

Syed Farid Alatas

*Intellectual and Structural
Challenges to Academic
Dependency*

SEPHIS



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This lecture was presented by Dr Syed Farid Alatas, Head, Department of Malay Studies and Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore at a workshop on “Academic Dependency in the South” in February 2008 organized by SEPHIS and the Asian Development Research Institute in Patna, India.

The introduction was given by Dr Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff from the Asian Development Research Institute, Ranchi, India

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INTRODUCTION: ACADEMIC DEPENDENCY IN THE SOUTH

From 5-7 February 2008 the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS) organized a workshop on Academic Dependency in the South in cooperation with the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI) in Patna, India. The workshop had as main objectives:

1. The assessment of the relation between place and career-building among post-doctoral historians residing in the South.
2. The development of a flexible career model for historians residing in the South that can be appropriated in different contexts.
3. The aim of this new career model is to breed professional historians in the South who can cope with academic dependency in its various manifestations and possibly reduce this dependency.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

A 2002 report on “Social Science Research Capacity in South Asia”¹ argued that the assignment of national identities has become very complicated in the contemporary world in which various categories of globally mobile people are able to lay claim to – and are being claimed by – more than one national context. Indeed, the existence of a category of the so-called globalized academy is now acknowledged by many scholars who also argue that Internet and other communications technologies “level the playing field” for participation in global academia. Yet, some feel that, in theory, these technologies could “perpetuate or exacerbate the inherent positional inequalities in the system of global academia and scholarly production of knowledge.”² In other words, although these scholars acknowledge that place might play a different role in the contemporary world, the location of people has not yet become

¹ *Economic and Political Weekly* XXXVII (35), 31 August to 6 September, 2002: 3604-3661.

² Eric C. Thompson, *Current Sociology*, 54 (1), January 2006: 41-61.

irrelevant. There is, however, limited knowledge of the costs and benefits of academic globalization. More in particular, not much is known about the impact of place among academics located in the South. There seems to be an urge to know more about the net result of such a calculus today for various regions in the South.

Syed Farid Alatas³ has argued that in international social science scholarship an academic division of labour exists between those who produce ideas and theory, on the one hand, and those who engage primarily in empirical work, on the other. He describes global academia as characterized by a “centre-periphery continuum or structure of academic dependency”, particularly in – but not limited to – the social sciences and humanities.⁴ From the few empirical studies carried out so far we learn that in some regions in the South the best students who are interested in an academic career invariably leave for Western universities. What is more, in these regions those who obtain Ph.D. degrees abroad do not want to come back unlike twenty or thirty years ago. Reasons given for this are first, the shrinking of employment in the higher education sector, and second, the intellectually deadening atmosphere in most universities and research institutions in the regions in the South. Generally, even among those who have obtained their Ph.D. degrees locally, there is little incentive to excel, except as a means to move out of the system – into a non-academic career or simply to go abroad. The result is not only a shortage of high standard published research studies but also a shortage of researchers who are located in one of these countries belonging to the South.

Although the problem seems particularly acute in the field of economics, among many historians in the South who go abroad to get advanced research degrees there is also a tendency not to come back or to come back and choose other employment or select teaching rather than research posts at home. In general, the number of historians located in the South seems shrinking and so is their research output in terms of publications. However, there seems to

³ Syed Farid Alatas, “Academic Dependency and the Global Division of Labour in the Social Sciences”, *Current Sociology* 51 (6), November 2003: 599-613.

⁴ Syed Farid Alatas, 2003: 610, footnote 5.

be great intra-regional as well as intra-national variation in these academically “peripheral” nations.⁵

One of the conclusions of the above-mentioned report on South Asia (2002) was that unless something can be done to revive the Ph.D. programs in the various South Asian countries, the alleged shortage of research and researchers would remain. We believe, however, that in order to understand as well as redress this phenomenon, it is necessary to go beyond the Ph.D. level and concentrate on the lives of post-doctoral fellows located in various regions in the South. Increasingly, historians in the South pursue doctoral degrees. As Ph.D. students they receive funding and other facilities locally or abroad. The path of a Ph.D. student is never smooth and certainly not of those who are located in the South. Yet, enough information is available on the problems they face ranging from writing proposals to those that are related to the mental stress of Ph.D. candidates. No knowledge is available, however, on the post-doctoral lives of people located in the South. One wonders for instance about the career of those who after obtaining their Ph.D. degrees in the North have returned to their place of origin in the South. One equally wonders about the career of those in the South who received their Ph.D. degree locally. It is thought that the situation and problems faced by post-docs residing in the South vary from those of pre-doctorals. We also believe that their lives merit separate attention in order to understand why the number of researchers in the South as well as the number of their publications is much smaller than that of those located in countries not belonging to the South. The aim of the SEPHIS workshop in Patna, India, was not only to enhance the number of researchers in the South and upgrade their output but also rectifying regional differences as well as strengthening the position of those who are placed in the so-called periphery in the South. The workshop was meant to foster horizontal academic transactions among historians working in the South that do not circumvent the North and are based on a rediscovery of specific local specialties and expertise.

