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Bridging Two Paradigms: A Social Scientist's Reflections on Knowledge Integration in SRGIK-2025

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On 3 January 2025, I had the privilege of attending a symposium focused on the roles and goals of integrating knowledge in Muslim minority contexts (SRGIK-2025). It was co-organised by the Department of Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, AbdulHamid Abusulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), and Darul Huda Islamic University in India, this event brought together scholars to explore knowledge integration from multiple perspectives. As someone rooted in

linguistics—a field that is inherently interdisciplinary—I found the symposium both fascinating and thought-provoking. While linguistics bridges various domains, the Western-centric paradigm often limits interdisciplinarity to secular ideologies, intentionally excluding intersections with theology or anything related to religion. In my field, these boundaries are often seen as mutually exclusive, never meant to intersect. The very idea of challenging this divide felt profoundly empowering. Although the symposium focused on integrating knowledge in Muslim minority contexts, coming from a Muslim majority context like Malaysia gave me a different lens to reflect on the discussions, which I have attempted to synthesize in the following.

Prof. Dr. Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi: A Case for Integration

Prof. Dr. Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi commenced the session by addressing the dynamics and integration of knowledge. He highlighted that integration is an essential reality, as life itself is an integrated phenomenon. Viewing life's elements in isolation, he argued, is fundamentally flawed, as it creates compartmentalisation and limits our understanding and problem-solving capabilities. This perspective resonated deeply with me, as the Western-centric structures dominating social sciences often fragment knowledge into silos, disregarding the interconnectedness of various disciplines. Integration, as Prof. Dr. El-Mesawi argued, is not just an academic exercise; it is a necessity for achieving a more comprehensive and relevant understanding of the world.

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mumtaz Ali: The Role of Spirituality in Education

The philosophy of education took centre stage with Prof. Dr. Mohamad Mumtaz Ali's presentation. He posited that spirituality must be the foundational philosophy taught to students, a perspective I wholeheartedly agree with. Knowledge, when detached from spirituality and the greater purpose of life, risks becoming a double-edged sword, capable of causing harm rather than bringing benefit. It reminded me how often secular educational paradigms sideline the ethical and spiritual dimensions of learning, reducing education to the mere accumulation of facts and skills. Reflecting on his words, I was struck by the profound simplicity of this argument: that

knowledge without a grounding in spirituality can lead to outcomes far removed from its intended purpose. His talk made me think about my own field and how ethics and spirituality can be better woven into its framework. As educators and scholars, we have a responsibility not just to inform minds but also to shape hearts, ensuring that knowledge serves humanity in ways that are meaningful and pleasing to Allah.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Radwan Jamal Elatrash: Faith and Reason in Surah Al-Kahf

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Radwan Jamal Elatrash delivered one of the day's most anticipated and impactful talks, exploring the interplay between faith and reason through the Qur'anic story of Musa (عليه السلام) and Khidr (عليه السلام) as narrated in Surah Al-Kahf. This chapter holds a special place in the hearts of many Muslims, myself included, as it is recited every Friday, as suggested by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), to receive its manifold blessings. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Radwan's analysis was both insightful and deeply moving. Unlike academic discussions that often become overly abstract or disconnected from real-life experiences, his approach was practical and relatable.

He described Musa (عليه السلام) as the embodiment of reason and Khidr (عليه السلام) as the embodiment of faith, illustrating how their story teaches us the importance of balancing these two faculties in our lives. He emphasized that while reason is a powerful tool, it has its limits, as human beings cannot fully grasp the divine wisdom and insight that belong solely to Allah (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى).

This point hit even harder when he referenced the ongoing genocide in Palestine, where 20,000 children have been brutally murdered, their deaths witnessed by the world through screens. Such atrocities transcend the bounds of reason, and this parallel moved me to tears. It was a reminder that some realities cannot be explained by logic alone and require faith to comprehend and endure. This humility in recognising the boundaries of human understanding was especially poignant for me, as someone navigating a field where logic and rationality often reign supreme.

Dr. Jafar Paramboor: Practical Models of Integration

The symposium brought to light practical examples of integration through the presentation by Dr. Jafar Parambour. He highlighted how Darul Huda Islamic University exemplifies the principles of knowledge integration within a Muslim minority context like India. Collective community efforts have enabled the institution to flourish, producing well-rounded graduates such as himself and Dr. Sayyed Mohamed Muhsin, the moderator of the event, who embody both spiritual grounding and intellectual excellence. This approach offers inspiration for other institutions striving to harmonise traditional Islamic sciences with modern disciplines.

As someone from a Muslim majority context, I found it humbling to witness how Muslims in minority settings overcome challenges and implement strategies to preserve and integrate their religious and intellectual traditions. It made me reflect on how I have always been blessed with easy access to such traditions and institutions—something I have perhaps taken for granted. Unlike my counterparts in minority contexts who must fight to protect their heritage, I have never faced such struggles. This realisation is an awakening for me, making me appreciate the privileges I have and consider how I can contribute more meaningfully to such efforts.

Reflections and Takeaways

The symposium offered a wealth of illuminating perspectives, but what stood out most to me was its relevance to my own journey as a Muslim academic in the social sciences. Dominated by Western-centric paradigms, my field often marginalises alternative epistemologies, particularly those rooted in Islamic thought. This event was a powerful reminder of the urgent need for knowledge integration today—to cultivate a truly holistic Muslim scholar and student, one who learns and understands both the religion and the world, harmonising the two in a meaningful and impactful manner. Dr. Radwan's discussion on faith and reason demonstrated the limitations of a purely rationalist approach and the importance of integrating divine guidance into intellectual pursuits. Similarly, Prof. Mumtaz's emphasis on spirituality as the foundation of education challenged me to think about how ethical and spiritual dimensions can be incorporated into the teaching and application of social sciences.

On a broader level, the symposium highlights the urgency of addressing compartmentalisation in knowledge systems. Whether in majority or minority contexts, Muslims face the shared challenge of preserving their intellectual tradition while engaging with contemporary disciplines. Events like this symposium serve as a crucial platform to creating dialogue, sharing best practices, and inspiring collective action.

Attending this symposium was an immensely valuable experience that makes me appreciate the concept of knowledge integration. The diverse perspectives shared not only broadened my understanding but also inspired me to think critically about how I can contribute to this effort within my own field. As I left the event, I felt a renewed sense of purpose and a stronger conviction for holistic approaches to knowledge. This symposium was more than just an academic event; it was a reminder of the transformative potential of integrating knowledge in ways that align with both divine guidance and human aspirations. For this, I am truly grateful.***

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