# KATHA

Official Journal of the Universiti Malaya
Centre for Civilisational Dialogue

ISSN: 1823-2159 eISSN 2636-9265 Vol. 18, 2022

UNIVERSITI
MALAYA

**Editor-in-Chief:**
Professor Datuk Dr. Azizan Baharuddin
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

**Associate Editor-in-Chief/Managing Editors**
Chang Lee Wei
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

Nur Lisa Mohd Yusoff
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

**Editorial Board:**
Professor Dr. Eddy Ng
Dalhousie University, Canada

Professor Dr. John Nirenberg
Walden University, Minneapolis, USA

Professor Dr. Yuki Shiozaki
University of Shizuoka, Japan

Assoc. Prof. Gs. Dr. Rosilawati Zainol
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Roger Barnard
University of Waikato, New Zealand

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Faridah Noor Mohd Noor
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

Dr. Alwani Ghazali
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

Dr. Kuang Ching Hei
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

Dr. Shida Irwana bt Omar
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

Dr. Siti Nor Awang
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

Dr. Zuwati Hasim
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

**Language Editors**
Kathleen Por Chhe Ern
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

Nur Shahidah Abu Hanifah
National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN), Malaysia

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


| NO | ARTICLE | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Religion and Postmodernism**<br>*Mohd Hazim Shah* | .....1 |
| 2 | **Mythopoeia in Akhavan's & Eliot's Poetry**<br>*Mahin Pourmorad Naseri, Parvin Ghasemi* | ....21 |
| 3 | **Rethinking International Order According to Islamic International Relations Principles**<br>*Muhammad Fahmi Md Ramzan, Mohamad Zaidi Abdul Rahman, Nurfarhana Mohd Daud* | ....39 |
| 4 | **Social Acceptance of Green Electricity: A Case Study in Putrajaya**<br>*Suzana Ariff Azizan, Ahmad Nazirul Akmal Ahmad Sayuty* | ....56 |

Vol. 18, Issue 1, pp. 1-20

ARTICLE

# Religion and Postmodernism

Mohd Hazim Shah[1,*]

[1] School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

*Corresponding author email: hazim.shah@gmail.com

**Received date:** 5 May 2022
**Published date:** 31 Dec 2022

**How to cite:**
Shah, M.H. (2022). Religion and Postmodernism. *KATHA*, 18(1), 1-20. Retrieved from https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/KATHA/article/view/36651

**DOI:**
https://doi.org/10.22452/KATHA.vol18no1.1

## ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss the implications of postmodernism on religious thought, with special reference to Islamic thought. Firstly, I discuss the nature and characteristics of postmodernist thinking, and the different schools of thought/'postmodernisms' that fall under that rubric. My contention is that postmodernism is a response to modernism rather than religion, although it has implications on religious thought. Secondly, I examine and compare the points of contention between modernism and post-modernism. I then argue that the differences are largely due to the privileging of nature and reasoning of modernists and the privileging of human/social and psychology of postmodernists. These, in turn, have implications on their metaphysics and epistemology, respectively. Thirdly, I provide an Islamic perspective on the modernist-postmodernist discourse, showing that the Islamic perspective transcends the natural-social divide, and how the tripartite relationship between God, man and nature, informs the discourse. The philosophy of language is also brought up in the discussion, where I suggest that Islam accepts the dual role of languages, that is, conveying the meaning in its literal sense (aka modernist), as well as being a symbol and an indirect reference (aka postmodernist). Finally, a close comparison is made between postmodernism and Islam, where both their incompatibilities as well as possible points of convergence are discussed.

**Keywords:** Modernism, Postmodernism, Islam

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between religion and postmodernism cannot be properly understood unless a discussion on modernism is included since postmodernism is largely a response to modernism rather than religion. In fact, history shows that modernism, or modernity, was deemed a response to the religiously dominated society and culture of the West. Therefore, the sequence is as follows: religion→modernity/modernism→postmodernism. Some, however, argue that the connection between modernism and postmodernism is more thematic than chronological, and that they co-exist at some point. Take for example the predecessor of the modernism-postmodernism divide, that is the opposition between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment philosophies (Berlin 2013). While Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant, Hume, Locke, and the French philosophes were well-known in the history of western thinking, there existed the opposite current of thought known as "Counter-Enlightenment", which is found in the writings of lesser-known 18th century philosophers such as Vico, Herder and Hamann. The co-existence of rational and non-rational philosophies is also found in the 20th century; with rationalists seen in the form of Bertrand Russell, Frege, and the Logical Positivists, in general, while the 'non-rationalists' were phenomenologists such as Husserl and Heidegger, and existentialists such as Sartre and Camus. However, one can nevertheless detect a distinct 'rise of post-modernism' beginning in the 1960s, marked by a watershed from the previous period which was dominated by 'modernist thinking'. This can be clearly seen in the philosophy of science, which has been regarded as the arena of epistemological contestation between modernists and postmodernists. Before the 1960s, the philosophy of science was dominated by the Logical Positivists/Empiricists and rationalist philosophers such as Popper and Lakatos. In the 1960s challenges to the rationalist thinking of science was brought about by philosophers such as Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, although they were described as 'postpositivist' rather than 'postmodernist'. Further provocations by postmodernists were made by social constructivists such as Bruno Latour, Steven Shapin, Simon Schaffer, and Michel Foucault. Post-modernists added a twist to the development of scientific philosophies by widening the field itself. If Kuhn's introduction of history to the philosophy of science was considered as novel, what came next was even more 'shocking'. Sociology, Cultural Studies, Feminism, Social Epistemology etc., joined the foray of epistemological discourses on science, so much so that a new discipline, namely the broader field, known as "Science Studies"

