribution to their death, it “enlist[s] people in their own extinction.”

The future of concentrations camps may be more grim than we commonly recognize.

Coda

The study of genocide has, as I have attempted to argue, been constrained – in part by the emphasis on groups or communities who have borne the brunt of oppression on account of their ethnicity, nationality, or religious outlook, and in part by the tendency to dwell on violence in its most palpably naked forms, such as the extermination camps in which Jews were herded and then dispatched to their death or the brutally open incitements to violence of the sort witnessed in Rwanda where radio announcements spurred the Hutus to massacre the ‘cockroaches’. Various other forms of genocide

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have gone wholly or largely unnoticed, and there is little prospect that we will even recognize the holocausts unfolding before our eyes until we understand the oppression of categories that have come to exercise a tyrannical sway over our lives. At least a few commentators have begun to recognize the truly genocidal potential of categories that are seen as innocent, as can be witnessed from the skepticism with which they receive invocations by the United States to the ‘international community’. However much ‘the international community’ is presented as something of a natural, self-generated phenomenon, embodying the collective and moral will of humanity, there are also good reasons for viewing it as a newer, apparently more ‘democratic’, form of imposing the depraved morality of the powerful upon the powerless. Let us not forget that the decade-long sanctions regime put in place against Iraq, during which mortality rates in Iraq (and not only of children, though their deaths expectedly evoked more sympathy) skyrocketed, would not be terminated by the United States on the grounds that the ‘international community’ could not condone Iraq’s flagrant violation of UN resolutions.\footnote{26. Anthony Arnove, *Iraq under siege: The deadly impact of sanctions and war*, Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002.}

There is, on sustained investigation, a transparency about ‘international community’ as a category of oppression that eludes many other categories. I commenced this paper with Eric Hobsbawm, and have previously remarked that Hobsbawm treats history as the unfolding of events, but never really pauses to understand history as a relatively recent category of now universal import. Let me, in closing, return to history and to its attempted monopoly over our conceptions of the past. Most societies lived without history textbooks – or, indeed, other textbooks, though here again history textbooks,
over which controversies are often bitter and deep, have a salience in modern societies that is quite distinct – until they emerged as nation-states, although now a society without textbooks is all but inconceivable. Textbook publishing is a phenomenally huge and profitable business, and there is at least as much reason to be alarmed by textbooks cartels as there is to fear oil cartels. Textbooks have homogenized forms of knowledge throughout the world, and societies that had numerous ways to engage with the past – myth, vernacular forms of knowing, the wisdom of elders, folktales, among others – have increasingly turned to history textbooks and to the narratives produced by professional historians to access the past and resolve disputes arising from its interpretation. As numerous historians, myself included, have documented in substantial detail, the controversy in India over the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth-century mosque in the north Indian city of Ayodhya, alleged by Hindu extremists to have been the site of a particularly significant Hindu temple before the temple was razed to make way for the mosque, was turned over to historians. On 6 December 1992, the Babri Masjid was destroyed by a crowd numbering in the thousands. In the wake of this act of desecration, violence erupted over many parts of India.

Whatever the precise history of the now-extinct Babri Masjid, the mosque survived for well over 450 years, mostly during the time when Hindus did not care much for their history, and were certainly content to settle for what might be described as a very muddled history of the Babri Masjid. What makes modern forms of knowledge particularly oppressive for much of humankind is our diminishing capacity to live with ambiguity, an argument to which both

George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden stood forth as sinister witnesses. Nothing can make nineteenth-century colonialism look benign, except of course to those who are still predisposed towards looking at colonialism as an endless variant of the narrative of ‘Custer Died With His Boots On’, but nonetheless the forms of colonization being attempted today suggest that the goriest chapters in genocide have yet to be written, most particularly if we keep in mind the most expansive conception of genocide as the extinction of distinct life-forms and cultures.

The present of the developing world, in the worldview of those who have set out to bring development to the unenlightened, is none other than the past, sometimes the very remote and mist-shrouded past, of the developed world; and indeed in this lies one of the greatest uses of the developing world, which preserves in its institutions and social practices the memory of an European past that is lost or of which there are only very dim traces. The ‘barbarism’ of the ‘developing world’ is always a reminder to the ‘developed’ world of the past it left so long ago, and of the profound blessings of Christianity, reason, and Western science. The future of the developing world: well, there is no future, since its future is already known to Europe and America; indeed, the developed world already lives the distant future of the developing world. As the future of the developing world as a whole is none other than the present of the developed world, so the future of the tribal or the peasant is only to live the limited conception of life of the planner, economist, policy analyst, and management guru. The other word for such a future is genocide.