Akademika

Jurnal Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan
Journal of Social Science and Humanities

Bilangan *Number* 38 ISSN 0126-5008 Januari *January* 1991

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Editor's Review: The Social Sciences in Malaysia

The publication here of Rustam A. Sani and Norani Othman's "critical scenario" concerning the development of the social sciences in Malaysia requires some explanation, since its appearance in Akademika, with the consent of Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia (PSSM), is in the nature of a joint endeavour. Its primary publication, however, is in that associations's own journal Ilmu Masyarakat 19 (1991).

The prior claim of PSSM and *Ilmu Masyarakat* to this critical scenario is due to the circumstances of its origin, when such a review of the sources, development, and current situation of the social sciences in this country was commissioned from PSSM by SERU (the Social and Economic Research Unit in the Prime Minister's Department, Kuala Lumpur). SERU itself had been charged by UNESCO with organizing a regional seminar in June 1990 to review the situation of the social sciences in the countries of Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Even the characterization as a "critical scenario" - a term which has provoked some comment, even criticism - derives from the call issued by UNESCO to SERU and equivalent national bodies elsewhere in the region, indicating the character and orientation of contributions that were abeing sought by the seminar's sponsors. When UNESCO's call was in turn referred to it by SERU, PSSM set up a subcommittee to prepare the Malaysian response. After discussing and agreeing upon the kind of review or "scenario" that it thought appropriate for presentation, the members of that subcommittee chose from among their own number Sdr. Rustam and Sdr. Norani to prepare the paper itself for presentation.

Held in Kuala Lumpur on 18 & 19 June 1990, the seminar was opened by the Minister for Education, Datuk Seri (then Sdr.) Anwar Ibrahim, who in his keynote remarks commented in knowledgeable detail upon the Malaysian "critical scenario", even before it was offered as the seminar's lead-off presentation. That presentation, in turn, was followed by lively and, so those who were present suggest, largely approving discussion.

However, since then the critical scenario reviewing the origins and contemporary character of Malaysian social sciences has provoked considerable controversy. An editorial page article by Rose Ismail in the New Straits Times (1 September 1990) entitled "Unpalatable Aspects of our Social Sciences" attracted some additional comment upon the critique offered by the two writers. Following that, further reference was made to both the scenario and Rose Ismail's commentary at a seminar held at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia from 8 to 9 October 1990 to appraise and

review the accomplishments of its Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan) over the twenty years since the university's foundation in 1970. The reaction on that occasion was heated and sustained. Both the critique itself and its underlying approach were challenged. More recently still, in criticisms made in December 1990 and January 1991 that were widely reported in the press, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim questioned the achievements of local scholars and academic institutions, including (or, as he put it, especially) in the social sciences. This intervention has encouraged further debate as well as several public and numerous private rejoinders to the Minister's censure.

Clearly, whether by accident or fate, this critical scenario of the Malaysian social sciences has somehow taken on a life of its own, and a significance rather greater than its own (as its authors would agree) very modest origins. But this inflation is not necessarily a bad thing. For while the analysis that it offered may have upset some, it also provoked many in the Malaysian social science community to reconsider and critically reassess their own accomplishments and intellectual stance. More, in a manner previously unprecedented in Malaysia, it has prompted the beginnings of a public debate that social scientists as concerned citizens and responsible members of a developing national community should welcome. After years of public silence and indifference over the character of our social sciences, and Malaysian intellectual life generally, this must be a healthy development.

Because of the attention which the PSSM critical scenario has attracted, the widespread controversy it has provoked, and not least because of the importance of the public debate which the Minister, Datuk Seri Haji Anwar Ibrahim, has now inaugurated, the editors of Akademika believe it important that the now perhaps notorious scenario also be published in its pages. Its publication here, however, is not intended merely as a matter of record, simply to be read and noted. Rather, its inclusion in our own pages is intended to encourage further intellectual reflection and debate. Convinced of the importance of such debate to the further development of our national intellectual life and to the formation of a distinctive modern Malaysian intellectual tradition, *Akademika* is happy to acknowledge its gratitude to PSSM and *Ilmu Masyarakat* for their consent to joint publication of the scenario originally commissioned from them.

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The Social Sciences in Malaysia: A Critical Scenario

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ABSTRAK

Sesuatu perbincangan tentang senario dan keadaan ilmu sosial kini di Malaysia tentu sekali memerlukan penelitian khusus bukan sahaja terhadap sejarah dan perkembangan disiplin-disiplinnya tetapi juga satu analisis terhadap beberapa masalah epistemologis yang menghambatnya. Dalam kertas kerja ini, fokus utamanya adalah kepada kelemahan pengajian, dan satu persoalan yang kami bangkitkan adalah mengapa perkembangan ilmu sosial di negara ini begitu tergugat sehingga tidak terhasil pemikiran yang kritis serta pendekatan yang sejajar dengan tuntutan masalah-masalah sosial yang dihadapi. Huraian yang diberi berteraskan kepada satu penilaian terhadap dampak pemerintahan Kolonial Inggeris yang boleh dianggap meninggalkan satu warisan budaya ilmu dan keintelektualan yang amat cetek. Kemunculan tradisi ilmu dan intelektual yang tidak tuntas itu pula dihambat oleh beberapa masalah sosial dan budaya yang timbul dalam zaman selepas kemerdekaan. Antara masalah itu adalah budaya ilmu yang telah tertanam dalam masyarakat kita, yang hanya menggalakkan penerapan ilmu sosial dari Barat tanpa penyesuaian kreatif, persoalan kritis dan daya melahirkan filsafat dan orientasi ilmu yang tulen, kukuh lagi sejajar dengan keadaan tempatan. Pandangalam yang agak tersekat ini bukan sahaja disebabkan oleh warisan budaya ilmu kolonial yang lemah tetapi juga disebabkan oleh tidak timbul dan hidupnya satu tradisi intelektual yang progresif pada zaman ini. Tambahan pula, tuntutan ekonomi moden yang kini rata-rata mencirikan suasana sedunia sejak awal dekad 80an melahirkan satu sikap materi yang kurang menitikberatkan pengembangan ilmu dan ideologi progresif. Selaras dengan itu, ilmu sosial sendiri menghadapi masalah-masalah "dalamannya" yang tersendiri: antaranya pengasingan antar-disiplin yang mengkotak-kotakan interpretasi konseptual masalah-masalah sosial yang dikaji, dan dengan itu membenteras kelahiran penyatuan ilmu sosial baru.

