

The Autonomous, the Universal and the Future of Sociology

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abstract: The universal concepts of sociology are those that form the basic foundation of the discipline found in all human societies and valid for all times. Examples are the concepts of sanction, class, social stratification, social mobility, group, culture, values, religion, custom and others. These concepts are universally valid in the general and abstract sense but their historical and concrete manifestations are conditioned by their temporal, spatial and cultural frameworks. It is in the studies of these unique historical phenomena that the autonomous tradition has its roots. What is lacking in the non-western world is an autonomous social science tradition, generated and developed by local scholars, guided by the selection of problems from within the society, applying an independent concept of relevance in the collection and accumulation of research data and comparative attention to problems outside the country or region.

keywords: autonomous tradition ♦ research data ♦ values

After the Second World War (1939–45), large parts of Asia and Africa gained their independence from the colonial powers that had dominated them from the 16th to the 20th century, some of less duration than others. The colonial expansion of the West throughout the non-western world took place during slightly more than four centuries.

During this period there was practically no interaction between the West and the non-western world. India and the Middle East took the lead in the 19th century. The great outburst of culture contact and intellectual interaction occurred after the Second World War, following the independence of the countries previously colonized by the West.

In this sudden outburst of interaction, an aftermath of colonialism, emerged a problem that is still prevalent today, another form of hegemony, this time not imposed by the West through colonial domination, but accepted, willingly with confident enthusiasm, by scholars and

planners of the former colonial territories and even in the few countries that had remained independent during that period (Alatas, 1981).

This problem is the emergence of imitative thinking arising from overdependence on the western intellectual contribution in the various fields of knowledge, not so much at the practical level of the applied sciences, but at the level of intellectual reflections, planning, conceptualization and the need to establish a genuine and autonomous scientific tradition. We confine ourselves here to the autonomous social science tradition, namely sociology, and the relation to its universal foundation. By universal, we mean that which is valid throughout human society. By autonomous, we mean the particular social phenomenon valid only in one particular area or shared among certain societies such as the use of chopsticks or a knife and fork for eating. The categories universal and particular have many forms and levels embracing all spheres of living.

The universal concepts of sociology are those that form the basic foundation of the discipline found in all human societies and valid at all times, such as the concepts of sanction, the class, social stratification, social mobility, group, culture, values, religion, custom and many others. These concepts have been continuously increased. Max Weber had contributed significantly in this area with his concept of the ideal type. So has Mannheim in the field of social analysis, with for instance his concepts of ideology and utopia.

These concepts are universally valid in the general and abstract sense but their historical and concrete manifestations are conditioned by their temporal, spatial and cultural frameworks. The sociological concept of the revolution applies to all revolutions in human societies, but the American, the French and the Russian Revolutions were unique, individual, concrete entities.

It is in the studies of these unique historical phenomena that the autonomous tradition has its roots. The general concepts of revolution, the elites, the ruling class, the mob, the masses, the intellectuals, the general laws of historical causation and many other universal concepts were applied interwoven with the particular events and conditions resulting in the autonomous emergence of that particular analysis of the revolution in question.

In the western world, the autonomous tradition is decisive and vigorous and the demarcation line between general universal sociology and the autonomous studies of subjects peculiar to specific western countries is clearly observed. Contents of studies of revolution in general are not automatically and uncritically applied to the study of the French or American Revolution. For instance, I have not come across an American historical study using the concept of the ancient regime, which de Tocqueville used in his book *The Ancient Regime*, discussing the French

Revolution and its background, the regime overthrown by the revolution of 1789.

What I would like to stress here, is that there is truly a genuine and autonomous tradition in western historical, sociological and other social-scientific disciplines. Both the general universal social science thinking and the autonomous application to a specific problem area have not been imitative and uncritical conceptually and methodologically. This is to be distinguished from committing errors in analysis and in the choice of methodology or in interpretation and conclusion. Again, I do not suggest that objectivity is always maintained, the studies are perfect, always up to the mark. I am not passing judgement on the objectivity and achievement of western scholarship. I am only stressing the autonomous tradition containing both the results of truth and error in its cumulative achievement.

The reason why the autonomous tradition in western sociology has been able to flourish so vigorously had to do with developments in European history. The idea of sociology as a science or discipline did not originate in the West, but sociological thinking with a collective response by a group of thinkers eventually entering mainstream intellectual discourse and later crystallizing into a modern discipline of its own originated in the West in the 19th century. Some suggest the 18th century. However, the separation of social thinking from social philosophy came very much around the turn of the 20th century.