⁵ Eric C. Thompson, 2006: 41.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE SOUTH

When preparing the workshop, we were interested in understanding the academic endeavors of post-doctoral social scientists located in the South. We wanted to know what happens to them practically, professionally and psychologically. One of the aims of the workshop was to evaluate whether there are some common factors that determine what we like to call the “post-doctoral slump” among scholars who live in the South, which separates them from post-doctoral scholars in the North and necessitates a different career model.⁶ We realize, of course, that there is much diversity within the South.⁷

Similarities among post-doctoral social scientists in the South may lie in the fact that all possess different bodies of knowledge that can be shared with other social scientists in the South and that can be integrated to produce knowledge with an important regional identity that can compete with social science in the North. Simultaneously, they face scarcity and uneven allocation of research funding or technological equipment and unequal access to resources such as libraries, journals and in general to a particular body of knowledge. They also frequently have to cope with poverty, inequality, state interference, politicized brutalities and a new imperial order peddled as globalization, which often puts them down. In short, the size, growth and composition of their output is affected by the general socio-economic and political position of the place they live in under conditions of globalization and by the status of social sciences and scientists in that place.

It appears that the most crucial years are those just after finishing a Ph.D. when one is neither part of the “student world” nor part of the “professorate”. Many drop out of the profession at this

⁶ Paul Deslandes, “Holding Patterns: Post-doctoral Survival Strategies for British Historians”, paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the North American Conference on British Studies, Boston 19-21 November 1999.

⁷ See the paper by Akilagpa Sawyerr of the Association of African Universities on “Challenges Facing African Universities: Selected Issues” for developments in the African context (February 2004).

stage and opt for other, non-academic careers. Yet, “keeping them in the profession” does not guarantee an increase of (qualitative and quantitative) output or solves the problems of dependency. In fact, the problems they face are diverse and differ not only within a nation but also from nation to nation in the South. African, Latino and Asian historians have to cope with the particularities of the local contexts in which they work that have different effects on their outputs. The workshop aimed at understanding these particularities and exploring how they affect the outlook and output of scholars in various places in the South.

Not only that, though these countries all face more or less academic dependency on the North, their coping capacities are varied and need to be included in our inventory. This will help us to formulate a career model, which in turn might produce scholars in the South who can learn from each other’s work directly without having been routed through the North. In this way they can develop alternative bodies of knowledge that can compete with the dominant and undemocratic knowledge they now still depend on.⁸

THE PROBLEM IN CONTEXT

The precarious position of social scientists residing in the South is not independent from what is done or not done by scholars in the North. Though it should be recognised that there is variation within the North (as there is in the South), generally the problems faced by social scientists in the North are of a different nature than those described above. Besides, those who migrated from the South may often continue to work on the South, but few have an inclination to return once they have obtained prestigious positions in academic institutions in the North. What is more, work and fame of those who migrated is much more acclaimed than those who stayed behind, or returned as vividly described by Ramachandra Guha, in a recent

⁸ See Su-Hoon Lee, “The Rise of East Asia and East Asian Social Science’s quest for Self-Identity”, in *Journal of World-Systems Research. Festschrift for Immanuel Wallerstein Part II*, Vol. VI (3), Fall/Winter 2000, Special Issue: 768-783.

article on “The Ones Who Stayed Behind.”⁹ Guha also shows, however, that the position of social scientists who resided and worked in, for instance, India during the 1960s and the 1970s, enjoyed a much higher status than their colleagues in India now.

Actually, the present problems of social scientists in the South are the result of the fact that they gradually have (some more than others) become institutional and theoretical dependent on (scholars in) the North. This academic dependency has been discussed in great detail by scholars such as Syed Farid Alatas, based in Singapore, who concluded in one of his papers that this dependence has resulted in, “an uncritical and imitative approach to ideas and concepts” from the West. We argue that this dependency has resulted in the above-described general regression among social scientists based in the South and in a marginalisation of their works. Scholars based in the South are therefore challenged to prove themselves (once again) as internationally established first-rate scholars equipped with journals in which scholars of the North wish to publish their best works (and not the other way round as is the case at present). They can only do this by liberating themselves from the Northern way of defining problem areas, methods, and standards of excellence.

For this, they first have to empirically show how this dependency on Western social science and scientists has resulted in the vanishing of works and workers of excellence in the South. Secondly, scholars in the South will have to develop alternative modes of defining problem areas, methods and standards of excellence that make the modes in the economically more developed North, irrelevant. The SEPHIS workshop in Patna was meant as a first step in this direction. The workshop was attended by twenty-five workshop participants, historians and social scientists almost all based in the South (two Nigerians, two Argentineans, two Filipinos, one Rwandean, and many Indians). The key note speaker was Syed Farid Alatas, Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology of the National University of Singapore, whose paper “Intellectual and Structural Challenges to Academic Dependency” will follow.

⁹ Ramachandra Guha, “The Ones Who Stayed Behind”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXVIII (12, 13), 22-28/29 March to 4 April, 2003: 1121-1124.

INTELLECTUAL AND STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES TO ACADEMIC DEPENDENCY

DEFINING ACADEMIC DEPENDENCY

The problem of academic dependency presents itself to us at two levels. At the structural level much of the solution has to do with the awareness, will and resolve of politicians, bureaucrats and administrators, without which the structures of academic dependency cannot be dismantled. Scholars have more autonomy and control where overcoming academic dependency at the intellectual level is concerned. The intellectual activity of generating alternative discourses at several levels with a view towards creating an autonomous social science tradition is discussed in this paper.