ABSTRACT

Any discussion of the "senario" and current situation of the social sciences in Malaysia must give particular attention not only to the historical

development of the various social science disciplines. It also needs to consider, within that historical context, a number of epistemological problems that have constrained their growth. The primary focus of the present discussion is upon certain inherent weaknesses in our own local intelectual and social science research tradition in Malaysia. Why fundamentally, has the development of our social sciences been so deformed and stunted that they have failed to yield any critical thinking or conceptual approach commensurate with the problems that confront them and our nation as a whole? Basic to any explanation must be the altogether shallow cultural and intellectual legacy that was left to Malaysia by British colonial rule. The formation of this paltry scholarly and intellectual tradition was also shaped by some features of our post-independence social and cultural situation. The cultivation within our society of an intellectual orientation that has encouraged the mere borrowing and transplantation of existing (and often, even where they originated, quite mediocre) Western social scientific approaches and practices has been a notable problem. Entirely lacking in this process of mere imitation and replication has been any creative adaptation or modification of these borrowed, and generally inappropriate, models and paradigms; any critical questioning of their presuppositions and appropriateness to our own circumstances; any effort to create a vital and, in local terms, culturally authentic intellectual and philosophical tradition. This narrowly limited vision is not only attributable to the intellectually attenuated cultural legacy that colonialism bequeathed in Malaysia; it is also the result of a failure to create and sustain any progressive intellectual tradition in our own time. Further inhibiting the emergence of such a progressive or critical orientation has been the increasing pressure and worldwide intellectual ascendancy exerted throughout the 1980s by neoclassical economic rationalism. But in addition to the marginalization and even "colonization" of large areas of broad sociological and philosophical concern by this narrow materialist economism, the other social sciences have also been afflicted by various "internal" problems of their own: not merely the setting of their long-term intellectual agendas and priorities by short-term, even immediate, policy demands and considerations but also the increasing isolation and divergence from one another of these various social science disciplines. The intellectual compartmentalization and fragmentation brought about by their theoretical specialization have thwarted the development of any unified, totalizing, and progressive social science.

INTRODUCTION

The subject which UNESCO has chosen to support in this conference is indeed timely and relevant, particularly in view of all those recent worldwide political and economic developments that have benn

symbolised by the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Clearly, those events have momentous implications for the social sciences today. Meanwhile, the complementary question of the impact of the social sciences on contemporary life is not only topical now, but has engendered constant discussion and debate throughout the past two hundred years.

More often than not, however, these debates reflect the tendency of some social scientists to engage the passions rather than to produce clarity of thought and understanding. In one of his portraits of historians, the famous essayist Lytton Strachey remarked that the three qualities that make a historian are "... a capacity for absorbing facts, a capacity for stating them, and *a point of view.*" He argued further that "the latter two are connected, but not necessarily inseparable. The late Professor Samuel Gardiner, for instance, could absorb facts, and he could state them; but he had no point of view, and the result is that his book on the most exciting period of English history (that of the Civil War) resembles nothing as much as a *a very large heap of sawdust*" (Emphases are our own).

To many both within and outside the profession it will be apparent that the landscape of the social sciences, particularly in Malaysia, is abundatly furnished with such heaps of sawdust, large and small. So prominent, in fact, are these heaps of sawdust on the intellectual landscape of the social sciences that they are often perceived, and sometimes even paraded, as social science itself in its modern form. Yet what such a social science offers is really nothing more than a corpus of techniques and methods for building up more such heaps. So instrumental, technical, and uncritical a perception of the nature of the social sciences is particularly dominant, however, in conditions where the social science disciplines have not developed authentically as a particular way of looking at the social world, as an autonomous intellectual response to the task of perceiving and making sense of complex modern social conditions.

In the West, the development of the social sciences can be characterised as the product of the impact of a postivistic perspective or approach to the fundamental philosophical questions posed by the emergence of the modern industrial and post-indsutrial world. Significantly, the pioneering thinkers who first mapped the territory of the social sciences had a definite political and philosophical "point of view" — so much so that the central social science discipline, namely sociology, and by extension the social sciences in general have been dubbed "the humanism of the twentienth century." Precisely because their enquiries were informed by such a point of view, their ideas came to exert great influence not only upon social thought but more broadly on the social and political condition itself of humanity.

In this part of the world, by contrast, the historical origins of the social sciences are closely related to, if not an integral part of, the social

conditions created by Western colonial rule. In Malaysia, for instance, the earliest social scientific writings were generally produced by officers and administrators employed in the British colonial service (Tham, 1981). Accordingly, the social sciences developed mainly out of the need to provide relevant data and information to the colonial government. The same "practical" emphasis on the collection of useful data and information still seems to characterise social scientific activity in Malaysia even after independence.

Subsequently the various social science disciplines developed mainly within an administrative context and with a careerist ethos (including that of academic careerism within the universities), rather than on an explicitly intellectual foundation. As a result, very little in the theoretical and philosophical development of Malaysian social science represents any distinctively Malaysian intellectual response to specifically Malaysian social conditions. Yet even the technicist, data-collecting social sciences have had to struggle hard to gain recognition and respect from their prospective sponsors (such as the government), who show no great faith even in purportedly "useful" social science, as compared with the so-called "hard" sciences.

