THE ROLE OF HUMAN SCIENCES IN THE DIALOGUE AMONG CIVILIZATIONS*

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In public discourse and formal education, human sciences need to facilitate the dialogue among civilizations to inculcate an attitude founded on appreciation, understanding, interest, and compassion for the cultures and worldviews of the other. All belief systems are corruptible and can be perverted, and there are specific social and historical conditions that result in these perversions. Human sciences must go beyond merely correcting the fallacies and distortions of public discourse. They must attack the root of the problem, which is the problem of Eurocentrism in social science education that ultimately informs public discourse. The problem has to be dealt with at the level of knowledge production in teaching and research. This in turn would mean a greater need for interaction among scholarly communities in the various civilizations.

INTRODUCTION

The question of global peace and harmony among various civilizations and religious communities can be broadly approached in two ways. One way is to engage in conflict resolution after conflicts have occurred. The second way is to engage the other civilization in constant dialogue in order to minimize the intensity of conflicts that are, at any rate, inevitable. In this essay, I seek to understand the preconditions for dialogue among civilizations from the point of view of human sciences. That is to say, what are the requisite characteristics of the human sciences that would allow for inter-civilizational dialogue?

Dialogue literally refers to a conversation between two people. What we have in mind here, however, is more than just that. We envision a conversation on a subject of common interest between two or more individuals or parties, whose beliefs are informed by differing worldviews. The ultimate aim of this dialogue is to inculcate an attitude founded on appreciation, understanding, interest and compassion for the cultures and worldviews of the other. Human sciences have a role to play, both in public discourse, as well as in formal education that facilitate this dialogue.

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*This article draws heavily from previous pieces of mine. See Alatas (2002; 2003; forthcoming).

ISLAM, THE WEST AND SEPTEMBER 11th

Despite the fact that the attack of September 11th was not an attack of Islam against the West, it is often portrayed as such. Within hours of the attack, people were likening the attack to Pearl Harbor, thus equating Muslims and the Japanese. Days later, President Bush spoke of getting Osama bin Laden dead or alive, although unsure that Osama bin Laden was the culprit. In line with pushing the imagery further into the past, President Bush then referred to the war against terrorism as a crusade. Although it is quite likely that the President did not have in mind a holy war, and that he was using the term in a general sense, the term "crusade" is as much misunderstood in the Muslim world as "jihad" is in the West. For the record, he regretted the use of "crusade," and went on to clarify that Islam is a religion of peace, not to be associated with terrorism.

Nevertheless, Muslims before and after September 11th, are also convinced that the West is against them. This is the extent that the demonization of Islam is reflected in media reports of Muslims and Arabs, Hollywood's stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims, and the writings of Orientalist-type journalists. This influences public opinion in the United States and elsewhere. The Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, did not help matters when he said that "we should be conscious of the superiority of our civilization,"[1] or when Alex Standish, editor of *Janes' Intelligence Digest*, said on BBC's Hardtalk that Islam is a military religion.[2]

We also have to consider the element of historical consciousness. Islam has been in conflict with the West since the 8th Century. First, there were the conquests of Spain and Sicily. The Arabs were in Spain for 700 years and in Sicily for 500 years. About 200 years of the so-called Crusades followed. Some centuries later, the Ottomans threatened to overrun Europe, eventually making their way to Vienna. Even after the ascendancy of Europe and then America, Muslim civilization continued to constitute a threat and a problem in the form of anti-colonial and other movements following political independence. Therefore, the feeling of animosity and threat is deep-seated both in the West and among Muslims.[3]

In the midst of this, there is a discourse of misrepresentation. Let me give two examples that deal with the trap of dichotomies. One is the moderate

[1] Berlin, 26 September 2001.
[2] 17 September 2001.
[3] For useful introductions to Islam see Ali (1922); Landau (1958) and Armstrong (2000).

versus the extremist Muslim. The dichotomy is a creation in the minds of politicians and journalists and does not have an empirical referent. However, this dichotomy functions to "educate" the public that moderate and, by extension, less strict Muslims are the good Muslims, while extremist and, therefore, stricter Muslims, are prone to evil. Nothing can be further from the truth. There is actually no correlation between strictness of religious belief and the propensity for terrorist activity. For example, the handwritten document which the FBI claims it found in the luggage of Mohamed Atta, the suspected suicide bomber from Egypt, stated "… in the name of God, of myself, and of my family," something which no Muslim, however irreligious, would ever do. I believe that a study of the biography of terrorists of different religious backgrounds would reveal different levels of religiosity, even though the acts of terrorism may have been committed in the name of religion.