The discovery of sociology as a science to study human society was made by Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406 AD), the Muslim historian, sociologist, judge, diplomat and reformer, who was born in Tunis and died in Cairo. He originated from Hadramaut in South Yemen. His works had generally been ignored in the Muslim world, except in Turkey during the late Ottoman period. The real discovery and subsequent attention on Ibn Khaldun occurred in the West, by both historian and sociologist. Following Robert Flint, a historian of the philosophy of history, in 1893, other scholars such as A. J. Toynbee, J. B. Bury, N. Schmidt, E. Rosenthal, J. W. Thompson, L. F. Ward, P. Sorokin, L. Gumplowicz, Jan Romein, H. E. Barnes and R. H. Williams, paid due attention to Ibn Khaldun.

It was Gumplowicz, the Polish sociologist, who first declared Ibn Khaldun's works as sociology. Two German scholars, Oppenheimer and Ratzenhofer, contemporaries of Gumplowicz, similarly showed interest in Ibn Khaldun. Direct interest in Ibn Khaldun dated back to 1697, when Barthélemy d'Herbelot included an article on Ibn Khaldun in his *Bibliothèque Orientale*.

Attention was further taken up by Orientalists during the 19th century. The first European translation, into French (1862), was done by de Slane, of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, the introduction to universal history,

wherein Ibn Khaldun presented both a new science of history and sociology. However, the discovery of Ibn Khaldun as a scientific historian and sociologist dates from an Italian and a Polish scholar, G. Ferrero and L. Gumplowicz. Appreciation of Ibn Khaldun had come from a spectrum of European scholars – Italian, French, Polish, German, British, Spanish and Dutch – as well as American. To the present day, serious and increasing attention is paid to Ibn Khaldun in the West but scarcely so in the Muslim world, though there has been some focus on him in the Middle East, namely Egypt.

I do not plan to discuss in detail the contribution of Ibn Khaldun, his theory, conceptualization and methodology. What is of interest here is the birth of an autonomous beginning of sociology conforming to its comprehensive requirements. It was a sociology born out of a historical setting unimpeded by the domination of a hegemonic external intellectual tradition from a previous colonial power. This is the same with the birth of modern sociology in the West, free from domination by an external hegemonic influence. Both were not obstructed by imitative thinking, and both were not under the spell of globalization.

Today, we are in a different situation in the non-western world. I am using western and non-western not in a pejorative or divisive sense but in a purely descriptive and nominative sense. I am also not pleading for any type of autonomous tradition. Nor am I politicizing or emotionalizing the issue to cultivate a pro- or anti-western stance. With strong reasons, I believe the western sociological tradition as the definitive reference point for departure and progress in the development of sociology, the autonomous and the universal.

To make this clear, I would like to avoid and reject the notion of indigenization as opposed to autonomous development of sociology, or any science for that matter. Indigenization has a different connotation. In principle, a science cannot be indigenized. Only its application can. In the method of curing malaria with modern medical science after successive generations, the old traditional method is replaced and forgotten and the new one takes its place to the point that it is felt as part of that society, of its indigenous identity, a culturally interwoven entity, the method blended with the cultural, in the actual practical operation.

Scientific thinking, however, is different. Its characteristic is to break away from the indigenous tradition mould. Science is autonomous from the traditional cultural background. Every great scientific breakthrough is a rupture with the previous outlook on the subject in question. Take arithmetic: the statement that $2 \times 2 = 4$ cannot be indigenized. We can indigenize the script and the numeral system but not the concept. The concept has an independent existence and growth in our mind. It does not possess a concrete existence by itself but is always tied to a concrete

object. In the concrete reality, two is always two objects, two trees, two goals, two houses, two graves, etc. etc.

Indigenization can only mean the distortion and mutilation of the sciences, similar to the politicization of the sciences. How does one indigenize a science such as sociology? First let me describe what is meant by an autonomous social science tradition and then compare it with indigenization. Basically, it is the linking of social science research and thinking to specifically regional problems selected by regional scholars, including smaller constituents of the region such as Europe or Spain.¹ Here the western world has given the most instructive and sophisticated example, both in its scope and depth.