My main concern as far as the state of the social sciences in developing societies or the South is the problem of Eurocentrism and the context within which this exists, that is, academic dependency. I owe my interest in these topics to the life long intellectual concerns of my father, Syed Hussein Alatas (1928-2007) who wrote on, among other things, the captive mind (Alatas, S.H. 1969a, 1972, 1974) and on intellectual imperialism (1969b, 2000). The idea of intellectual imperialism is an important starting point for the understanding of academic dependency. Intellectual imperialism is analogous to political and economic imperialism in that it refers to the “domination of one people by another in their world of thinking” (Alatas, S.H. 2000: 24). Intellectual imperialism was more direct in the colonial period, whereas today it has more to do with the West’s control of and influence over the flow of social scientific knowledge rather than its ownership and control of academic institutions. Indeed, this form of hegemony was “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 remained independent during that period” (Alatas, S.H. 2006: 7-8).

Intellectual imperialism is the context within which academic dependency exists. Academic dependency theory is a dependency theory of the global state of the social sciences. It defines academic

dependency as a condition in which the knowledge production of certain scholarly communities are conditioned by the development and growth of knowledge of other scholarly communities to which the former is subjected. Then relations of interdependence between two or more scientific communities, and between these and global transactions in knowledge, assumes the form of dependency when some scientific communities (those located in the knowledge powers) can expand according to certain criteria of development and progress, while other scientific communities (such as those in the developing societies) can only do this as a reflection of that expansion, which generally has negative effects on their development according to the same criteria. The psychological dimension to this dependency, captured by the notion of the captive mind (Alatas, S.H. 1969a, 1972, 1974), is such that the dependent scholar is more a passive recipient of research agenda, theories and methods from the knowledge powers (Alatas, S.F. 2003: 603).

Today's knowledge powers constitute a kind of "world system" of knowledge in which the three core countries, that is, the United States, Great Britain and France, determine the nature of the discourse (Kuwayam & Bremen, 1997: 54). According to Garreau and Chekki it is no coincidence that the great economic powers are also the great social science powers (Garreau 1985: 64, 81, 89; see also Chekki, 1987). This is only partially true as some economic powers are actually very peripheral as knowledge producers, Japan being an interesting example.

The mode of conditioning of the captive mind in academically dependent social science communities is determined by the dimension of academic dependency that is operating. These are (a) dependence on ideas; (b) dependence on the media of ideas; (c) dependence on the technology of education; (d) dependence on aid for research and teaching; (e) dependence on investment in education; and (f) dependence of scholars in developing societies on demand in the knowledge powers for their skills (Alatas, S.F. 2003: 604).

What is very crucial about the structure of academic dependency is the global knowledge division of labour which is founded on a three-fold division as follows: (a) the division between theoretical and empirical intellectual labour; (b) the division between

other country and own country studies; and (c) the division between comparative and single case studies.

I have elaborated on this and given empirical examples elsewhere (Alatas, S.F. 2003: 607). While there has been recognition of the phenomenon of academic dependency, there have been few attempts to delineate its structure. Among the exceptions are the works of Altbach (1975, 1977) and Garreau (1985, 1988, 1991).

In the section that follows, I shall discuss the first dimension of academic dependency in the context of the related problem of Eurocentrism in the social sciences.

ACADEMIC DEPENDENCY AT THE LEVEL OF IDEAS:
EUROCENTRISM IN THE CURRICULA

Academic dependency at the level of ideas is the general condition of knowledge in the South. Although scholarly communities in developing societies have tirelessly pointed out ethnocentric biases in the Western social sciences, the emergence of autonomous, alternative theoretical traditions has yet to be seen, and the dependence on theories and concepts generated in the context of Western historical backgrounds and cultural practices continues. This problem of dependence is linked to the pervasiveness of imitation, a condition conceptualized by Syed Hussein Alatas as mental captivity.

Alatas originated and developed the concept of the captive mind to conceptualize the nature of scholarship in the developing world, particularly in relation to Western dominance in the social sciences and humanities. The captive mind is defined as an “uncritical and imitative mind dominated by an external source, whose thinking is deflected from an independent perspective” (Alatas, S.H. 1974: 692). The external source is Western social science and humanities and the uncritical imitation influences all the constituents of scientific activity such as problem-selection, conceptualization, analysis, generalization, description, explanation, and interpretation (Alatas, S.H. 1972: 11). Among the characteristics of the captive mind are the inability to be creative and raise original problems, the inability to devise original analytical methods, and alienation from the main issues of indigenous society. The captive mind is trained almost

entirely in the Western sciences, reads the works of Western authors, and is taught predominantly by Western teachers, whether in the West itself or through their works available in local centres of education. Mental captivity is also found in the suggestion of solutions and policies. Furthermore, it reveals itself at the levels of theoretical as well as empirical work.

Alatas elaborated the concept in the 1972 and 1974 papers, but had raised the problem in the 1950s referring to the “wholesale importation of ideas from the western world to eastern societies” without due consideration of their socio-historical context, as a fundamental problem of colonialism (Alatas, S.H. 1956). He had also suggested that the mode of thinking of colonized peoples paralleled political and economic imperialism. Hence, the expression academic imperialism (Alatas, S.H. 1969b; 2000: 23-45), the context within which the captive mind appears.