Another problematic dichotomy is that of modern Muslims who regard the United States as a benign power, versus anti-modern Muslims who regard the United States as a malevolent power. This is not to say that a Muslim could not be modern and highly critical of United States foreign policy at the same time. Applying this faulty misconception, but this time not in reference to Islam, is a recent report in *The Sunday Times* of Singapore. The story is of an Indian national who murdered his Singaporean wife of Indian origin. The story revolved around the man as traditional and religious, while the woman was cosmopolitan and liberal. Within a year of their marriage, he stabbed her to death, and was sentenced to 10 years in jail and 15 strokes of the cane.[4]

Therefore, there is clearly a need for dialogue between non-Western civilizations and the West. The year 2001 was the United Nations' Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations.[5] However, all we have heard in the media concerns conflict. Very little on dialogue had been covered. What can we do to prepare for and engage in dialogue? Human sciences have functions both in public discourse, as well as in formal education.

HUMAN SCIENCES AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

More balanced media reporting is needed, which covers, for example, suffering around the world, anti-war protests in the United States and Europe, sane voices from within the Muslim world, cooperation, respect and love

[4] *The Sunday Times* 17 March 2002.
[5] See http://www.un.org/Dialogue/

between Muslims and non-Muslim, and so on. Americans need to know that most Muslims are not scruffy-looking, Kalashnikov-wielding war-mongers. On the other hand, Muslims need to know that most Americans are not tough, red-neck, cowboy types.

I would like to give two examples regarding the role of the media in fostering dialogue among religions and civilizations. The first example is the article by Farrukh Dhondy that first appeared in the City Journal, and was reprinted in Singapore under the title "Muslim misfits in Britain."[6] The article drew severe criticism within the Malay-Muslim community of Singapore for what many saw as its objectionable and inaccurate statements on Islam. For example, Dhondy writes that "if you prostrate yourself to an all-powerful and unfathomable being five times a day, if you are constantly told that you live in the world of Satan, if those around you are ignorant of and impervious to literature, art, historical debate and all that nurtures the values of Western civilization, your mind becomes susceptible to fanaticism. Your mind rots." That is, being religious and ignorant of Western culture breeds fanaticism. This is Eurocentrism, combined with very shallow thinking on the nature of the religious experience. Even a less-educated Malay farmer or Bangladeshi construction worker knows that there is no correlation between religiousity and fanaticism. Many Muslims in Singapore were unhappy with the publication of Dhondy's article. Saharudin Kassim, Special Assistant to the President of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, critiqued the Dhondy piece, and suggested that such "a malicious piece of writing" should not have been published in *The Sunday Times*.[7] I have a different view. Articles such as these create the conditions for dialogue. Singaporeans would not have benefited from Saharudin Kassim's correction of Dhondy's views had Dhondy's article not been printed to begin with. Many Singaporeans may have held these erroneous views, and this was an opportunity for them to be corrected. In a sense, the printing of misguided opinions also have their functions. I would encourage more of these discussions in the media.

The second example is the article by Asad Latif, "Secularism protects all faiths."[8] This is also misleading in that it gives the impression that it is the virtues of secularism that have aided Singapore in withstanding the shocks emanating from the September 11th terrorist attacks. While this is an erroneous view, it does provide us with an opportunity to correct it and, in

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[6] *The Sunday Times* 23 December 2001.

[7] "It's a malicious piece of writing, not a critical exposition," *The Straits Times* 2 January 2002.

[8] *The Straits Times* 31 December 2001).

doing so, to enter into dialogue with both religious as well as secular groups. This view needs to be corrected because it deflects our thinking from the historical realities. If we understand secularism as an attitude underlying various ideologies that is hostile or indifferent to religion, and the religious outlook and worldview, then logic would have it that secularism is not free of ideology anymore than religion is.

Further, experience tells us that the worst cases of genocide in recent history occurred in the name of secular ideologies, namely, fascism, liberal democracy, and socialism. I am referring to the Nazi holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and genocide under Stalin and Polpot. Of course, it would be as illogical to conclude that secularism is the cause of such genocide, as it is to conclude that secularism is the reason behind religious harmony. I feel it necessary to clarify these distinctions because of a dominant perception that religion is the cause of many problems. This view is based on the notion that religion breeds intolerance. It is more accurate to say that all belief systems are corruptible and can be perverted, and that there are specific social and historical conditions that result in these perversions.