Let us follow the penetrating observations made by A. N. J. den Hollander, a leading Dutch sociologist who taught sociology and American studies at the University of Amsterdam following the Second World War. He said:

No European who devotes professional attention to things American can, I believe, escape the realization that what is true of American living is also true of American thought: both have characteristic patterns that mark them off from other cultures. In certain respects European scholars do not think the same way as their American counterparts do. To Europeans, American thought has a distinct bent of its own born from reshaping British, French and German influences to an American mold. (Den Hollander, 1971: 202)²

Though den Hollander's interest was in the sociology of knowledge applied to American and European scholarship, his related observations around the theme constitute the materials for an autonomous tradition and devote attention to the regional problems selected by scholars from that region. This selection process is conditioned by the factor of relevance.

It was pointed out by den Hollander, citing Dahrendorf, that American sociology has been selective in assimilating European influence. In this intellectual traffic, certain ideas and concepts have been more or less systematically neglected despite the fact that it continues to absorb the interest of European sociologists:

In directing their attention to European sociologists and their works, Americans have, till quite recently, greatly, greatly preferred such theories and concepts that fitted in with their prevailing orientation of dynamic conservatism and have neglected those aspects of European social thinking which might be interpreted to have more radical implications. (Den Hollander, 1971: 204)

As Dahrendorf pointed out, de Tocqueville was received rather than Marx, Spencer rather than Pareto, Max Weber rather than Sorel, Tönnies and Durkheim rather than Mosca and Michels, Malinowski rather than Lévy-Bruhl. Within the works of these chosen authors, there was further operation of the selective principles. General ideas central to European

thinking such as class conflict and elites did play a considerable part in American sociology:

Instead, the ideas of democracy, of individualism, of ethical capitalism, of rationality, community and stability were chosen, because they served well as ideological foundations of the American reality. Clearly, the selection of problems to which answers are given is a function of the values of the society in which such knowledge arises and becomes significant. In this sense every social theory is relative to the society in which it belongs. (Den Hollander, 1971: 205)

Another significant point of difference concerns European and American views on the nature of theory. America has had little grand theory in the European sense, whether political, economic, social, cultural or theological:

One finds fragmentary achievements rather than imposing overall structures. The American disinclination to structure thought into systems is striking when contrasted with the continental European tradition. Much more so than Europeans, Americans have a fear of freezing thought. Being less interested in form than in contents, being little disposed towards projections into a faraway future, they have also shied away from predictions and programs of social change covering more than one generation. It may have been one of the reasons why neither socialism nor communism ever gained much ground in the United States. To Europeans American thought seems tentative, piecemeal, concrete and direct, keeping both postulates and objectives flexible. American thought has rarely strayed far away from the concerns of social reality. (Den Hollander, 1971: 206)

We are here not evaluating the relative merit of the American or European tradition. We are only drawing attention to the operation of profound and vigorous autonomous sociological traditions in Europe and America, and definitely Russia, Spain and the Latin American countries. Taking Asia as an example, there are sociological studies and meaningful analyses of sociological inclination by political thinkers and social philosophers, or historians touching upon sociological materials, such as the lucid and instructive analysis of the caste problem in India by Rammanohar Lohia.

He discussed the all-pervasive influence of caste in Indian history and contemporary society, from various angles, to explain how nine-tenths of the population became passive onlookers, listless and almost completely disinterested spectators of national tragedies. The fixation by caste of skills and division of labour through hereditary succession had blocked the emergence of creativity and social mobility. A small caste of superior skills and education habitually provides the national leadership.

Lohia's analysis of the subject was full of sociological insights and significant problems of the kind that qualify as the product of an

autonomous sociological tradition. It is highly original and non-imitative, reflecting the unique reality of Indian society, its dynamics, the impact of fundamental changes towards social justice and genuine development, and why there has never been a social revolution. Lohia's analysis of the data and the causal background is most suitable for the sociology of backwardness and inertia (Lohia, 1979: 79-85).

The same issue, caste, can be used by the notion of indigenization of sociology. Caste would then be presented as the abiding cement holding Indian society together. Lohia's agitation to destroy and wipe out the system would be ignored or resisted. New conceptualizations around backwardness and passive acceptance of its grave injustice would not be encouraged as opposed to its positive function in the social order, even though its abuses are recognized.