Academic dependency at the level of ideas should be seen in terms of the domination of social science teaching and research by the captive mind, the consequence of which is the persistence of Eurocentrism as an outlook and orientation as well as a condition. In teaching, for example, a survey of course syllabi for the history of sociological theory as well as sociological theory will reveal a number of characteristics of Eurocentrism. These are the subject-object dichotomy, Europeans in the foreground, Europeans as originators, and the dominance of European categories and concepts.

In most sociological theory textbook or writings on the history of social theory, the subject-object dichotomy is a dominant, albeit unarticulated principle of organization. Europeans are the ones that do the thinking and writing, they are the social theorists and social thinkers, what we might call the knowing subject. If at all non-Europeans appear in the texts they are objects of study of the European theorists featured and not as knowing subjects, that is, as sources of sociological theories and ideas. If we take the nineteenth century as an example, the impression is given during the period that Europeans such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim were thinking about the nature of society and its development, there were no thinkers in Asia and Africa doing the same. Therefore, the only non-Europeans

that appear in these works are those usually nameless ones, anonymous ones mentioned or referred to by the European thinkers whose ideas are being discussed.

The absence of non-European thinkers in these accounts is particularly glaring in cases where non-Europeans had actually influenced the development of social thought. Typically, a history of social thought text or a course on social thought and theory would cover theorists such as Montesquieu, Vico, Comte, Spencer, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Toennies, Sombart, Mannheim, Pareto, Sumner, Ward, Small, and others. Generally, non-Western thinkers are excluded. Even when they are, they tend to be cited out of historical interest rather than as sources of ideas. For example, Ibn Khaldun¹ is occasionally referred to in histories of social thought but is rarely seen as a source of relevant sociological theories and concepts. He is merely regarded as a precursor or proto-sociologist.

What the subject-object dichotomy does is to place Europeans and later, North American scholars in the foreground in the social sciences. One interesting exception, as far as sociology is concerned, is the work of Becker and Barnes in their *Social Thought from Lore to Science*. This was first published in 1938 and contains many pages discussing the ideas of Ibn Khaldun (Becker & Barnes, 1961, vol. I: 266-279). They say that the first writer after Polybius to apply modern-like ideas in historical sociology was not a European but Ibn Khaldun (Becker & Barnes, 1961, vol. I: 266). A few scholars like Becker and Barnes in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were responsible for making Ibn Khaldun known in the West. Becker and Barnes also discussed the influence of Ibn Khaldun's ideas on some European thinkers. Although these influences have been recognized in some early studies until today they are hardly discussed in mainstream sociological theory textbooks and courses.

¹ 'Abd al-Rahman Abu Zayd ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun was born on 1 Ramadan/5 May 732 AH/1332 AD. After receiving a customary education in the traditional sciences ibn Khaldun held posts in various courts in North Africa and Spain. After a number of unsuccessful stints in office he withdrew into seclusion to write his *Muqaddimah*, a prolegomena to the study of history which was completed in 1378 AD and which introduces his *'ilm al-'umran* (science of civilization).

The consequence of this is that the West, particularly the Americans, British, French and Germans, are seen as the sole originators of ideas in the social sciences. The question of the multicultural origins of the social sciences is not raised. Many social thinkers from India, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia during the nineteenth and early twentieth century who were contemporaneous with Marx, Weber and Durkheim are either only briefly mentioned in works on the history of sociology or totally ignored. Examples of such thinkers are José Rizal (Philippines, 1861-1896), Benoy Kumar Sarkar (India, 1887-1949), and Yanagita, Kunio (Japan, 1875-1962).

A more serious consequence of all of this is that what dominates in the social sciences are theories, concepts and categories in social sciences that were developed in Europe and North America. This domination has been at the expense of non-European ideas and concepts. I had mentioned earlier that interest in Ibn Khaldun tends to be historical. There has never been much interest in studying his concepts with a view to developing a theoretical perspective for sociological studies. While there are some exceptions, that is, attempts to develop a neo-Khaldunian sociology, they remain marginal to mainstream social science teaching and research.² Another example, come from the study of religion. It is astonishing to me that the social scientific study of religion does not take into account the conceptual vocabulary of the various religions in its presentation of concepts. Rather it draws for its concepts almost exclusively from the Christian Western tradition with the belief that these concepts are of universal value. While that may be true, it is equally true that the concepts of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism have the same potential to be universalized and brought into the social sciences.