emerged. The identification of science with rationality, objectivity, truth and progress was no longer taken for granted - in fact it was seriously challenged. Today, postmodernism in all its various forms is here to stay, and has penetrated several different fields, be it art, philosophy, social sciences, and even religious studies.

Given the novel and pervasive influence of post-modernism on contemporary thinking and culture, it makes sense to examine its influence and implications on religion. This article aims to do just that, i.e., discuss the nature and characteristics of post-modernist thinking and how it impinges on religion, focusing on Islam.

## 2. The Tripartite Relationship between Modernism, Postmodernism, and Religion

As mentioned earlier, postmodernism can generally be viewed as a response to modernism, while modernism itself, or rather modernity[1] can be seen as a form of thinking or mode of discourse based on 'Enlightenment Rationalism'—to borrow Gellner's (1992) phrase—a mode of thought based on the ideas of the Enlightenment philosophers with their emphasis on reason and science.

In this article, however, the three lines of thinking or rather 'ideologies', are not treated as part of a sequential development of the history of ideas, but rather as three competing ideologies in contemporary culture. In this regard, reference is made to the three main positions outlined in Gellner's book (Murad 1996), *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, namely: (i) Religion (or Religious Fundamentalism) (ii) Relativism or Postmodernism, and (iii) Enlightenment Rationalism (read 'Modernism'), which according to Gellner, are the 'three principal contestants for our intellectual loyalty' (Gellner 1992). A similar framework is adopted in this paper, with a slight modification, that is, the replacing of the term 'Enlightenment Rationalism' with 'Modernism', although the contents of both largely overlap[2]. In his book, Gellner argued in favour of a third option, namely 'Enlightenment Rationalism', while rejecting both Relativism/Postmodernism, and Religious Tradition/Fundamentalism[3]. However, this paper takes a different position from Gellner's. The discussion starts by looking at the opposition between, and the polemics surrounding, the contestation between modernist and postmodernist thinking. Subsequently, the author took the novelty of giving his own intellectual intervention by viewing the dialogue between both positions as a contestation

between two secular ideologies, providing critique on both, and showing how they can be viewed within an Islamic perspective or framework of thought.

## 3. Modernist Thought: The Features Which Invite a Postmodernist Response

Modernistic thinking is characterized largely by the philosophies of the Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant, Locke, Hume, Comte, and the French *philosophes*. They value rational and empirical sources of knowledge, and adopt epistemologies based on either rationalism, empiricism, or a combination of both, just as Kant did. They also valued scientific knowledge and methods, and sought to extend their uses even to anthropology and social sciences. Modernist thinking, as laid down by Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century, was revived in the 20th century through the philosophical works of Bertrand Russell, the Logical Positivists, and Karl Popper. It was linked to the Philosophy of Science in the early stages of its development. It cannot be denied that the Scientific Revolution in the 17th century and the subsequent progress of science became a model—even for philosophers—for what genuine knowledge is. Kant for example, was impressed by Newton and Newtonian physics, and even tried to elevate some of Newton's scientific ideas to metaphysical status. Abstract philosophical ideas such as rationalism and empiricism were vindicated through science, when science was shown to be based on rational and empirical sources of knowledge, as claimed by the Logical Positivists. The successes of science, especially physics, demonstrated how man can sought to achieve power through knowledge, without the aid of revelation or supernatural assistance. This fits in with another theme of the Enlightenment school of thought, that is, the courage for man to use his own rational powers and the five senses in formulating knowledge and charting the future course of his own civilisation whose glory lies ahead in time, as argued by Francis Bacon, and not somewhere in the medieval or distant past. Thus, science became the yardstick and the model by which philosophers set their epistemological standards, which then goes on to determine as to what counts as true and real. What initially applied to the natural or physical world, then became the universal standard for all, including determining the nature of truth and reality in the human world. This 'philosophical trick' of extending the epistemology and metaphysics of the natural world to the rest of existence, became the hallmark of modernist thinking, thereby sidelining other approaches such as that of religion or humanist.

