

The Islamization of Social Sciences in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects

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Introduction

The Islamization of social sciences is part and parcel of developing and promoting knowledge that conforms to the norms of Islam. This can be attained by motivating scholars to develop scholarship using an Islamic perspective through the introduction of new social science courses based on Islam, Islamizing (i.e., rearticulating along Islamic lines) existing conventional social science disciplines, and promoting the movement of Islamic attitude to knowledge.

The Islamization of Knowledge undertaking in Nigeria can be traced to the period of the Sokoto Jihad leaders, whose scholarly writings covered such aspects of life as politics, economics, and medicine. However, with the passage of time and, more especially, with the coming of the British colonialists and the concomitant infiltration of western scholarship, the Islamization of Knowledge pioneered by the Jihad leaders gradually began to fade. At first, the North opposed vehemently the spread of the western system of education, because it was linked with Christian missionary propaganda (Fapohunda 1982). As such, the emirs of the North and their subjects stood firmly against this alien system, a stance that accounts for the disparity in western education between the South, that had welcomed it, and the North.

Unfortunately, like most other Muslim countries, Nigeria continues to suffer from the colonial legacy of the West. In particular, its elites are the worst victims of colonization of mind by the West's so-called secular ideology. Its education and other systems of life continue to be based largely on the structure of that secular ideology.

Education is the single most important instrument for grooming and channelling a society in the desired direction. To rescue Muslim societies from the yoke of western secular civilization and to reestablish Islamic civilization requires the decolonization of the secularized minds and spirits of the elites as well as of Muslim intellectuals (the ulama), professionals, and political leaders, on the one hand, and the training of young people in Islamic knowledge and education, on the other. In order to return the society to the Islamic system of life, the first task is the Islamization of the educational system (both formal and informal) for the Muslims and the Islamization of the country's ulama.

Fortunately, with the recent Islamic resurgence in many Muslim nations, including Nigeria, efforts are being made by many scholars to revive the past glory of Islam. One of these efforts is the Islamization of Knowledge in several Nigerian universities, especially Usmanu Danfodiyo University. It is our intention in the rest of this paper to highlight the efforts made so far in this direction and to pinpoint a number of key impediments confronting the Islamization of the social sciences.

Islamization of Social Sciences: The Journey So Far

The most significant effort in the Islamization of the social sciences in Nigeria is traceable to the year 1985, when the country convened its first international seminar on Islamic economics, which was organized by the Department of Economics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Scholars from all over the world attended and presented papers. A number of recommendations were given by the participants on how to develop the discipline of economics, as well as other social science disciplines, along Islamic lines.

Immediately after the seminar, a program for the Islamization of Knowledge was introduced by the university. It involved the Islamization of several disciplines in the faculties of arts and Islamic studies, law, social sciences, and administration. For example, the department of management studies has introduced two Islam-based courses in its undergraduate syllabi: Islamic business ethics and Islamic banking. Two courses have also been introduced into its postgraduate MBA program: the Islamic financial system and public duties in Islam. The department of economics offers courses on various fields of Islamic economics, such as Islamic banking, development in an Islamic framework, Islamic welfareism, and the economics of production, distribution, and consumption in Islam. A number of Islam-based undergraduate courses have also been introduced into the political science and sociology departments.

As the pioneer in this endeavor, it is essential at this juncture to examine the efforts made by the authorities of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, especially during the second term of the then vice-chancellor, Mahdi Adamu (1985/86–1988/89 sessions).

The Syllabi: As indicated above, several Islam-based courses were introduced, in addition to the conventional courses, in the departments of economics, management studies, sociology, and political science. All of these departments are located within the faculty of social sciences and administration. In addition, the contents of several conventional courses were enlarged through the addition of numerous Islam-based topics. Thus the Islamization of social science undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Usmanu Danfodiyo University was achieved through two broad perspectives: the introduction of entirely new Islamic courses and the

inclusion of Islamic topics within the syllabi of conventional courses. The beauty of this approach is that while students will have the singular advantage of acquiring new insights from their academic pursuits by registering for these Islam-based courses, they will compete with their counterparts in other institutions, for they are still required to register for all the conventional courses approved for them by the National Universities Commission.

Recruitment and Training of Staff: In December 1988, fifteen new staff members (mostly graduate assistants) were recruited to foster the Islamization of social sciences. Approximately twenty new staff members were also employed for the purpose of promoting the Islamization of their disciplines. The funds used in recruiting these new staff members were sought and obtained largely from the Islamic Education Trust, based in Minna, and the International Institution of Islamic Thought, based in the United States.

A special postgraduate training program, designed and approved by the university, sought to enable these young scholars to gain and develop scholarship in Islam and Islamic perspectives of various branches of human knowledge. The reasoning behind this was that this acquired knowledge would equip them with the skills and confidence needed to teach the existing Islam-based courses in their respective disciplines and to Islamize and develop the disciplines of Islamic knowledge. The basic components of the training program are Islamic studies and Shari'ah courses, workshops on the Islamization of Knowledge, Arabic language courses, and selected conventional courses on each student's particular discipline. The basic procedure used for training staff members is to send them for a Masters or a Ph.D. degree in either Islamic economics, sociology, and political science if possible, or for conventional programs in their respective disciplines. Later on, students in the second group will receive additional training in Islamic studies, the Shari'ah, and Arabic at Usmanu Danfodiyo University. So far, all staff members have completed their postgraduate studies successfully.