REVERSING ACADEMIC DEPENDENCY VIA
WRITING AND RESEARCH

The logical consequence of the critique of Eurocentrism in the social sciences is to urge and agitate for a kind of intellectual movement

² For these exceptions see Gellner (1981: chap. 1), Michaud (1981), Carre (1988) and Alatas (1993).

that would eventually result in an autonomous tradition of the social sciences. This tradition would generate and apply universal social science thinking in an autonomous fashion to specific problems in a way that is not imitative and uncritical conceptually and methodologically (Alatas, S.H. 2006: 9). It would result in what I have called alternative discourses in the social sciences. Alternative discourses are defined as:

those which are informed by local/regional historical experiences and cultural practices in the same way that the Western social sciences are. Being alternative means a turn to philosophies, epistemologies, histories, and the arts, other than those of the Western tradition. These are all to be considered as potential sources of social science theories and concepts, which would decrease academic dependence on the world social science powers. Therefore, it becomes clear that the emergence and augmentation of alternative discourses is identical to the process of universalizing and internationalizing the social science. It should also be clear that alternative discourses refer to good social science because they are more conscious of the relevance of the surroundings and the problems stemming from the discursive wielding of power by the social sciences.... As such, alternative discourses could be advocated for Western social science itself (Alatas, S.F. 2006: 82-83).

The practice of alternative discourses in the social sciences stands for universalization at varying degrees of universality:

1. At the simplest level, relevant social science would insist on a cautious application of Western theory to the local situation. An example of this would be economic dependency theory.
2. At a higher level of universality, both indigenous and Western theory are applied to the local context.
3. At yet another level of universality, local, Western and other indigenous theories and concepts (that is, indigenous to other non-Western societies) are applied to the local setting. I have in mind as an example, the application of Ibn Khaldun's theory of state formation to the Mongol conquest of China.
4. The highest level of universality refers to the application of indigenous theory from within and without one's own society to areas outside of one's own area.

Levels two to three require increasing degrees of creativity. Our success with reversing academic dependency will be determined by our ability, not merely as individuals but as collectivities and institutions, to push the limits and boundaries of such creativity.

Consider as an example the study of religion. Social scientific concepts originate from cultural terms in everyday language. As such they present problems when brought into scientific discourse and used to talk about areas and periods outside of those of their origins. The result is a distortion of the phenomena that they are applied to. By the 18th century “religion”, from the Latin *religio*, came to be used as a scientific concept, referring to belief systems other than Christianity. When “religion” is applied to beliefs other than Christianity, for example, Islam or Hinduism, there is an implicit or explicit comparison with Christianity, which results in an elision of reality and a cultural Christianization of these other belief systems in the sense that it is the characteristics of Christianity which are attributed to these other “religions”. This has become a problem in the social sciences because of the fact that it was European Christendom that became dominant culturally, resulting in the cognitive hegemony of European knowledge. This does, however, suggest the possibility of alternative constructions of other religions. This would require the study of the various and not just Christian-originated constructions of different belief systems.

According to Smith, Hinduism is a particularly false conceptualization, one that is conspicuously incompatible with any adequate understanding of the religious outlook of the Hindu. Even the term “Hindu” [an Indian or non-Muslim inhabitant of India] was unknown to the classical Hindus. “Hinduism” as a concept they certainly did not have (Smith, 1964: 61, cited in Frykenberg, 1989: 102, n. 3). The term “Hindu” has its origins in antiquity as the Indo-Aryan name of the river Indus, which is its Greek transliteration (Smith, 1964: 249, n. 46, cited in Frykenberg, 1989: 83).³ It is from this usage that the terms “Hindu” and “Hinduism” gradually acquired their descriptive and geographical denotations. Muslim scholars such

³ Smith’s source is Spiegel (1881, Vol. 1, lines 17-18, A, line 25: 50, 54, 246).

as al-Bīrūnī (A.D. 973-), writing in Arabic, used the term *al-Hind* to refer to the Indian subcontinent, but when they referred to the people of that subcontinent or aspects thereof they were referring to what they considered the indigenous and non-Muslim inhabitants of India. In Persian and Urdu the corresponding geographical term to *al-Hind* was *Hindustān*. Things *Hindustānī* referred to whatever that was indigenous to India and non-Muslim (Frykenberg, 1989: 84). The English “Hindu” probably derived from the Persian. The term “Hindu” appears in the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* texts of the sixteenth century (O’Connell, 1973: 340-3, cited in Frykenberg, 1989: 84), probably as a result of Muslim influence. The usage here is consistent with that in the Muslim texts of the premodern Arabs and Persians. Even in the modern period, this negative definition of Hinduism is found as evident in the Hindu Marriage Act. The Act defines a Hindu, among other things, as one “who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion...” (Derret, 1963: 18-19).

The terms “Hindu” and “Hinduism” in reference to religion, and a unitary one at that, was for the most part, a modern development. In the eighteenth century it began to be used to denote an Aryan, Brahmanical or Vedic-based high culture and religion by European Orientalists such as Halhed, Jones and Müller (Frykenberg, 1989: 85-86). It is this usage that was adopted by the early Indian nationalists themselves like Ramohun Roy, Gandhi and Nehru (Frykenberg, 1989: 86). This “new” religion was founded on the ontology and epistemology contained in the *Varnāśramadharmā* and encompassed the entire cosmos, detailing as part of its vision a corresponding stratified social structure (Frykenberg, 1989: 86).

What is important in these developments as far as the intellectual Christianization of Indian beliefs systems is concerned is that (i) the belief systems of the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent (excluding Muslims, Jews, Christians and Parsis) came to be regarded as religion; (ii) these beliefs systems were seen to constitute a single religion; and (iii) were founded on a system of Brahmanical doctrines based on the *Catur-Veda* (Four Vedas) (Frykenberg, 1989: 86). It is in these senses that characteristics of Christianity were read into Indian beliefs.