THE PROBLEM OF EUROCENTRISM

Human sciences must go beyond merely correcting the fallacies and distortions of public discourse. They must attack the root of the problem, which is the problem of Eurocentrism in social science education that ultimately informs public discourse. I would like to provide an illustration of the problem of Eurocentrism, with recourse to the concept of religion, by drawing from the work of Joachim Matthes (2000). This concerns the translation of cultural terms, such as religion, into scientific concepts. Social scientific concepts originate from cultural terms in everyday language. As such, they present problems when brought into scientific discourse, and when 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.

The Latin *religio*, from which the English term religion is derived, was a collective term referring to diverse practices and cults in and around Rome, prior to the emergence of Christianity. When Rome became Christian, Christianity became the dominant belief, and all other beliefs were absorbed or eliminated. *Religio* was not applied to Christianity as there was no need to — it was the only legitimate belief, so it was simply known as the Church. With Luther and the Protestant Reformation, *religio* referred to Christian beliefs and a way of life separate from the institution of the

Catholic Church. It opposed the clergy, and was the layman's religion. In 1593, the French philosopher, Jean Bodin, published his *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* (*Colloquium of the Seven about the Secrets of the Sublime*). This was a generalized understanding of religion and included non-Christian faiths. By the 18th century, "religion" evolved to be used as a scientific concept, referring to belief systems other than Christianity.

While "religion" meant all beliefs, when European scholars wrote about religion critically, they had in mind Protestantism (as in Marx's reference to religion as the opium of the masses), or the institutional religion (Catholicism), as opposed to the religion of the believers (Protestants).

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 illusion of reality. According to Matthes, the logic of comparison is such that the two things to be compared are subsumed under a third unit which is at a higher unit of abstraction. For example, apples and pears are subsumed under fruits. "Fruits" become the *tertium comparationis*. Similarly, Christianity and Islam are subsumed under religion. The problem with this is that the characteristics of religion are derived from Christianity to begin with. Therefore, the supposedly general scientific concept "religion" is culturally defined by Christianity. Islam is looked at in terms of Christianity, rather than compared to Christianity in terms of a *tertium comparationis*, a general concept of "religion."

What reality is lost? What is the distortion of Islam? Religion is understood in the West as a private matter, and not as a matter of the state and church. Therefore, there are dualities, such as sacred versus profane, and religious versus non-religious. Also, religion in the West refers to the beliefs and private lives of believers. The danger is that Islam is also seen in these terms, when in fact there are no such dualities in Islam. For example, there is no distinction between secular and religious education. All knowledge and education is either about God or the creations of God.

Another example comes from the application of the concept of religion to Hinduism. The term "Hindu" was first used in the eighth century to refer to people who lived on the other side of the Sindhus or Indus River, on the Indian sub-continent (Sinha, 1991: 1). This was externally imposed to encompass a wide variety of beliefs, covering a vast area of land. It originally had geographical connotations which had since been undergoing transformation (Sinha, 1991: 2). The adherents of these beliefs did not always consider themselves as belonging to the single religious entity that we now know as Hinduism. Yet many textualist and essentialist studies of Hinduism, such as that of Max Weber (1958), subscribed to these construct-

ed myths.

What are the problems with these constructions of non-Western experiences that utilize Western concepts?

1. The mix of fact and fiction. The beliefs of peoples such as those of Muslims and of the Indian sub-continent are not understood according to their self-understanding. There is a mix of fact and fiction in that facts are organized into a coherent framework that is derived from Christian categories posing as the *tertium comparationis,* so that the resulting construction is somewhat mythical.

2. The imposition of categories from the outside. Categories such as "religion" or "Hinduism," imposed from the outside, that is, by European scholars, result in constructions that do not accord with the self-description of the communities concerned.

3. Homogenization. There is an attempt to homogenize societies and communities, thereby hiding complexities. Simply stating the commonalities of the people who live on the Indian sub-continent veils not only contrary self-understandings, but also the variety and heterogeneity of religion in India.