Those who practise indigenization of the sciences announced their programme first in Europe, led by the Nazis with their enthusiasm for eugenics. Another form of indigenization, this time of political ideological nature, was propounded by T. D. Lysenko (1898-1976), the Soviet agronomist who attempted to cast aside the genetic conditioning of wheat crops in favour of the environmental, during the Stalinist period.

Indigenization of the sciences is, in reality, actually impossible. The term has been used innocently to mean focusing attention on a particular country, locality or ethnic group. Thus the study of ethnic tribes is called indigenization, or the ethnic or country history based on their particular sources. Though indigenization cannot apply to the sciences, it can, however, apply to their use.

Let us take cigarette smoking in Indonesia. Modern cigarette production was introduced in Indonesia by the Dutch decades before the Second World War. Before that, the native Indonesian smoked tobacco rolled like a cigarette using a kind of leaf with clove powder mixed with the tobacco. This is called *kretek*. Later on, *kretek* was manufactured like ordinary cigarettes with a paper wrapping. So is the method of lighting, something new, with a match or lighter.

The present *kretek* is indigenized and by far the overwhelming majority of smokers enjoy the present *kretek*. It is unique to Indonesia. But can we say that the sciences and technology involved in the production of the *kretek*, their principles, methodology, are also indigenized?

What if we study the sociology of *kretek*, which to the best of my memory has not been attempted? Though the subject is unique and indigenous the sociology is not, even though new concepts and methodology may be developed. This development would be part of the autonomous growth, not indigenization, because it would become part of the general repertoire of sociological concepts in the general science of sociology, such as 'caste', 'taboo' and 'amok'.

It is interesting to note that Lohia saw the rudiments of caste in modern Soviet Russia, based on the remarks of Khrushchev:

A study of caste in all its periods is not being attempted here. We are only concerned with the system of caste as it is today and as it probably has been in all periods of national decline and caste rigidity. In a sense, caste is a universal phenomenon. The tiny beginnings of its roots were laid bare by Mr Khrushchev when he bemoaned in present-day Russia, the unwillingness of persons with a higher education to do manual work. This rift between manual and brain work and evaluation of one as the lower and the other as the higher and the increasing complexity and permanency of this rift are behind the formation of caste. The Indian experience of caste goes farther than that of any other nation and all the world may have lessons to learn from it. (Lohia, 1979: 81)

The derogation of manual labour was found in numerous societies throughout history, but the form it developed in India was unique and all-pervasive in such a huge and complex society. Lohia correctly pointed out the need for others to learn from the Indian experience. He offered many significant, penetrating insights into the caste problem and the phenomena surrounding it, together with the attempts to replace the caste system, as hoped for by some sociologists.

He said:

Eminent sociologists like Max Weber have proved thoroughly wrong in their prognostications about this virus. They had thought that Europe-educated Indians bred to rational concepts and ways of life, would destroy caste on their return home. Little did they realize that these Europe-returned Indians would be drawn overwhelmingly from the ranks of the high-caste and would further reinforce the caste system with its exclusive marriages because of their education and high status. Speech against caste may well go with acts in furtherance of it. (Lohia, 1979: 95)

We have cited Lohia's views on the caste problem only in connection with the autonomous sociological tradition. There have been hundreds of publications on caste but the point we wish to emphasize is the kind of thinking and analytic approach exhibited by Lohia, though himself not an acclaimed or professional sociologist, is the foundation material for an autonomous social science tradition, generated and developed by indigenous scholars, with some possible assistance from foreign scholars, guided by the selection of problems from within the society, applying an independent concept of relevance in the collection and accumulation of research data and comparative attention to problems outside the region.

Lohia's original reflection on the caste system led him to discover what he called a new sociological law, that shrinkage and contraction of

opportunity and ability are a necessary consequence of caste. This process went on indefinitely at the expense of those at the bottom of the system while those at the top acquired new privileges. The backwardness of India, according to Lohia, is precisely due to this (Lohia, 1979: 119).

India is not lacking in original thinkers and scholars. A great number of autonomous studies of various subjects have been done. A tradition can be expected to emerge. By tradition, it is not meant the mere presence of disparate studies of local or regional subjects by indigenous scholars. Apart from the traits we have earlier cited, there is one significant, overriding trait of a tradition, that is, the continuous discussion of a set of major problems and ideas in the course of long duration, decades or centuries, reflecting the cumulative development of knowledge concerning particular subjects. An example is the discussion on the French Revolution or periodization in European history.