Knowledge about the natural world as discovered through science, is considered as 'objective knowledge' which reflects true reality and is confirmed through the success of scientific practices. Thus, it is not surprising if modernist thinkers such as the Logical Positivists and Karl Popper, regard science as the only valid form of knowledge, being epistemologically privileged and that it should be emulated by all other forms of knowledge that seek to make a claim of authenticity. Following this thinking, there would not be any controversial matters had claims been confined or limited to the realm of science and the natural world. Science became controversial and a source of contention when it became the standard bearer of truth and reality, setting standards for all fields of knowledge and claims to truth and reality. Unlike Wittgenstein's language games, science sets the standards for all. Epistemological notions such as 'rationality', 'truth' and 'objectivity', became defined in terms of science, or at least the epistemology of science as viewed by modernists. To add value, science was also seen as 'progressive' knowledge, in that its development is a progress towards the truth as argued by Karl Popper through his theory of verisimilitude.

All these became grist for the postmodernists' mill, who refused to accept the authority of science and the resulting epistemological standards. Instead, postmodernists took a humanistic turn, and placed emphasis on the social and humanism, in determining the nature of truth and reality. Which explains why they vehemently objected to the notion of 'objective truth' or 'objective knowledge', of a singular monolithic rationality expressed by and through science, and the idea of a mind- independent reality accessible through rational and empirical means. The social constructivists for instance, went to the other end of the spectrum and argued that scientific knowledge is a social construction rather than a camera image of an objective external world. By combining Kant's idea of how the world 'fits into' our mind or the scaffolding provided by our mind, and Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge where knowledge is 'context-dependent', social constructivists had minimized the role of the external world and instead widened the role played by the human mind as well as the social interests that feed into the mind in explaining the nature of the knowledge formed. In so doing, they are thereby placing emphasis on the social over the natural, which typifies the postmodernist response to modernist claims.

In the case of the pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, who is also a postmodernist of sorts, an attempt was made to redefine epistemological notions such as rationality and objectivity, in human or social terms (Rorty 1991). According to Rorty, 'objectivity' can be seen as 'inter-subjectivity', which involves agreement between human seekers of knowledge[4]. Again, the connection is not between knowledge and 'external reality', but between human individuals involved in the construction process of knowledge. As for rationality, Rorty defined it more as a human attitude, rather than a method of approach aimed at achieving truth[5].

## 4. Postmodernism: Some Defining Features

To highlight, Postmodernism is not a monolithic philosophy or school of thought, unlike Utilitarianism, Marxism or Logical Positivism. Under the broad umbrella of 'Postmodernism', different philosophies can be identified, namely; Existentialism, Phenomenology, Nihilism/Absurdism, Deconstruction, Social Constructivism, and Critical Theory. Despite their differences, there are certain common characteristics that qualify them as 'postmodernist'. Among these are: (i) their rejection of grand or meta-narratives (ii) a philosophy of language that rejects the notion of language having a 'fixed' relation to an objective reality (iii) the rejection of the idea of absolute truth, and the acceptance of relativism.

We begin with some of the 'differences' between these philosophies before moving on to shared commonalities. More often than not, these so-called differences are not differences in assertions on common themes, but rather differences in themes highlighted. For example, Deconstruction concerns itself with the philosophy of language, and to some extent, combination with sociology. Deconstructionists are critical of concepts expressed through words, since they reflect the ideologies of the ruling class, are socially and culturally constructed, and do not refer to 'essential truths'. Their criticism on binary concepts such as 'East and West', 'Male and Female', 'Master and Servant', 'Religious and Secular', 'Reason and Revelation', 'Active and Passive', reflects this. Critical theorists, on the other hand, took a critical view of society, and theorized about society. However, their analysis of society went beyond language and included perspectives drawn from philosophy, history, psychology etc. Nevertheless, this difference between Deconstruction and Critical

Theory does not imply that they are incompatible. It merely indicates the scope and range of their critical analysis of knowledge and society.

Next, we look at shared concepts that cut across different philosophies included under Postmodernism. Firstly, the opposition to metanarratives and grand theories, and the emphasis on the local and contextual. This feature of Postmodernist thinking derives its origins from Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (Lyotard 1984), in which Lyotard criticized Habermas' overarching legitimating approach towards the foundations of a social order that is based on reason and rational communication. Metanarratives such as Marxism, Positivist theory of science, or even religions such as Christianity or Islam, tend to provide a unified view of the world, through which everything can be viewed and subjected to. Here, one can draw a parallel with Berlin's earlier theory of the 'hedgehog and the fox', where the hedgehog only knows one big thing but the fox knows many things, albeit in a piecemeal fashion (Berlin 2013). The postmodernist, like Berlin's fox, rejects the hedgehog's approach of reducing the world to a single framework, uniformizing under the pretext of unification. Instead, postmodernism puts emphasis on the local and contextual, where individual differences are acknowledged, and human liberty restored. Their rejection of metanarratives can also be seen as an implicit critical stance in which they include the analysis of society; their attempt to ensure that social reality is not straitjacketed into a prescribed or predetermined framework. While such an approach might help to preserve individual liberties, it nevertheless foregoes the possibility of seeing the world in totality, and basing a social order on such a vision.