Despite the increasing use of the National Language as the language of discourse in the social sciences in contemporary Malaysia (especially in local institutions of higher learning), the indigenization process has been slow and has failed to cultivate in the various social science disciplines any novel content or critical stance. At best, through fairly mechanical translation, the process has only created a parallel imitative version of the same familiar heaps of sawdust already repeatedly piled up elsewhere.

DEVELEPMENT OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN MALAYSIA: A BRIEF SKETCH

The development of the social sciences in Malaysia can be said to begin during the colonial period. The producers of social scientific writings during the colonial period included a variety of contributors: colonial administrators, scholars, educationists, journalists, and even Malay nationalists. But it was the works of the colonial administrator-scholars that contributed most to the development of what came to be known as "oriental studies" and "area studies" (the academic disciplines that were consequently developed at such institutions as SOAS in London and the University of Leiden in Holland).

Although strongly influenced by the intellectual trends then current in the West such as evolutionism and diffusionism, the area and oriental studies traditions promoted by the administrator-scholars were quite

atheoretical and thus remained rather detached from the dominant theoretical currents and orientations of the various social science disciplines that were emerging in the West at the same time. The major scholastic contributions of the area and oriental studies traditions were in the field of "social documentation", not in the basic intellectual area of theoretical elaboration, criticism, or refinement. Furthermore, the "colonial" orientation of the practitioners of oriental studies led them to concentrate on the more "exotic" aspects of native societies and communities (H.M. Dahlan 1990). As a result, this tradition of scholarship tended to place emphasis on classical "cultural" fields of study such as philology, ethnology, and comparative linguistics.

Such a scholarly tradition (in the form of Malay Studies) was introduced to native students in Malaya during the first stages of the development of local university education from the early 1950s and, despite its "orientalist" origins and character, became a great influence in the "cultural rediscovery" of their native roots by a small pioneer group of Malay university students. Yet far more dominant and emphasised among the social sciences — and enjoying almost status with the preferred "professional and vocational" subjects — were economics and law. However, it was not the theoretical, critical, or philosophical dimensions of these disciplines that were developed. More instrumentally, it was the technical aspects of these more worldly disciplines that were introduced, as useful vocational training for junior administrators in the colonial service: i.e., so-called "black letter law", including especially commercial and land law, rather than comparative law or jurisprudence; training in the deployment of legal skills, not education in the culture of critical legal reasoning. The introduction of these subjects, therefore, had a greater role to play in opening the colony to the penetration of Western capitalism than of the Western intellectual tradition of critical rationality.

With the decline of colonialism and the rise of the new states during 1950s, the influence of the scholastic traditions of oriental studies also declined, giving way to the then novel and more fashionable social science disciplines. At the same time, however, the social sciences in the West were undergoing important theoretical and paradigmatic changes. These were in large part caused by the evident inability of the hitherto dominant structural-functional perspective, with its emphasis on systemic equilibrium, to account for current social conditions — especially conflict and the discontinuities of change — in the new states. But some critical revisions and, more important, the apologetic injection of neo-evolutionary perspectives into conventional structural-functionalism made possible the rise of the various "development" social science disciplines such as development economics, the sociology of development, and so on (Shamsul A.B. 1990).

It is in this context of the development of Western social science and the decline of classical oriental studies that the early development of such subjects as anthropology and sociology in Malaysia must be located. By the mid-1960s, students and teachers in the culture stream of the University of Malaya's Malay Studies Department (one of three streams together with literature and linguistics) had virtually abandoned their former oriental studies approach and posture, adopting instead the newly acquired theoretical and methodological devices of British social anthropology and predominantly "American" (i.e., United States) sociology.

The same period also witnessed the proliferation of research activities in Malaysia by Western anthropologists and sociologists, especially from the USA. In large part these research activities were conducted by young scholars whose immediate objective was the researching and writing-up of a doctoral dissertation. Quite different from that of the practitioners of oriental studies, their academic background was shaped by the newer social science approaches with their emphasis on techniques of empirical data collection. In the West these by now well-established scholars have come to be generally regarded as area specialists and are highly respected for their expert knowledge of their "exotic" research areas (an especially valuable national intellectual asset in the context of the Cold War-era struggles of the great powers for international influence). Hardly any of them became known for their theoretical or philosophical contributions to the social sciences (only Clifford Geertz, the renowned analyst of Indonesian society providing the illustrious exception to prove the rule).

Even so, despite their lack of any great theoretical fertility or creativity, the influence of such scholars at a later stage on the development of the social sciences in Malaysia was considerable. Many of them became dissertation advisers and supervisors to graduates of the culture stream of the University of Malaya's Malay Studies Department and other similar academic departments in Malaysia who were sent to pursue advanced studies overseas. The prominent part subsequently played by these graduate students, the pioneer cohort of overseas-trained local social scientists with advanced graduate qualifications, in the development of the social sciences in Malaysia — both in the various social scientific departments of the universities and in other non-university research and consultancy organisations — is well known. Exerted through their own relations as thesis supervisors to these pioneer Malaysian graduate students, the influence of that first generation of area studies specialists, especially from the USA, upon the direction and development of the social sciences in Malaysia was consequently great and far-reaching.

The specific social and political conditions of the process of decolonisation and independence in this country also affected the character of the local social sciences then emerging. They ensured that it was the

management of the state itself rather than the formulation of any distinctive social theory or national ideology that dominated the agenda for the post-colonial social sciences in Malaysia. Not surprisingly, therefore, economics which since the colonial period had long enjoyed hegemony among the social sciences continued to do so in Malaysian institutions of higher learning after independence. Far more than the other social sciences, it was intensely subjected to processes of "Americanisation", quantification, and professionalisation, all intended to make it a more sophisticated tool for the professional management of the new state and its capitalistic economic structures. Close to power and useful to its purposes among the state's custodians, economics acquired a centrality a and "respectability" that contrasted markedly with the marginalisation of, say, sociology and the near non-existence of political science and political philosophy.