However, if a tradition is lacking, significant discovery in the field of knowledge, in our case, sociological thought, would be left neglected, as in the case of Ibn Khaldun's new science of society. It was the European tradition of social thinking that revived interest in Ibn Khaldun as the earliest known scholar who discovered the science of society now called sociology and also the science of history now called historiography.

This revival of interest by western sociologists and historians, and other scholars, is corrective of the general opinion of sociologists the world over that it was Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the French philosopher and founder of positivism, who introduced the science of sociology. This may well be the case in the European beginning of modern sociology. But it was Ibn Khaldun who, long before Comte, gave birth to sociology as a science which he called *ilm al-umran*.

There is always the probability that Comte was aware of Ibn Khaldun's writings through d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*, first published in Paris in 1697. I have not been able to verify yet whether the entry on Ibn Khaldun contains information on the laws of society and history, which he claimed as a new science. The important thing for us is to recognize Ibn Khaldun's earlier discovery of sociology for the simple reason that his new science of sociology may develop into the beginning of a tradition in the non-western world.

I would like to suggest here that training in sociology should include Ibn Khaldun as its founding father, just as political science and some other disciplines went back to Aristotle as their decisive origin for the non-western world. Ibn Khaldun's contribution is extremely relevant and generative of significant reflections on what is going on around people of the Third World, the corruption, decadence and instability of governments in power generally inimical to democracy and social justice, undermining development and insensitive to humanitarian values. Whatever

is one's view on the above, a study of the subject is highly relevant and significant to the understanding of the reality surrounding us.

Ibn Khaldun's sociology fits into the present understanding of the science and its attendant principle of objectivity. I do not argue here for my belief in objectivity and sociology as a science as this would lead to a digression from our main theme, the need for an autonomous tradition throughout the non-western world in each relevant unit of scholarship belonging to each particular tradition. I have explained the tradition of autonomous scholarship is already strong in the different countries such as those in America, Europe, Russia and Latin America.

I have also suggested what is meant by tradition as opposed to specific local studies that have not been entwined into the growth of a tradition moved and nourished by the main stream of sociological research from diverse tributaries that enables the rise of certain broad themes for cumulative discussion extending through a long period of time, years, decades, or centuries. Ibn Khaldun had offered us at least one such grand theme, that is his theory of solidarity of the group in power (*asabiyah*) and the law of three generations replacing that group by another one.

He based his general law on dynastic history. Mere nominal change of rulers does not affect the nature of the state. What affects it is the composition of the ruling group, the type of solidarity dominant over the rest of society. The group with its particular solidarity conditions the life of the state under its control. The life of the state, that is a dynasty, during his time and previous to that, rarely exceeds three generations or approximately 120 years. The dynamics and process of decline Ibn Khaldun explained empirically with a rich selection of historical data from several dynasties.³ The downfall is completed by the fourth generation if not earlier, though the name may remain longer.

An autonomous sociological tradition from North Africa or other Islamic areas may examine and test Ibn Khaldun's theory, whether it has general validity, not tied up to kings and dynasties but to states (republics) and political parties. Ibn Khaldun's concept would have to be replaced by political generation instead of dynastic genealogical generation. This is significant for us today in understanding the life span of powerful dominant political regimes.

Ibn Khaldun himself urged us to develop his new science of civilization. He felt he had dealt adequately with the nature of civilization and the problems connected with it. But he emphasized:

Perhaps some later (scholar), aided by the divine gifts of a sound mind and of solid scholarship, will penetrate into these problems in greater detail than we did here. A person who creates a new discipline does not have the task of enumerating (all) the (individual) problems connected with it. His task is to

specify the subject of the discipline and its various branches and the discussions connected with it. His successors, then, may gradually add more problems, until the (discipline) is completely (presented). (Ibn Khaldun, 1958: 481)

What Ibn Khaldun suggested is the autonomous sociological tradition. May I convey here, this message from Ibn Khaldun to the International Sociological Association, that in the coming World Congress of Sociology a session be created on the autonomous sociological tradition? This would alert sociologists throughout the world to pool their attention on this extremely vital need for the development of sociology.