Workshops: During Adamu's tenure, two major international activities on the Islamization of Knowledge were organized successfully by Usmanu Danfodiyo University. The first was the International Seminar on Islamic Economics, held at the university from 11–16 February 1985. The second was the workshop on the Islamization of Knowledge, also held at the university, from 27–29 March 1989. The seminar was organized as a prelude to the introduction of Islamic economics into the university's undergraduate programs, and its proceedings, edited by R. I. Molla et al., were published in 1988 by the university. The primary aim of the workshop was to produce a blueprint on how to acquire materials for teaching the numerous newly introduced Islam-based courses. Twelve papers, including four lead papers, were presented and discussed.

Challenges Facing the Islamization of Knowledge Movement in Nigeria

Degree of Acceptance: Careful perusal of the Islamization of the social sciences will show that, at the present time, it has only been implemented successfully in Usmanu Danfodiyo University. Many famous universities, such as Zaria's Ahmadu Bello University, have yet to introduce any Islam-based courses into their social science syllabi.

The Participation of Women: To date, there has been very little input by female scholars in both the Islamic oriented and the conventional disciplines. In the North, women continue to lag behind in both forms of education and remain underrepresented in educational institutions. In some cases, village heads have accepted bribes from parents who want to remove their daughters from schools so they can be married off.

Lack of Support from the Traditional Ulama: The traditional ulama constitute jurists who are well-versed in the Shari'ah. In general, their role is to derive a set of rules and injunctions of do's and don't's that will govern social interactions as they relate to the social sciences. However, the basic problem here is that they do not agree with specialists who have received a modern (i.e., western) education, since many of them refuse to exercise *ijtihād*, on the ground that the "gate of *ijtihād*" is closed, when faced with devising solutions to modern socioeconomic phenomena. As explained by AbūSulaymān (1988), the absence of *ijtihād* is one of the causes of the crisis in knowledge that has kept the Muslim world in a state of backwardness and malaise. On the other hand, Muslim social scientists with a modern education lack the Shari'ah knowledge of the ulama. To a certain extent, some oppose the Islamization of Knowledge movement and refer to it by such pejorative terms as "fanaticism," "extremism," "fundamentalism," and "unscientific."

The Problem of Secularism: Another problem is the assumed secularism of the educational system and the resulting general lack of government support. The government, claiming to be secular, generally tends to patronize secular education at the expense of Islamic education even in Muslim populated areas. In Nigeria, the situation is similar to the view expressed by al Fārūqī (1988) that

the secularist education system has assumed tremendous proportion, elbowing the Islamic system from the field. Islamic education . . . remains a private affair devoid of access to public funds.

In Nigeria, like other Muslim nations, secular knowledge dominates all aspects of life and is popularized and perpetuated by institutions, universities, and organizations.

The Lack of Impact of the Islamization of Social Sciences on the Society: From the economic perspective, one finds that there has been very little, if any, effort toward the practical implementation of Islamic economic principles. This is despite the large number of students produced and the volume of research conducted under the Islamization of Knowledge program since its inception in Sokoto in 1986.

For example, as is commonly known, the Islamic economic system is an interest-free and just system in which equitable distribution is assured by such tools as zakat and Islamic banking. But today, even in Muslim populated areas, there are no Islamic banks, despite the fact that Muslims are barred from interest dealings with conventional banks and that many Muslim traders and entrepreneurs are willing to establish and patronize such banks (Mikailu 1989). In this study, consisting of a survey of nine major Nigerian cities with predominantly Muslim populations, Mikailu established that there are serious imperfections in routine commercial transactions: the existence of monopolies, the unethical attitude of traders in the form of profiteering, false claims made by sellers, the sale of unlawful and defective items, dealing in interest-based activities, hoarding, and speculative trading. All of these problems have militated against healthy economic growth and have compounded further the problem of income distribution. Zakat, which is supposed to alleviate the suffering of the poor and needy, has not been established either properly or effectively, for its payment has been left to the individual. Neither the government nor any Islamic movement has tried to establish it as an Islamic economic institution.

On the political side, most of our Muslim leaders have tended to rule contrary to the Islamic principles of administration. Some are ignorant of the Shari'ah and tend to support the dichotomy between Islam and politics, not realizing that Islam encompasses all aspects of an individual's life. The government's claim to be secular only widens this dichotomy further. On the social side, it is astonishing that even in Muslim areas, the rates and frequency of such crimes as murder, rape, prostitution, theft, and gambling are on the increase.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have observed that a) as far as the Islamization of social sciences is concerned, its coverage in terms of disciplines is in the areas of economics, management studies, political science, and sociology, and b) that Sokoto's Usmanu Danfodiyo University is the vanguard of this movement. Some conferences and seminars have been conducted for the purpose of Islamizing the social sciences, and others are being prepared. We have also shown that the Islamization of the social sciences is part of the Islamization of Knowledge program.

However, this program faces a number of constraints and impediments (outlined above). To overcome these, we feel obliged to make the following recommendations. We believe that these recommendations, if

implemented, will go a long way toward fostering the Islamization of Knowledge movement:

1. All social science disciplines should be given equal weight in the Islamization drive. To make this possible, more experts are needed in these disciplines to make contributions.

2. Other Nigerian universities—Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria), Bayero University (Kano), and the University of Maidugury—should be urged to embrace the Islamization of Knowledge program in totò.

3. The Islamization of the social sciences should encompass women, because they play an important role in society. The mass media could be utilized to enlighten the public on this crucial Islamic endeavor.

4. There is a need for the practical implementation of such Islamic institutions such as zakat, *shūrā* (advisory) committees, and *ḥisāb* (market supervision). Islamic banks should be established so that the Islamization movement would have some practical results rather than remaining a mere academic endeavor.

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