Gradually, the newly-christened Hinduism also came to encompass the “low” tradition or what is nowadays referred to as “popular”, “temple”, “bhakti”, “village”, or “tribal” Hinduism (Frykenberg, 1989: 87).

This is a construction at odds with indigenous thinking and experience as there was never such a thing as a single all-encompassing religion (or *dharma*, for that matter) called Hinduism or any other name that can be traced to the Vedas and that characterize the beliefs of the non-Muslim, non-Jewish, non-Christian, non-Parsi population of India. Instead, what happened was a process of reification, that is, an ideal type of the “Hindu” religion was constructed and assumed to be a description of the real Indian society. As Deshpande suggests, this is a “case of simulated identity which over the years has been accepted as true identity” (Deshpande, 1985, cited in Frykenberg, 1989: 101).

Looking at South Indian examples, Frykenberg tells us how this happened in practical terms beginning in the nineteenth century. Modern Hinduism is a

form of corporate and organized and “syndicated” religion which arose in south India and by which highly placed and influential groups of Brahmans, supported by Brahmanized Non Brahmans, did most of the defining, the manipulating, and the organizing of the essential elements of what gradually became, for practical purposes, a dynamic new religion. Moreover, this process of reification, this defining and organizing of elements which they did, occurred with the collaboration, whether witting or unwitting, with those who governed the land (Frykenberg, 1989: 89).

This was facilitated by the process centralization, rationalization, and bureaucratization of information (Dykes, 1854: 232, cited in Frykenberg, 1989: 89) which had two bases. One was the interaction between local officials and the rulers, examples of which are the patronage of cultural events and the policy with respect to temples and their administration. The latter entailed the collection and preservation of information (historical, archaeological, artistic) (Frykenberg, 1989: 89, 91, 92, 94) that served to concretize a concept that was gradually developing in the minds of colonial scholars and administrators, and local elites.

In the previous section it was suggested that the intellectual Christianization of “religion” is a special case of the application of an exclusive definition of religion. The exclusivity of the definition is smuggled into the concept unwittingly. The result is a specific type of construction of religion determined in the first place by the elements smuggled into the concept of religion to begin with. I have argued that the elements smuggled into the understanding of Islam and “Hinduism” are derived from Christianity.

The application of a universal concept of religion would not result in such constructions of individual religions because the elements that make up the universal concept of religion are derived from all religions, apply to all of them with varying degrees of significance and are, therefore, neutral, in the sense that one is not led by the very concept of religion to read into a particular religion the traits of another. The neutrality of the universal concept of religion would extend to all related concepts in the study of religion. A universal concept of religion implies neutrality for all other concepts applied in the description and analytical study of religion. The reverse is also true. A non-universal concept of religion, such as an exclusive one, would render all other concepts in the study of religion non-universal.

Therefore, the use of the conceptual vocabulary of one religion to talk about another is not in itself a problem if the concept of religion in operation is the universal one. For example, in the sociology of religion concepts such as sect and denomination are defined in terms of another concept, that of the church. Since the idea of the church as a religious organization does not exist in other religions, the use of concepts like denomination and sect for other religions runs the risk of resulting in an intellectual Christianization of these religions.

We may, however, go beyond the critique of the intellectual Christianization of Islam or Hinduism and study alternative constructions of these religions. An example would be Al-Biruni on what is now called Hinduism. Abū al-Rayhān Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Bīrūnī (/973 – 445/1048) aimed to provide a comprehensive account of the civilization of India, including the religion, philosophy, literature, geography, science, customs and laws of the Indians. This

section concentrates on al-Bīrūnī's construction of the religions of India.⁴

The work of al-Bīrūnī that can be considered as sociological is his study of India. His *Kitāb mā li al-hind* (*The Book of What Constitutes India*) aimed to provide a comprehensive account of what he called "the religions of India and their doctrines". This included the religion, philosophy, literature, geography, science, customs and laws of the Indians. Of special interest to sociology is al-Bīrūnī's construction of the religions of India. Al-Bīrūnī considered what we call "Hinduism" as religion centuries before Europeans recognized Hinduism as not mere heathenism.

In attempting a reconstruction of al-Bīrūnī's construction of "Hinduism" it is necessary to point out that it is inadequate to rely on Sachau's English translation of the Arabic original. The translation, which was undertaken in the late nineteenth century, reads into Arabic terms, nineteenth century European ideas about what Hinduism was. For example, in his preface in the Arabic original al-Bīrūnī refers to "the religions of India" (*adyān al-hind*) (Al-Bīrūnī, 1377/1958[c1030]: 4) while this is translated by Sachau as "the doctrines of the Hindus" (Sachau, 1910: 6), leading one to assume that al-Bīrūnī conceived of a single religion called Hinduism.⁵ As we shall see, this was not the case.

We begin our reconstruction of al-Bīrūnī's construction of the religions of India with the title of his work: *Kitāb al-Bīrūnī fī tahqīq ma li al-hind min maqbūlat fī al-'aql aw mardhūlat*. This can be translated as *The Book of What Constitutes India as derived from Discourse which is Logically Acceptable or Unacceptable*. As noted by Sachau (1910: xxiv), al-Bīrūnī's method was to allow Indians to speak in order to present Indian civilization as understood by

⁴ I consult both the original Arabic, the *Kitāb fī tahqīq mā li al-hind* (al-Bīrūnī, A.H.1377/A.D.1958[A.D.c1030] as well as Sachau's English translation, *Alberinu's India* (Sachau, 1910). Dates in brackets indicate the year in which the work was written. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations in English are taken from Sachau's translation.