Arising consequently from this autonomous perspective, may I add another suggestion to create new sessions? This is the sociology of the fools. I mean here the sociological fool, as opposed to its opposite counterpart, the sociological intellectual. If we have a long-standing session such as the sociology of the intellectuals in the world congresses, why not have one on the sociology of the fools? Permit me to explain what is meant by the sociological concept of the fool.

I started presenting the preliminary discussion on the topic of the fool in my book *Intellectuals in Developing Societies*, published in London in 1977 (Alatas, 1977a). The contract was signed in 1972, together with that for my other book, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (Alatas, 1977b). In it I suggested 14 characteristics to define the sociological concept of the fool and the concrete problems and events as the consequences of the fools wielding power in the developing societies. This type of leaders and administrators stamps its own peculiar imprint on whatever thinking and doing they undertake. When they are corrupt, their corruption bears the imprint of the fool. When they are honest, their honesty can be naive and immature.⁴

What I am suggesting here is to add another category of analysis to existing ones in the present pool of cognitive sociological conceptualization. This inclusion would effect a deeper and broader understanding of the problem and a more efficient method of discovering the solution. Take, for instance, our study of development. Should we not ask who is planning on controlling the process of development, the fool or the thinking group? We would raise this question even for the bus driver. Is he or she a fool of a driver or not? Is it of less importance to enquire whether our ruling elites belong to the category of the fool?

A Sri Lankan researcher on development, Godfrey Gunatilleke, revealed his concern on the quality of elites in development planning and execution, in particular the governing elites. His highly instructive analysis of the decisive influence of the ruling elites in development is that their shortcomings distort and undermine development and one of these is their intellectual capacity. He said:

At the end we come back to the intrinsic quality of these groups, their leadership capacity, the moral seriousness of their commitments and their executive capability to fulfill their modernizing function. It is meaningless to ask the question why a light weight boxer is not a heavy weight. (Gunatilleke, 1971: 61)

Hence the classification is necessary between the light weight and the heavy weight though we do not have to bother why one is not the other. For analysis purposes, we must take them as they are. To know what they are, the sociology of the fool and the intellectual are respectively necessary. The latter is already flourishing but the former has to be initiated.

The concept of the fool deals with its sociological function and effects as well as its generic type. The following are the 14 characteristics (Alatas, 1977a: 45). (1) The fool is not able to recognize a problem. (2) He, or she, is not able to solve it or has difficulty in understanding it. (3) He or she is not able to learn what is required. (4) He or she does not know the art of learning. (5) He or she does not admit to being a fool. (6) He or she does not think contextually in space and time, and in the dynamic relationship of various factors. (7) He or she reacts only to the immediate and cannot see beyond. (8) The fool's mind thinks in terms of limited cause and effect and not of successive cause and effect in several stages of analysis. (9) The fool is a creature of habit uncritical of the foundation of his or her own thinking. (10) He or she cannot genuinely reflect upon a problem or a serious situation. (11) The fool is inconsistent in his or her reasoning. (12) The fool's thinking is descriptive and not analytic. (13) He or she lacks mental energy and follows the line of least resistance. (14) The fool cannot discuss at a high level of abstraction without contradicting reality.

The above characteristics can be further increased but they are sufficient to isolate the fool from the intellectual and the intelligent person. As I explained in my book, a highly educated specialist can be a fool in his performance within his domain or when he judges on societal issues linked to his specialization. I have discussed this at length with empirical illustrations in my book.

However there is another highly interesting example. In 1960, the weekly *L'Express* in Paris published a series of extracts from the writings of American and Russian scientists on society in the year 2000, at the point of writing more than 40 years to come. They included works from Nobel Prize winners and members of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, and other prominent scientists whose qualifications could not be disputed.

Jacques Ellul, the well-known French critic of the technological society, said the visions of these scholars put science fiction in the shade. They claimed by the year 2000, voyages to the moon would be quite common and also inhabited artificial satellites. All food would be completely synthetic. World population would be stabilized after a fourfold increase.

Sea water and ordinary rocks would provide all the necessary minerals. Disease and famine would be wiped out. There would be universal hygienic control and inspection (Ellul, 1970: 64–5).

Furthermore, knowledge would be accumulated in electronic banks and transmitted directly to the human nervous system by means of coded electronic messages by passing the conscious circuit of the brain. In the interest of population control, artificial insemination would be employed. Natural reproduction would be forbidden. Eugenic engineering would attempt to generate the ideal masculine and feminine type through in vitro fertilization of a carrier uterus. All these to herald the golden age of science to usher in a more noble, more beautiful and more harmonious humanity, assuring the triumph of peace, liberty and reason.