Unlike their peers in anthropology and sociology, foreign economists — increasingly, by the end of the 1960s, from the United States — exerted an influence that was not solely academic. They were not confined merely to teaching the subject in the Faculty of Economics and Administration and Faculty of Agriculture in the University of Malaya but also played a prominent, direct, and leading role in the formulation and implementation of government economic plans and policies (notably through such instrumentalities as the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department). Their influence, therefore, was a multiple one, combining the accumulated impact of their roles as official economic consultants and advisers and, later, as academic sponsors, dissertation advisors, and supervisors to Malaysian graduate students in economics and public administration (Jomo 1980).

It is in the context of these linkages that the impact and influence of these scholars — their specific orientation in economic thinking both in academic scholarship and in policy formulation and direction — in this country must be understood. Through their role as consultants and advisors in the formulation and implementation of government development programs, these foreign economists also facilitated the setting up of research and consultation organisations within the governmental structure - or as part of semi-government organisations - to deal systematically with the task of generating, collecting, and disseminating socio-economic data necessary for the task of policy formulation and evaluation in the development process.

In the context sketched above, the social sciences in Malaysia can be said to have experienced some accelerated development, at least in quantitative terms, in the 1970s. On the academic front, the 1970s were characterised by the establishment of new universities alongside the University of Malaya. This occurred in response to both the nationalistic

demands for the establishment of institutions of higher learning in the National Language and also the economic demand for trained manpower needed for implementation of the physical development programs of the nation. The number of universities leaped from only one to half a dozen in less than a decade.

Although the social science disciplines were never accorded the same importance as the physical science-based "professional" subjects, they were nevertheless introduced and taught in the new universities. The development of the various social science disciplines at the University of Malaya was somewhat limited by the organisational and structural constraints of the Faculty of Economics and Administration and the Department of Malay Studies. The new universities, however, were more free to plan their respective departmental and faculty structures to accommodate the introduction of other social science disciplines - both "pure" and "applied" - which they nevertheless did for the most part by simply replicating the disciplinary patterns and departmental structures, in other words the cognitive and intellectual "map", of Western universities. Even the physical science-based technological universities - such as Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia - established departments and faculties to teach social science subjects, mainly as "service" disciplines for their more vocationally oriented students.

The establishment of the new universities therefore ushered in an era of setting up new academic departments teaching a variety of social science subjects hitherto unavailable in Malaysia such as political science, social work, psychology, communications, business administration, and so forth. The establishment of these new departments meant that future members of their teaching staff had to be sent for advanced study or training to overseas universities, and the financial resources of the universities and the government as well as foreign organisations were utilised for the purpose. Those selected for this overseas academic apprenticeship were drawn from among the graduates of local universities or those with relevant undergraduate training from foreign universities (Hairi Abdullah 1976). Similar facilties and opportunities for graduate training were also made available to members of the civil service: to prepare them to be not only senior administrators but also future leaders of the government's own research, consultancy, and training organisations.

THE STATE OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN MALAYSIA TODAY

Looking at the academic and intellectual landscape of contemporary Malaysia, it is in general safe to say that it includes a fully-fledged social science of sorts, based on the presence of most of the major social science disciplines known in the West. (modern philosphy, political theory, and the history of ideas are some notable omissions). These disciplines are taught in the universities and their "methods" are routinely utilised in conducting research within non-university research organisations. Social scientific "knowledge" — or at least some forms of wisdom gained through the utilisation of socio-economic data diligently collected through "approved" techniques for generating such bodies of information - is routinely given recognition in the making of policy decisions, even if it is not always accorded equal status with other sources of knowledge.

Social scientific debate and discussion occur from time to time in conferences and seminars as well as in a variety of publications including scholarly journals (Appendix 1), although the question remains whether such journals do in fact reflect the existence of genuine social scientific discourse or merely fulfill the administrative requirements of academic departments and research organisations and the career aspirations of those who publish and are also published in them. The problems of maintaining the existence and improving the intellectual quality of these journals in the face of the growing number of practising social scientists raises some doubts in our minds. Degrees continue to be awarded in social scientific subjects, professorships continue to be conferred, and senior positions in social scientific research organisations are routinely filled. But whether this increase in quantity will be accompanied by the further development of a distinctively Malaysian social science intellectual tradition remains for us the critical question - one to which it is still too soon to offer confidently any optimistic answer.

The social scientific orientation that has emerged in Malaysia has been shaped basically by the routine practices and immediate activities of various practitioners of the social science disciplines, both in their university teaching and in their collecting, storing, and analysing of information within various research organisations. In short, any connection between these practitioners and the tradition of macro, historical, and philosphical social science that constitutes their ultimate intellectual origins, or with the more culturally concerned fields of oriental studies, has been almost completely severed. Their current concern seems confined to the utilisation of routine information and the simple application of standard techniques to solve immediate and short-term social questions. They themselves seek little more than to be immediately

"relevant". In general, because of their overwhelmingly pragmatic and instrumental orientation, the social sciences in Malaysia today can be characterised as a mere recapitulation or "reenactment" of the methodological, technical, and utilitarian dimensions of Western social science, especially their dominant United States versions (cf. Rustam A. Sani 1990).

The universities do offer some opportunity for the academic practitioners of the social sciences to explore the problems of conceptually formulating and also of actually creating a culturally specific Malaysian social science: an intellectual tradition growing out of and also reflecting the distinctive formation and features of modern Malaysian society, and therefore capable of addressing conceptually the specific nature of Malaysian social conditions, including the changes and continuities displayed by their evolution, rather than simply tinkering with socio-economic data. But such an endeavour can only flourish in a situation where the creation and practice of social science is generally perceived as an intrinsically valuable intellectual undertaking and, by its practitioners, as a commitment or Weberian "vocation": as an intellectual response to persistent, even fundamental, social questions. But these practitioners are compelled by their own professional situation tu pursue the social sciences within a careerist context and ethos, and under insistent daily pressure to be "relevant". Such conditions hamper efforts at social scientific theorising, rendering them piecemeal and futile, and the concerns of mature academic social scientists consequently never outgrow those of the "dissertation-oriented graduate students" they once were.