⁵ In fact, a study of Sachau's translation may be more a study of the intellectual Christianization of the religions of India than of al-Bīrūnī's work on India.

Indians themselves (Sachau, 1910: 25; al-Bīrūnī, 1377/1958[c1030]: 19).⁶ Al-Bīrūnī quotes extensively from Sanskrit texts which he had either read himself or which were communicated to him.⁷

The second chapter of the *Tahqīq ma li al-hind* was translated by Sachau as “On the Belief of the Hindus in God”, whereas the Arabic original has it as “On their Beliefs in God, Praise be to Him”. Moreover, the term Hindu does not appear in the Arabic text and the term “*hind*” does not have religious connotations. Sachau writes “the Hindu religion” in his translation (Sachau, 1910: 50), whereas the Arabic original has no equivalent (al-Bīrūnī, 1377/1958[c1030]: 38).

The account of the creed of the Indians begins in chapter two with an exposition of their belief in God, by which al-Bīrūnī means the same God that is worshipped by Jews, Christians and Muslims. The exposition begins with an account of the nature of God, with reference to his speech, knowledge and action (Sachau, 1910: 27-30; al-Bīrūnī, 1377/1958[c1030]: 20-22).

We are then told that this is an account of the belief in God among the elite. Here al-Bīrūnī is making a distinction between ideas associated with a high tradition and ideas held by the common people, as far as the conception of God is concerned (Sachau, 1910: 31-32; al-Bīrūnī, 1377/1958[c1030]: 23-24).

What we get so far is a picture of a monotheistic religion based on a determinate number of books, the *Patañjali*, *Veda* and *Gita* (Sachau, 1910: 27, 29; al-Bīrūnī, 1377/1958[c1030]: 20-21). The Veda was “sent down” to Brahma (*anzalahu ’alā brāhma*) (Sachau, 1910: 29; al-Bīrūnī, 1377/1958[c1030]: 21), which Al-Bīrūnī understands as the First Power (*al-quwwah al-awwalī*) (Sachau, 1910: 94; al-Bīrūnī, 1377/1958[c1030]: 71). Al-Bīrūnī draws an analogy between the Christian trinity and the three forces of Brahma, Narayana (second force) and the Rudra (third force). The unity of these three forces is called Vishnu, sometimes called the middle force and sometimes conflated with the first force (Sachau, 1910: 94).

⁶ For more on al-Bīrūnī’s method see Jeffery (1951).

⁷ On al-Bīrūnī’s knowledge of Sanskrit, see Chatterji (1951) and Gonda (1951).

Sociologically speaking, a distinction has to be made between the abstract, metaphysical ideas of the high tradition and the literalist, anthropomorphic ideas of the common people.

Al-Bīrūnī is, therefore, referring to a specific Vedic-Sanskritic religion that revolved around the worship of Brahma, which today in retrospect is often seen as a branch or sect within Hinduism, and which was historically a minor tradition among the more major traditions of Vaisnavism, Saivism and Saktism (Klostermaier, 1989: 53). Al-Bīrūnī refers to the tradition around Brahma as a dharma. Dharma refers to, among other things, a system of socio-ethical laws and obligations, including a system of social classification based on the division of society into varnas (castes) (Klostermaier, 1989: 46). To the extent that the Islamic concept, *dīn*, approximates “religion”, Al-Bīrūnī would have understood dharma as religion as he translates dharma as *dīn* (al-Bīrūnī, 1377/1958[c1030]: 30; Sachau, 1910: 40).

Clearly, the task for those concerned with the problem of the neglect of ideas emanating from non-Western societies, and for those concerned with a more universalistic approach to knowledge, is to counteract Eurocentrism in the social sciences by reversing the subject-object dichotomy, bringing in non-Europeans into the foreground, recognizing non-Europeans as originators, and turning attention to the non-European concepts and categories. This should be done not with the idea of displacing modern social science but to truly universalize. The task should not be to develop a social scientific tradition that is equally parochial as the one being critiqued here.

It is theoretical work that is crucial to undertake. These works have to be more than descriptive. For example, there are many works that describe Ibn Khaldun’s theory, but there has been a negligible amount of theory building that would result in what we may call neo-Khaldunian social theory, that is, work that goes beyond the mere comparison of some ideas and concepts in ibn Khaldun with those of Western theorists toward the theoretical integration of his theory into a framework that employs some of the tools of modern social science (Laroui, 1980; Cheddadi, 1980; Gellner, 1981; Michaud, 1981; Lacoste, 1984; Carre, 1988; Alatas, 1993). The stress here should be on drawing upon hitherto marginalized and untapped sources of knowledge.