It should be noted that the sociology of religion, especially where the study of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam are concerned, is very backward. A proper approach would be to develop the *tertium comparationis* from a comparative study of concepts in all of these belief systems. The development of what we may term as alternatives to Eurocentric discourses, therefore, requires familiarity with the local or indigenous tradition, which is understood by Kim Kyong-Dong to mean both the classical tradition as well as the world of popular discourse.[9] Knowledge of the local or indigenous is a prerequisite for the development of the *tertium comparationis*. The general problem of irrelevance has been noted in the literature of the various human sciences in a number of intellectual communities throughout the world (Alatas, 2001).

ASIAN RESPONSES TO THE PROBLEM OF EUROCENTRISM

Although the leading theoretical perspectives that originated in Europe and America have not always been relevant in the foreign milieu, their continuing presence in university syllabi and lists of references in journal articles in the non-West testify to the process of adaptation to the "rules of the dominant caste within the Euro-American social science game (Kantowsky, 1969: 129)." The Indian thinker and reformer, Rammohun Roy (1772-1833),

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[9] Kim, personal communication, 21 June 1996. See also Kim (1996).

was among the earliest to counter Eurocentric thinking. Roy lived during a period of intense proselytization activities carried out by British missionaries among the Hindus and Muslims of India. Roy was critical of the derogatory attitude of the English missionaries towards Hinduism and Islam. Replying to British objections against the literary genres of the Vedas, Puranas and Tantras, Roy argued that the doctrines of the first were more rational than Christianity, and that the teachings of the last two were not more irrational than what is found in Christianity (Roy, 1906, cited in Sarkar, 1937/1985: 622).

Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887-1949) systematically critiqued various dimensions of Orientalist Indology. Writing in the early part of this century, Sarkar was well ahead of his time when he censured Asian thinkers for having fallen "victim to the fallacious sociological methods and messages of the modern West, to which the postulate of an alleged distinction between the Orient and the Occident is the first principle of science (Sarkar, 1937/1985: 19)." He attacked Eurocentric notions such as the inferiority of Hindus in science and technology, the one-sided emphasis on the other-worldly and speculative dimension of the Hindu spirit, and the alleged dichotomy between Orient and Occident (Sarkar, 1937/1985: 4, 18, 35). He was also critical of the methodology of the prevailing Indology of his times on three grounds: (i) it overlooked the positive, materialistic and secular theories and institutions of the Hindus, (ii) it compared the ancient and medieval conditions of India with modern and contemporary European and American societies, and (iii) it ignored the distinction between existing institutions on the one hand, and ideals on the other (Sarkar, 1937/1985: 20-1). Sarkar was very explicit about his call for a new Indology that would demolish the idols of Orientalism as they are found in sociology (Sarkar, 1937/1985: 28-9). Although Sarkar tended to be Hinducentric in some of his interpretations pertaining to the history of ideas in India, this does not detract from his critique of Orientalism.

In 1968, the well-known Indian periodical, Seminar, devoted an issue to academic colonialism, which was understood in terms of two aspects. One aspect referred to the use of academically generated information by overt and covert North American agencies to facilitate political domination of Afro-Asian countries. The other aspect refers to the economic, political and intellectual dominance that North American academics exercise over academics elsewhere (Saberwal, 1968: 10).

Despite awareness of the state of the human sciences in India for all these decades, J. P. Singh Uberoi's indictment of foreign aid is as relevant today as it was in 1968:

> The existing system of foreign aid in science, to which the internationalist notion of collaboration lends credence, in truth upholds the system of foreign dominance in all matters of scientific and professional life and organization. It is nothing but the satellite system, with an added subsidy. It subordinates the national science of the poor to the national and international science of the rich. It confirms our dependence and helplessness and will not end them (1968: 120).

According to Saberwal (1968: 13), the "dependence on North American sponsors is pathetic; its consequences for problem selection, research design, and modes of publication are disastrous." The need, therefore, for alternative discourses in India was keenly felt, and did result in a critical tradition of scholarship in the social sciences and historical studies. One has only to mention the early example of Subaltern Studies to realize this.

Another interesting example is Rabindranath Tagore's (1919) "The Home and the World." Tagore challenged common place notions, and attempted to transcend ideas founded on an East-West dichotomy. An example of his undermining or questioning of this dichotomy can be seen in "The Home and the World." While this is fiction, it also serves as a theoretical reflection of history. Standard Marxist accounts tend to view the aristocrat as oppressive, and seek to advance the interests of the old order, while the patriot and nationalist may be portrayed in a more positive and progressive light. It is partly for this reason that, as Ashis Nandy (1994: 15-16) points out, Georg Lukacs' (1983) review of "The Home and the World," being based on a Eurocentric Marxist reading of Tagore, was highly unfavorable.