Finally, no survey of the scenario of the social sciences in Malaysia could be considered complete that did not mention another major trend: that which calls for an explicitly Islamic social science as the means of creating a culturally-specific, culturally appropriate, and intellectually adequate and authentic corpus of knowledge for the analysis and also enhancement of Malaysian social life in the face of rapid change and social transformation. It is not possible in this paper to address this issue in the manner that its wide implications warrant. However, certain questions can be raised here in the context of exploring its claim to be *the* "alternative" social science.

In the context of this present discussion, such a claim, like that for any other form or variety of social science, must be clearly grounded within the social bases and recognised conditions for the production of knowledge. Knowledge directed at understanding one's social environment presupposes a rational basis, the critical use of one's intellectual faculties, as well as a moral reference and commitment authentic to one's historical consciousness. Accordingly, the intellectual character, the animating moral vision, and the claims to special adequacy or superiority of such a

social science - like those of any other school or variant that would claim to be consequential or meaningful - must be argued and grounded contextually, not simply asserted and superimposed upon the sociocultural reality it seeks to inform.

No intellectual position can ever be purely self-justifying, self-absorbed, self-referential. Perhaps a relevant and innovative "alternative" social science would do well to address social issues from this point of departure, arguing for its own intellectual and analytical strategies and engaging with those of its rivals, rather than rejecting outright and in advance existing paradigms that it has yet to comprehend fully, or even attempt really to understand. (A case in point is Islamic economics: Timur Kuran 1986, 1989). If it is to establish itself as a genuine competing position and vindicate its claim to provide an alternative intellectual orientation and ideology, an Islamic social science must not only provide but also intellectually justify, through engagement with its alternatives, its own intellectual, critical, and methodological stance. Its social appeal notwithstanding, this prospective "alternative" social science may well need to fulfill its claims of social relevance in realistic terms by such engagement with other, longer established local intellectual traditions before it can occupy a central place in the future scenario of the social sciences in Malaysia.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

If, as noted previously, the emergence and development of the social sciences in the West must be seen as part of a reaction and intellectual response to the emergence of the modern industrial and post-industrial world - to "modernity" itself in other words - then in our case, in Malaysia and Southeast Asia more generally, the historical origins of social science are intimately related to, if not part of the result of, Western colonial rule. Several authors have attempted to explain the failure of any critically-active scholarship or innovative methodological content to emerge within the Malaysian social sciences during the early period of their development. Both Tham Seong Chee (1981) and P. Ramasamy (1983), for instance, maintain that the philosophical presuppositions and ideological control accompanying colonial rule constituted a major obstacle to the development of a truly authentic and culturally specific Malaysian social science (Saravanamuthu et al. 1983).

Another reason that is sometimes advanced is that the kind of social science research that was sponsored and undertaken during the colonial period was little interested in analysing the long-term implications of the social transformation of Malayan society brought about by the expansion

and penetration of Western capitalism and the attendant transplantation of the non-Malay ethnic communities into British Malaya. In other words, the social science research of the time was regarded purely as an adjunct to the bureaucratic needs of the colonial government. As disciplines for training and higher education in the later period of colonial rule, the social sciences were important only as an avenue providing educated manpower to be absorbed into the colonial government service, mainly as junior administrators, technicians, and teachers. However, it was this kind of social science research and publication, as conducted in particular from the prewar period until the 1950s, that set the substantive agenda and established the dominant methodological approach for the social sciences in Malaysia throughout the three ensuing decades since independence.

The argument which we advance here concerning the British cultural and intellectual legacy left in Malaysia has been put, if rather harshly, by C.S. Kessler in his discussion of the contrasting character of the two colonial powers in Indonesia and Malaysia (Kessler 1991). Whereas the Dutch, over a long period (and for by no means altruistic reasons), gradually provided the foundations for a local scientific and intellectual tradition and some of the key elements for an authentic local culture of critical modernity, the argument goes, the British cultural and intellectual legacy was a barren one. Here, in an attempt to evaluate the state of the social sciences in present day Malaysia, we extend that argument by focusing upon the social science tradition that emanates from the colonial period. When the British penetrated into peninsular Malaya at the end of the nineteenth century, Britain was at the arrogant zenith of her imperial prominence. The British

> established their own ascendancy over Malay, and later Malayan, society on this crass foundation of brute political and economic dominance, creating in their colonies no intellectual traditions or cultural institutions worthy of more than passing mention. Indeed, those who headed and embodied the British colonial presence in Malaya were not only the representatives of a power unreflectively self-satisfied at the summit of its brief dominance. They also tended, in general, to come from the least intellectually accomplished and culturally aware corners of British society - from the younger sons, with their uncertain futures, of the dec-lining rural gentlefolk: the reactionary, philistine "county" element whose own ways and ideas displayed about the same relation to civilized European culture that so-called English cooking bore to modern European cuisine (Kessler 1991).

This nineteenth century British philistinism lives on, Kessler suggests, somewhat redesigned and modified perhaps, in much of the contemporary Malaysian ethos, particularly in educational philosophy as well as the administrative system. It is this very same approach or orientation, Britan's lasting legacy, that remains dominant not only in the area of national educational policy but also in our intellectual including academic

culture generally. However, in evaluating the poor state and presenting a less than approving scenario of the social sciences in Malaysia today, attributing all their current deficiencies to the adverse residual consequences of British colonialism and the paltry intellectual culture that was its continuing legacy will not suffice. One must also relate the problems of contemporary intellectual culture to the fundamentally technicist, vocational, and managerial ethos that has pervaded educational policy in modern independent Malaysia.