Those were fine words with no substance behind them, said Ellul, and 'down-at-the-heel platitudes that would gladden the heart of the pettiest politician' (Ellul, 1970: 66). His following remarks were most revealing. He said:

We are forced to conclude that our scientists are incapable of any but the emptiest platitudes when they stray from their specialities. It makes one think back on the collection of mediocrities accumulated by Einstein when he spoke of God, the state, peace, and the meaning of life. It is clear that Einstein, extraordinary mathematical genius that he was, was no Pascal; he knew nothing of political or human reality, or, in fact, anything at all outside his mathematical reach. The banality of Einstein's remarks in matters outside his speciality is astonishing as his genius within it. It seems as though the specialized application of all one's faculties in a particular area inhibits the consideration of things in general. Even J. Robert Oppenheimer, who seems receptive to a general culture, is not outside this judgement. His political and social declarations, for example, scarcely go beyond the level of those of the man in the street. (Ellul, 1970: 67)

The scientists referred to earlier, according to Ellul, were not even at the level of Einstein and Oppenheimer. Ellul was concerned about the gap between their enormous power and their critical ability, which to him was null. He warned: 'To wield power well entails a certain faculty of criticism, discrimination, judgement, and option. It is impossible to have confidence in men who apparently lack those faculties' (Ellul, 1970: 67).

What Ellul was discussing had prevailed for a long time in different areas of the exercise of power, not at the apex of scientific utopian expression, but at the level of state administration and leadership. Ellul discovered the fool at the top of the scientific hierarchy. His book, *The Technological Society*, was published in English in 1964. I came across it after my book was published in 1977. If I were to raise the question who is the fool, Ellul or those scientists he criticized, definitely my reply would be not Ellul, but those scientists. They conform to my conceptual definition.

Coming back to the vast region of the globe, the non-western world of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the fools in power have become a very serious problem of development. They have disturbed the process of development and modernization to the point that we might separate one from the other, unlike what happened in the West. Norman Jacobs, a perceptive sociologist whose study of Thailand may be considered as an encouragement to the autonomous development of Southeast Asian sociology, significantly titled his book *Modernization without Development* (Jacobs, 1971).

Thailand's lack of development in the overall qualitative sense is due to its patrimonial system of leadership and administration. It has been obvious to indigenous scholars and politicians truly concerned with the progress of their countries, that a rise in production and the national income can be brought about by a highly corrupt regime with a dubious intellectual standard and increasingly damaging the countries' environment, further creating serious societal problems. The fools in power, particularly those already infected by corruption, have greatly distorted the development process.

Sociological research in the non-western world has to draw its own radius of thinking. In the non-western world, preventive sociology has to be emphasized centred around certain problems such as poverty, corruption, degradation of the environment, human rights violation, unjust and backward political systems, and a host of other serious problems. The philosophical background of sociology, like all other sciences, is preventive. Durkheim did not study anomic suicide to promote it. The sociologist of disaster does not aim to welcome it.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the autonomous development of the social sciences in each region cannot be isolated from interest in the West. I have in mind as an example the spread of the coffee-drinking culture throughout the world with the terrific impetus given by the West during its days of imperial expansion. There were a lot of interesting historical sociological events surrounding coffee houses or cafes in Europe, in particular the role of cafes in the French Revolution.

An indigenous scholar from South Yemen may take up this issue and show how coffee houses originated from the Muslim Sufi movement in the beginning of the 16th century. The effect of coffee enhanced the performance of their religious exercises, and it was therefore considered good to drink coffee. From the mosque it later spread to the towns, as coffee served as a commercial drink in coffee houses where people met to listen to music or play chess. By the 18th century, coffee-drinking in cafes played a significant role in Arabia and North Africa.⁵

Events surrounding cafes in Europe and the Muslim world are of great sociological and historical interest. The sociology of the coffee house has

to consider both the Middle Eastern origin and western development of coffee-drinking and the coffee house. Hence autonomous development means the choice of new themes with relevant connection to western affairs as well as conceptual contribution to general and universal theory formation. In the sociology of religion, it concerns the employment of pleasant stimuli to attain religious satisfaction at a high level of seriousness.