TEACHING IN THE SPIRIT OF ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSES: PREPARATION FOR DIALOGUE AMONG CIVILIZATIONS

I, and a colleague at the National University of Singapore, have tried to introduce into our teaching the spirit of the critical tradition of alternative discourses, a tradition that is conscious of the problems of Eurocentrism and academic colonialism. I am not suggesting that no other colleagues in Singapore draw from Indian works or experiences, but I can say with confidence that these cases are extremely rare. Using a more personal account, I will illustrate our concerns with non-Western scholarship in the human sciences with an example from our teaching of sociological theory at the National University of Singapore.

Why read or teach the works of Marx, Weber, Durkheim or other long since departed European authors to a class of Singaporean or Southeast Asian students? What do the ideas of three European theorists who were

born in the last century, and in a different cultural milieu, have to do with the non-European regions of the world today? While the various calls for alternative discourses have in theory questioned the existing paradigms in the social sciences, they have so far been unable to displace the fundamental assumptions of specific disciplines in practice. The pragmatic need to reproduce disciplines such as sociology and anthropology demands that certain continuities with the past be maintained. Hence, it is not insignificant that the critique of the human sciences is confined to the professional arena (that is, scientific journals, conferences and other academic forums), with the participants being established scholars, and not students. Critiques of the social sciences that emanated from academic institutions in Asia, Africa and Latin America tended to remain at an abstract and reflexive level. There had been several thoughtful pieces on the state of the various disciplines, raising the issue of the lack of connectedness between social science and the societies in which it was taught. However, calls to decolonize the social sciences were generally not followed by successful attempts to build `indigenous' theories and autonomous social science traditions, that were delinked from the academic core of Western Europe and North America. Neither have these calls manifested themselves at the level of teaching in the social sciences. Courses on sociological theory throughout the world tend to be restricted to discussions and expositions of the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, in addition to those of other nineteenth century Western scholars.

Given this scenario, my colleague, Vineeta Sinha, and I have attempted to deal with the issue of teaching sociological theory by way of a more universalistic approach. This includes raising the question of whether sociological theorising had been done outside of the bounds of European modernity. This would imply changes in sociology theory curricula. We have been experimenting with various approaches entailing changes in the way sociological theory is taught. Some interesting results came out of these changes, and were reported in the journal, *Teaching Sociology* (Alatas and Sinha, 2001).

These changes involved, among other things, introducing Asian thinkers, grappling with similar problems of social change and emerging modernity, to nineteenth century European scholars. For example, the works of Ibn Khaldun, Rammohun Roy, Jose Rizal and Benoy Kumar Sarkar were taught in addition to those of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. We also plan to introduce the ideas of East Asian thinkers such as the Japanese, Ogyu Sorai (1666-1728) (Najita, 1998).

I followed a similar logic in another course I taught, "Development and Social Change." The aim of this course was to understand the different reasons why peoples' lives in so many parts of the world are affected in one

way or another by poverty, income inequality, low levels of education, corruption, political oppression, and other features of underdevelopment. The complexity of the development process can be grasped from the multitude of explanations that have emerged since the nineteenth century, and include those from India. These include D. Naoroji who wrote at the turn of the last century (1962 [1901]), and the Indian Marxist M. N. Roy (1971 [1922]).

The purpose of these changes to the courses or curriculum lies in the need to educate people about the multicultural origins of modern civilization, about the contributions of Muslims, Indians and Chinese to modern Europe, about the positive aspects of all these civilizations, and about the common values and problems that humanity shares. A course on World Religions should be introduced to the schools. Children should not only be learning about their own religions, but about all religions. Apart from this subject, the theme of inter-religious experience can be reflected in other subjects such as social studies, literature, geography and history. All this would require a serious re-examination of the curricula of schools and universities.

Due to the relative autonomy that university professors enjoy, we are in a position to make such changes in the courses that we teach, even if entire curricula cannot be revamped along these lines. In addition to the two courses mentioned, I have attempted to put into practice some themes that I believe should inform the dialogue among civilizations in a course entitled "Islam and Contemporary Muslim Civilizations."