This problem of a lack of moral or intellectual vision in all official thinking about economic policy remains, for the present authors, the overriding national issue. It not only affects the present state and future prospects of Malaysian social science as an intellectual or academic pursuit; it also has potentially fateful implications for the theoretical content and ideological orientation of the social sciences and hence for their utilisation and practice in everyday life, their application to the fundamental problems of Malaysian society and the nation as a whole. The historical irony, or tragedy, here is that social sciences shaped by persistent pressures of "pragmatism" and "relevance" may in the end be too narrow, too distorted, or too misdirected in their orientation to be of any practical use in areas where the application of social scientific understanding is becoming increasingly urgent. Beyond blaming again the colonial legacy, the inadequacies and even possible deterioration of the social sciences in Malaysia over the last two decades must also be analysed and evaluated in relation to the problems of our national intellectual culture generally: the lack of intellectual depth in our society, the narrow and undeveloped character of our modern intellectual culture, and our consequent failure to engender a rational, scientific, and critical outlook as the common culture among our community of scholars, the intelligentsia, and the so-called intellectuals (Walzer 1988). For if we had such an intellectual tradition, a functioning community of critical intellectuals, they might at least address this problem inherited from our colonial experience and perhaps devise a programme of reform to remedy it (Ahmat Adam, Kassim Ahmad & Rustam A. Sani 1989). A further irony here, in other words, is that a central and indispensable task for the social sciences in contemporary Malaysia is the urgent one of examining, confronting and overcoming their own backwardness, their own distorted development.

The narrow, ill-focused, somewhat technicist orientation of the official experts and policy-makers in our society and the crude economism that has dominated their worldview have only compounded the problems inhibiting the emergence of a socially relevant and critical social science in Malaysia. In claiming that their problems are located in wider social conditions, we do not wish to minimise the "internal" problems of the social sciences (Giddens, 1987, chap. 2). For example, the disciplinary divisions that tend

to "compartmentaize" and fragment conceptual interpretation of complex socialproblems come immediately to mind. These internal problems are no less damaging in their effects upon the development of an intellectually alive, coherent, and relevant tradition of social thought - a disciplinary or multidisciplinary discourse which is substantively critical, sensitive, and concerned with large-scale, long-term processes of social transformation - than the inhibiting features of the broader sociocultural environment.

The social sciences continue to be divided by an endemic internal strain between what C. Wright Mills (1959) disparagingly called "the mindless and abstracted empiricists" and the "grand theorists". There is no need to repeat here this old and continuing debate, particularly within sociology, between these two methodological positions or tendencies (Bourdieu 1988/89). It suffices to note that this old debate is now recurring once more, prompted by the effects of the present economic situation in which a government bent on economic rationalisation of the universities is urging the social sciences to abandon intellectual work which seemingly has no utilitarian value or cannot contribute to the wealth of the nation (Habibie 1989).

What the all too pragmatic proponents of that simplistically "realistic" postion forget, or have never realised, of course, is that, just as engineers can only be socially useful by being good engineers, so too social scientists can contribute work that is of practical social value only if they are allowed and indeed encouraged to pursue and produce work of real intellectual quality. There can be no objection to "applied" social science, so long as what is to be applied is itself securely grounded intellectually. If it is not then, regardless of the intentions those who commission and produce such work, it is simply not worth applying - indeed, its application is likely, from a strictly *practical* viewpoint, to be not merely futile but actually harmful. To those who would commision and apply such research, with its fateful and far-reaching implications, the old warning still applies: "let the buyer beware!"

This rather wide-ranging critical evaluation of the current state of the social sciences in Malaysia has the primary purpose of initiating a reappraisal of their intellectual project within a wider framework of social values which is by no means utopian but one rather that is borne of a restless anxiety and a need to look into "Hamlet's looking glass": "You go not till I set you up a glass, where you may see the innermost part of you."

Appendix 1
A List of Some Social Science and Social Science-Related Publications Produced in Malaysia

Name of Publication	*Institution/ Organisation*	*No. of Issues (Anually)*	*First Year of Issue*
Akademika	FSKK*[1]	2	1971/72
Ilmu Masyarakat	PSSM*[2]	4	1983
Jebat	Jabatan Sejarah, UKM*[3]	1	1971
Jurnal Antropologi & Sosiologi	Jabatan Antropologi & Sosiologi	1	1972
Jurnal Budaya Melayu	Jabatan Persuratan Melayu, UKM	1	1976
Jurnal Ekonomi	Fakulti Ekonomi, UM*[4]	Occ.*[11]	1960
Jurnal Ekonomi Malaysia	Fakulti Ekonomi, UKM	1	1980
Jurnal Ilmu Alam	Jabatan Geografi, UKM	1	1972
Jurnal Kemanusiaan	UTM*[5]	1	1987
Jurnal Komunikasi	Jabatan Komunikasi, UKM	1	1982
JMBRAS[6]	Arkib Negara KL & ISEAS Singapore for the Society	2	1984
Jurnal Pendidikan	Fakulti Pendidikan, UM	1	1970
Jurnal Pendidikan	Fakulti Pendidikan, UKM	2	1976
Jurnal Pendidikan Islam	ITM*[7]	Occ.	1987
Jurnal Pengurusan	Fakulti Pengurusan, UKM	2	1982
Jurnal Personalia Pelajar	HEP*[8], UKM	1	1989
Jurnal Psikologi Malaysia	Jabatan Psikologi, UKM	1	1985
Majalah Psikologi	Persatuan Mahasiswa Psikologi, UKM	1	1976
Pendidik & Pendidikan	Pusat Pengajian Ilmu Pendidikan, USM*[9]	3	1979
Penerbitan Tidak Berkala	Fakulti Ekonomi, UKM	Occ.	1978
Penerbitan Pengajian Melayu	Jabatan Pengajian Melayu, UM	1	1984
Sarawak Museum Journal	Sarawak Museum	2	1949
Sari	IBKKM*[10], UKM	2	1983
Sarjana	Fakulti Sastera & Sains Sosial, UM	2	1981
Sasaran	Kajian Sebaran Am, ITM	2	1983