The growth of a genuine autonomous tradition throughout the world would have a profound effect on the role and influence of sociology on human development as a whole. New attention would be given to subjects hitherto outside our radius of thinking. This would entail the repositioning of our sociological perspective. We have to review our conception of relevant knowledge of sociology. For instance, in the non-western world, there is no scholarly interest in the American Revolution of 1775. There is a great deal of relevance of the ideas behind the Revolution, the conception of social order and its institutions, to the goals of present-day attempts at building a body politic in the non-western world.

Let us not confuse this with the politics of American governments, the various social problems in America and the conflict of values and philosophy. The modern world development in the organization of a body politic, the democratic as well as its opposite, historically originated with the American Revolution. A constitution incorporating large segments of human rights with popular support guided by thoughtful and committed founders linked to the democratic philosophy, was introduced for the first time on a grand scale through the American Revolution despite certain shortcomings and subsequent violations at the practical level.

One issue that requires urgent attention is the ideal of excellence pursued by all societies throughout history with no exception. How can the American Revolution contribute to the ideal of excellence of the present developing societies? The same applies to the French and Russian Revolutions. Does it not apply to the revolution in sociology?

A revolution in sociology would entail not only the growth of conceptual development sustained by the various parts of the world but also the overthrow of sectarian obstructions to the unification of sociological thinking as opposed to conclusions. By sect is meant the trend in conceptualization and methodology that excludes others from a similar position of authority and significance.

I do not mean here the philosophical sectarianism such as Marxist or Capitalist sociology, but rigidly held outlooks such as functionalism, structuralism, formal sociology, the qualitative or quantitative approach and the trend towards fragmentation. I do not mean fragmentation in the selection of themes but in the manner the themes are handled with an outlook ignoring wider background connections.

The unification of sociological thinking is to recognize the relevance

and validity of the various permutations of sociology as parts of its growing corpus of knowledge and intrinsic nature.⁶ Macro and micro studies, specializations in certain areas constitute sociology as a whole.

Finally, we should seriously consider the ever-expanding boundary of sociology just as it is with the sciences. In concrete sociohistorical terms, how do we expand the boundary? The present terror in the world can only be studied adequately with an extension of the sociological boundary. This would require a special investigation. Durkheim raised this issue at the time when sociology was considered as a new science. He was concerned with the relation between history and sociology, that the sociologist should be familiar with the realm of history and vice versa (Giddens, 1972: 79).

The merging of interests between sociology and other sciences is an ongoing process. An example at hand is the study on global climate change undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The study of climate change and its impact on past and present cultures has become a cooperative venture between the social scientist, the historian and the climatologist (The Impact Team, 1977).

There has been a growing recognition of this need among some sociologists interested in the development of the discipline. There have also been more and more collaborative efforts between sociologists and others for the simple reason that the end results of scientific analysis regarding certain problems such as those within climatology are sociological phenomena, and this in turn may lead to a subdiscipline in sociology, such as historical sociology of climate change, the sociology of disaster and others already in existence, that requires knowledge of the sciences of nature and the physical universe.

Notes

1. For a more detailed exposition of an autonomous tradition, see Alatas (2002).
2. Den Hollander's book is a comparison between European and American thought and action. In addition to scholarly attention, I cherish fond memory of den Hollander, who was my teacher at the University of Amsterdam.
3. A more detailed explanation of Ibn Khaldun's theory of the rise and fall of dynasties would be published in a monograph by me, which was in press for publication in 1958 by a Dutch publisher in Bandung. The publishing house was seized by the Sukarno government during its crisis with the Dutch government. I had to postpone its publication indefinitely, owing to other pressures. The title is *Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun and the Origin of Sociology*.
4. For explanation of the concept and its relevance in analysis, see Alatas (1977a)
5. On the origin and spread of coffee-drinking see *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1978) Vol. IV, cit. 'kahwa', pp. 449-55.
6. On a discussion of the concept of relevance, see S. F. Alatas (2001).

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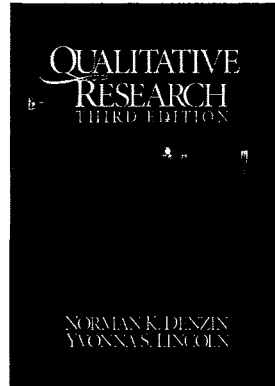
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