This is an introductory course to Muslim civilization. Emphasis is on the historical, cultural and social context of the emergence and development of Islam, and the great diversity that exists in the Muslim world, from Morocco in the west to Indonesia in the east. The course is divided into five sections. The first section, consisting of two lectures, provides an introduction to the study of civilizations in general, defines Islam as belief, practice, creed and civilization, and briefly discusses the origins of Islam. The second set of lectures discusses the spread of Islam and encounters between Islam and the West in the past. This part of the course introduces the major cultural areas within Muslim civilization, that is, the Arab, Persian, Ottoman, Moghul, and Malay. It covers topics such as the Muslim conquest of Spain and Sicily, the Crusades, and the Islamization of Southeast Asia. The third part of the course examines the cultural dimension of Muslim civilization, with particular emphasis placed on the religious and rational sciences that developed among the Arabs and Persians, their contact with Greek heritage, and the impact that Islam had on medieval European philosophy and science. Also discussed in this part of the course are the literary and artistic dimensions of Muslim civilization. The fourth part of the course focuses on current issues

in the contemporary period (post-World War II). Particular emphasis is given to the emergence of Orientalism in Europe and the Islamic response to it. This section also provides an overview of the political economy of the Muslim world, setting the stage for discussions on a number of contemporary problems and issues such as gender, underdevelopment, Islamic revivalism, and imperialism.

All this seems a lot to cover in one course. It would be if the objective of the course was to impart knowledge of the facts and events concerning Islam as a civilization. However, this is not the dominant aim of the course. The main objective is to bring students to an understanding of what I understand as the three central themes of the study of civilizations.

1. Intercivilizational encounters. The study of Islam is one case of encounter between civilizations. As Islam was the only civilization to have conquered the West, and to have been in continuous conflict with West, it is important that people be introduced to the idea that such civilizational encounters are not always negative. The Crusades, for example, resulted in many scientific and cultural borrowings between the Muslims and the Europeans.

2. Multicultural origins of modernity. Modern civilization is usually defined in Western terms. However, many aspects of modern civilization come from Islam and other civilizations, including the sciences, the arts, cuisine, and commercial techniques. The university is a fine example. The notion of the university as a degree granting institution of learning was developed and put into practice by the Muslims by the tenth century, and adopted by the Europeans in the thirteenth century. This includes the idea of the hierarchy of teachers and scholars, the idea of a chair (professorship), and the idea of the degree Makdisi (1980). When we add to this the examination system developed by the Chinese, we then get the modern university.

3. The variety of points of view. The study of Islam provides us with an opportunity to experience the multiplicity of perspectives from which any one fact or event can be viewed. For example, most works on the Crusades provide accounts from the point of view of the European Crusaders. The perspective of Muslims who fought the Crusaders, and then lived amongst them when European soldiers settled in and around the Holy Land between Crusades is instructive, as it helps to complete the picture of an otherwise fragmented reality. Another example of this concerns the *hijab* or head covering worn by many Muslim women. While in some settings it co-exists with the oppression of women, in others it is a symbol of liberation. It is important, for example, to expose students to the experiences of Muslim

women who wear the *hijab* in order to escape the critical gaze of the fashion and beauty industry.

CONCLUSION

It can be said, therefore, that the role of human sciences in the dialogue among civilizations covers a number of areas:

1. The participation in and monitoring of public discourse with the objective of breaking stereotypes and unsettling commonly held notions that typically translate into prejudiced views.

2. The formal education of the public at all levels, that is, primary, secondary and tertiary education, such that intercivilizational encounters, the multicultural origins of modernity, and the variety of points of view, inform the development of curricula. In order for this to be done on a sound intellectual basis, there must be serious efforts to develop adequate *tertium comparationis.*

3. Greater interaction among social scientists in Asia and Africa, and more support to journals and other scientific publications that are produced out of these regions. In order for dialogue among civilizations to be facilitated, particularly between the West and other civilizations, it goes without saying that serious inroads must be made in the trafficking of stereotypes by the media. It is not enough to stop there, as the media and public discourse themselves are influenced by knowledge that is produced in the universities, research institutes and think tanks. Therefore, the problem has to be dealt with at the level of knowledge production in these institutions, that is, teaching and research. This in turn would mean a greater need for interaction among scholarly communities in the various civilizations.

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