Appendix 1 *(continued)*

Siri Seminar FSKK	FSKK, UKM	Occ.	1978
Sojourn	The Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, Singapore	4	1984
Sumber	Fakulti Sains Pembangunan, UKM	1	1988

*1 - Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan & Kemanusiaan
*2 - Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia
*3 - Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
*4 - Universiti Malaya
*5 - Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
*6 - Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
*7 - Institut Teknologi MARA
*8 - Hal Ehwal Pelajar
*9 - Universiti Sains Malaysia
*10 - Institut Bahasa, Kesusasteraan dan Kebudayaan Melayu
*11 - Occasionally

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POSTCRIPT (JANUARY 1991)

This paper grows out of what for long appeared to others as mere idle talk: out of its authors' many conversations, held over a number of years, both with each other and with some of our colleagues. The continuing focus of our attention, then and at the time of our writing this essay, was the unsatisfactory state of intellectual life both in our own university and others in Malaysia. We were only persuaded to begin putting our analysis of the problem on paper, however, when we were commissioned by Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia (PSSM) to prepare this review of the state of the social sciences in Malaysia for a Southeast Asia and Pacific regional seminar on "Research in the Social Sciences" that was jointly organised in Kuala Lumpur by SERU and UNESCO in June 1990. Of course, provocative or not, the views and analysis offered in this essay are simply ours, not those of the association.

Our central concern in this essay, as in the many long conversations that preceded it, was with the state of the intellectual tradition, that of the Malaysian social sciences, in which we had both been schooled and in which we and our colleagues have worked as academics. This concern led us to examine critically the relation between that intellectual tradition which we had inherited and the orientation and character of the universities in which it had been spawned. In particular, we were led to reject any naive expectation that the intellectual orientations and projects pursued within them might define the outlook and character of our academic institutions. Instead, we were forced into an increasing awareness that the social sciences in which we had been formed — and in wich we and our colleagues still operated — had been powerfully shaped by the distinctive structure and institutional traditions of our universities.

Accordingly, our intention in our analysis was not to find scapegoats or allocate blame to any individual academics. Rather, as we had conceived it, ours was a project in critical intellectual history and in the sociology of knowledge. We were seeking to analyse and understand, within its historical and political context, the development — what seemed to us the deformed or distorted development — of certain broad and general patterns of thought central to the social sciences and to Malaysian intellectual life generally. We sought to analyse the ways in which Malaysia's colonial and postcolonial situation had lent a quite specific character to its tertiary institutions, in the first instance Universiti Malaya which played a primary role in the formation of Malaysian intellectual culture, and through those institutions to the scholarly activites and traditions they harboured and fostered.

It was, in other words, a general analysis. As such, and as our concluding quotation from *Hamlet* urging reflective self-examination in the looking glass of truth should have suggested, we included ourselves in our critique of Malaysian social science paradigms and their exponents. How could we not see ourselves as among the inheritors and exponents of that tradition? That, indeed, was the explicit basis of our critique, a critique clearly from within. For us it remains a matter of regret that some of our colleagues reacted to our analysis as they did, believing, apparently, that we had singled out particular individuals as our targets (but without naming them!) while arrongantly excluding ourselves from the strictures that we were levelling. (We have been more than a little bemused, but also saddened, to overhear apparently authoritative identifications made by others of certain of our paragraphs or criticisms with certain specific people. These are generally wrong, not because the wrong individual has been "fingered" but because we are pointing throughout to underlying intellectual trends and tendencies, not the foibles or omissions of anyone in particular).

Most controversial, it seems, or most wounding, was our borrowing of an analogy from Lytton Strachey's criticism of his fellow historians in England: that facts mindlessly amassed in the absence of any rigorous and intellectually explicit framework of interpretation amount merely to so many "heaps of sawdust". Many of those who reacted to this phrase, we recognize however, did so to its polemical quotation by others, including in the context of public seminars where they were put on the defensive. When they eventually read our analysis, as they now can thanks to its publication here, and understand both the context in which Strachey coined it and also that in which (and the purpose with which) we ourselves referred to Strachey's sardonic remark, whatever hurt the phrase may have caused will, we are confident, be dissipated. That, at least, is our sincere hope. For our part, we would have preferred that others had read our analysis fully, and considered it as scholars, before they reacted to any reported part of it torn out of its own intellectual context.

If a piece of academic writing is to become, and be remembered as, a focus of controversy, it is better that the reasons be substantive, dealing with fundamental issues, rather that imagined slights and temporarily hurt feelings. The attention once again drawn to our critical scenario by the Minister of Education Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (who, as the editor of *Akademika* notes above, commented upon it on the occasion of initial presentation) is therefore fortunate. Late in 1990 and again early in 1991 Datuk Seri Anwar has chastised the universities "for failing to produce intellectuals capable of producing works of literature and culture" and, apparently drawing on our analysis, especially singles out Malaysian social scientists for their failures.

Whatever our reservations concerning his interpretation of our argument and the uses to which he has put it, he has done us all a great service by reminding us that what is at stake are important issues concerning our nation's intellectual and academic culture, not simply wounded feelings or even zealously nourished reputations. He has not only returned the argument to the general level of (dare we say it?) Durkheimean "social facts" where we had originally situated it; he has also made it, in a manner which is as unprecedented as it is appropriate, a matter of public interest, debate, and concern. If the much abused term "commitment" means anything among academics, it must entail an awareness of the larger public and cultural dimensions of their intellectual work, as well as an eagerness to see the meaning of that work take on some prominent public significance. When it does, then, regardless of its form or its number of footnotes, the piece of writing that prompts this intelligent public interest is for us scholarly and may appropriately be termed "academic".