REVERSING ACADEMIC DEPENDENCY VIA
TEACHING IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Essential to counteracting Eurocentric discourse is bringing in non-European ideas into teaching in mainstream social science courses and into mainstream social science textbooks. Due to the relatively greater autonomy that university teachers have, as compared to teachers in the schools, we would be able to inject more non-European content into the courses that we teach. There is no reason why social thinkers such as José Rizal (Philippines, 1861-1896), Benoy Kumar Sarkar (India, 1887-1949), and Yanagita, Kunio (Japan, 1875-1962) cannot be introduced into course of social thought and theory, for example. This is something that I and a colleague at the National University of Singapore, Vineeta Sinha, had been doing for some years. We departed from the conventional classical sociological theory course that is usually confined to teaching Comte, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, de Tocqueville and other Europeans of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. We introduced Ibn Khaldun, José Rizal, Sarkar and other non-Western social thinkers and teach their ideas systematically. At the same time, we do not neglect Western thinkers. Still, when it comes to Western thinkers such as Marx and Weber, the focus is on those topics generally neglected in similar course taught in Europe and North America, such as Marx's concept of the Asiatic mode of production, his views on colonialism in India or Weber's work on Islam and Confucianism. The details of how the course was revamped were reported in the journal, *Teaching Sociology* (Alatas and Sinha, 2001).

THE PROSPECTS FOR ACADEMIC DEPENDENCY REVERSAL

As scholars there is much we can do at the individual level in our research and teaching to spread awareness about the problem of academic dependency and go beyond merely talking about the problems to actually practice alternative discourses. Counteracting academic dependency and Eurocentrism in the social sciences also requires our being active in terms of conscientizing students and scholars about the problems of academic dependency and the need

for alternative discourses and popularizing non-European ideas by regularly and continuously organizing panels or presenting papers at mainstream social science conferences. This is a matter of organization and funding but also requires a lot of will on our part. Syed Hussein Alatas, in one of his last publications, suggested that the International Sociological Association organize a session at the World Congress of Sociology on the issue of an autonomous sociological tradition in order to “alert sociologists throughout the world to pool their attention on this extremely vital need for the development of sociology” (Alatas, S.H. 2006: 17).

Indeed, the South is not lacking in creative and original thinkers. Many examples of alternative discourses can be cited from various countries in Asian and Africa. I have documented some of these in my *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science*. Of India, Syed Hussein Alatas said:

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 (Alatas, S.H. 2006: 15).

But, whether such a tradition can emerge in much of the South will depend on our ability to make changes in policy, change the reward systems in institutions of learning, reduce corruption and inefficiency, and remove national and local politics from the centres of learning. In other words, this requires nothing short of the non-interference of the fools in the entire art, science and business of education. But, the fools are dominant.

Alatas, in fact, had also suggested the creation of sessions on a new theme, the sociology of the fools. By this, he meant the sociological fool as opposed to its counterpart, the sociological intellectual. Sociologists should not only be interested in the sociology of the intellectual but also in the sociology of the opposing type, the fool. The concept of the fool is not only an original concept

and example of the type of creativity needed for an autonomous social science tradition, it also points to a diagnosis of the problems that alternative discourses face in societies dominated by fools in positions of leadership (Alatas, S.H. 2006: 17).

Alatas had started discussing the topic of the fool in his book *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (1977: chap. 4). Fourteen characteristics for the definition of the sociological concept of the fool and the concrete consequences of power wielding fools were discussed. Leaders and administrators who are fools stamp their own peculiar foolish imprint on whatever thinking and practices they undertake. For example, in their corrupt practices, “their corruption bears the imprint of the fool. When they are honest, their honesty can be naïve and immature” (Alatas, S.H. 2006: 17).

I feel that throughout his intellectual life, my father lived in fear of our society being taken over by the fools. Among the traits of the fools are (i) the inability to recognize a problem; (ii) the inability to solve a problem if told to him; (iii) the inability to learn what is required; (iv) the inability to learn the art of learning; (v) not admitting that he is a fool (Alatas, S.H. 1977: 45). Furthermore,

The revolution of the fools which had occurred in many developing societies was to a great extent due to the colonial period. The colonial government did not pay much attention to the creation of high-caliber administrators in the colonies. During that time all the thinking at national levels was done by the colonial government abroad. The commercial and industrial houses were similarly foreign-based. Education in the colonies was mainly geared to provide clerical service or tasks at a subsidiary level. After independence following the Second World War, there was a sudden increase in the volume and intensity of administration and other decision-making centres covering diverse projects which were introduced in increasing number by the newly independent states. During this period there was a shortage of intelligent manpower to deal with the sudden increase of planning and administration, both in the official and in private realms, in the newly independent states. Hence the rise to power of the fools. Once the fools came to power, they perpetuate their own breed. With the fools came nepotism, provincialism, parochial party politics, to condition selection and ascent in the hierarchy of administrative power. Fools cannot cope with a situation where merit and hardwork

are the criteria of success, and so corruption is the hallmark of the rise to power of the fools, making a farce of government tenders and leading to bureaucratic intrigues to gain office or promotion. Where fools dominate it is their values which become society's values, their consciousness which becomes society's consciousness (Alatas, S.H. 1977: 45-6).

Such is the context within which the critique of academic dependency and the call for alternative discourses is made. Does our society have the leadership of sufficient integrity, resolve, and bravery to combat imitative and cultural slavish ideals that are among the causes of academic dependency to begin with?

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