Welcome though the Minister's intervention has been from this perspective, in adopting our analysis for his won purposes he seems to have misunderstood its argument in two important respects. (Rustam has already offered two rejoinders in the daily press to the Minister's criticisms: "The Falure of Local Universities", *New Sunday Times,* 20 January 1991: p. 10; and "Krisis Intelektual di Universiti Memalukan", *Utusan Malaysia,* 21 January 1991: p. 6. These essays review the causes of the "unpalatable" state of social sciences in Malaysia and suggest that the remedies needed must be different from those that the Minister's diagnosis implies). First, we did not state, nor does anything in our argument support the implication, that the problems of defining an appropriate intellectual project and tradition were particular to the social sciences or that these, among all the disciplines pursued in Malaysian academic life, were especially to be found wanting and condemned. Rather, if the analysis which we advanced has any force and validity, then the kinds of problems that we identified will be characteristic of virtually all fields of Malaysian scholarly endeavour for quite some time to come. After all, the colonial legacy and the impact of our universities' postcolonial situation (and especially of offical educational policies and expectations) must have been felt, if not necessarily with identical force, throughout all corners of Malaysian academic life and scholarly endeavour.

All the debates about "scientific imperialism", for example, and the tremendous constraints, not only challenges, that confront natural scientists in Third World countries attest to the generality of the problem. It cannot then be peculiar to or especially endemic within only some intellectual fields. Indeed, if we can do so without seeming excessively parochial or self-serving, we would argue just the opposite: that far from

being notably blameworthy or deficient, the social sciences are in this regard rather more advanced than many other fields. As our own paper exemplifies, the social sciences ahead of may others have identified this fundamental problem affecting the development of virtually all our scholarly disciplines. They — and not, for example, the natural sciences with their generally more exclusively empirical and applied orientation in this country — have highlighted its implications for the creation of an intellectual culture that is both locally authentic and appropriate to the conditions of advancing modernity in formerly colonial nations such as Malaysia. The problem does not occur solely or with particular force but has simply been recognized with special clarity in the social sciences. It is accordingly evidence of their strength, not any outstanding deficiency, that the social sciences have reached this less than generally shared insight into the conditions affecting all intellectual endeavour in our country. This is what, if anything, might have placed the human sciences in a prominent position in this debate (or what should have until the Minister launched what is to us his misdirected attack).

Our second criticism is more fundamental. As Rustam's recent rejoinders noted above make clear, the remedies that we think are necessary differ from those proposed by the Minister because our characterization and diagnosis of the problem differ from his in the first place. His response has been to propose new measures and initiatives to give better effect to government policy towards the universities and their academic staff. (He does not indicate why previous measures of basically the same kind have failed in the past, or why the new ones he now proposes will not meet with the same fate). Our analysis as outlined above is rather different and, in our view, more basic and persuasive.

The distorted or deformed quality of the intellectual disciplines and traditions engendered with in our universities, we have argued, derives from the particular character that those academic institutions have acquired as the immediate result of government policy and direction. Whatever form or orientation that the development of the various social science disciplines has assumed has been taken not for random or unfathomable reasons but in a direct process of adaptation and accommodation: to the nature of the academic institutions hosting them and, more fundamentally, to the various government policies that over the years have shaped those institutions.

For the government simply to propose some new, perhaps different and even more enlightened, measures and regulations for our universities and their academic staff will not alter or solve the problem. It will merely modify the context, and the essentially bureaucratic "rules of the game", within which university staff are encouraged to pursue their careerist

strategies of advancement. What are needed instead are policies that would encourage academics to seek, and reward them for seeking, scholarly objectives and visions — not the successful pursuit of preferment through patronage or sponsorship in les than entirely modern, indeed still largely patrimonial, bureaucratic structures. In other words, a university, if it is to advance learning, must be conspicously seen to recognize and value those who genuinely pursue and embody what learning means and who understand with some profundity and insight the intellectual traditions within which they as scholars operate; not those who merely outwardly fulfil certain formal requirements or empty criteria such as the perfunctory attainment of some necessary academic credentials or the sponsored publication of some less than memorable and scarce-read monograph.

If this analysis is correct, then no new government initiative of the kind proposed by the Minister will remedy the problem. The belief that such new minsterial directives, of necessity bureaucratically interpreted and implemented, may encourage scholarship and remedy all manner of scholarly deficiencies in our universities is itself the principal cause of the problem. If this sounds a harsh judgement, then we can only say that it is one that we have reached not out of prejudice or any malice. Rather, we have come to it as a result of looking — at times very much against the grain of the intellectual traditions in which we ourselves were originally trained, but as sociologists with a persistent aspiration towards achieving some clarity of vision about the context of our own lives — at the social and institutional environment in which we work. If our universities are really to be universities (not *keuniversiti-universitian,* as Professor S. Takdir Alisjahbana once remarked) and the majority of those working in them are to become scholars in the way that the term is commonly understood internationally, then they must be run as universities: not under close government direction as some peculiar hybrid between a colonial civil service appendage and a precolonial *istana* domain of intensely strategic calculation discreetly masked behind a facade of loyalist conformism.

Our analysis therefore gives no support to the approach and the specific measures now proposed by the Minister. The challenge that policy towards our academic institutions in this country now faces is not that of how the government can better and, down to ever finer details, more intimately bring its will to bear within the everyday processes of university life and administration. Rather, it is how, consistent with its broad political goals and responsibilities which none of us would deny, the government may disengage itself from the management of our universities, enabling them to grow and thrive under identifiably scholarly leadership as primarily and fundamentally scholarly institutions. Only then, through an alchemy of gradually transforming "sawdust" if not into gold then at least into silver

of internationally marketable quality, will the problems that rightly preoccupy both the Minister and ourselves of remedying the crisis of intellectual culture in our society begin to be addressed.