The second feature of postmodernist thinking is the rejection of the idea that language has a fixed relationship with reality, or that language expresses essential realities or truths about the world. In terms of origins, this idea can perhaps be traced back to Wittgenstein's 'conversion' from his positivism in the philosophy of language, as seen in *Tractatus*, to the view of 'language games' that was developed in his later philosophy. According to Derrida, this idea might be interpreted as a rejection of the Platonic idea of the 'world of forms', and language as an expression of concepts drawn from them. Whatever the case might be, the emphasis is on the nature of the relationship between language and reality, that is there is no singular or unique way of relating them, or that there is no strict isomorphism between them. The idea here is the 'fluidity of language', although it does not necessarily

imply cognitive anarchy or a total breakdown in communication engendered by linguistic ambiguity. Again, we see how this goes against modernist or positivistic view of scientific language as a paradigm of linguistic and cognitive clarity, and how scientific meaning sets the standard for meaningful statements.

The third defining feature of postmodernist thinking is the rejection of the idea that there is an absolute truth which is universal. Instead, postmodernists accept relativism, where truth is relative to the perceiver or one's perspective. In some cases, there is denial of the existence of truth, as in the case of nihilists who deny all values. This reflects the postmodernists' attitude of rejection towards any secure base on which one can 'ground' oneself. It also reflects the liberal attitude of not denying the perspective of the Other. This belief cuts across the various philosophies identified as postmodernist such as Existentialism, Nihilism, Social Constructivism, and Critical Theory. For the existentialists, moral truth is to be sought through one's own effort and not given by some religious moral authority, hence the possibility of having different moral truths. For the nihilists, no value is sacred or grounded in any ontological essence. For the social constructivists, truth is a matter of how one constructs knowledge based on one's context and interests. Hence the idea of an objective truth that is universal and shaped by a belief in the existence of a mind-independent reality found in the natural world, is rejected as untenable by postmodernists. This rejection is perhaps motivated by postmodernists placing the human/social over the natural, where Kant's 'objective relativism/constructionism' finally transformed into a 'subjective relativism'.

## 5. Postmodernism as a Response to Modernism

The issue of 'Postmodernism and Religion' cannot be really discussed or understood in the absence of a prior discussion on how postmodernism can be seen as a response or reaction to Modernist thinking. This is because postmodernist thinking, in most cases, bears an indirect relationship to religion, whereas its relationship to modernism is more direct. Thus, in order to properly understand the relationship between postmodernism and religion, one must take a detour and discuss its relationship to modernism.

The essence of modernist thinking can be found in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which places emphasis on reason and science. As Rorty argued,

western epistemology has, since the 17th century, been preoccupied with the attempt to provide an epistemology that would serve as a tool that would enable the mind to represent reality more accurately (Rorty, 1979). The assumption here is that there exists an external reality 'out there', which the 'mind' is able to apprehend and represent through knowledge. The function of the mind, therefore, is to reflect external reality faithfully, just as how the camera provides a faithful image of the object which it represents. This approach to knowledge, was labelled by Derrida as 'logocentric', meaning that we associate words and language with the structure of reality, which the mind accurately represents. In this regard, Derrida refers to Plato as the iconic symbol of such a concept of knowledge, even going as far as locating reality in an ultimate world of forms. The idea of a 'transcendent reality' apprehended through the mind, finding the ultimate expression through language is what Derrida was referring to when describing such an enterprise as 'logocentric'. Postmodernists such as Derrida, Foucault and Rorty, reject such concepts of truth and knowledge, preferring instead to reinstate the multidimensional experience of knowledge (Derrida), the deconstruction of the notion of 'mind' in the case of Rorty, and emphasising the social role in the construction of knowledge in the case of Foucault.

As for the privileging of science as a form of knowledge and epistemology, critiques by post-positivists such as Kuhn and Feyerabend, and postmodernists such as Foucault, Rorty, and Latour are testaments of the rejection of the Enlightenment ideal of science as exhibiting the highest form of human knowledge, which sets the epistemological standard for knowledge as a whole, as claimed by the Logical Positivists. Thus, the conventional image of science as a form of knowledge that is rational, objective, true and progressive—as portrayed by modernist thinkers such as Popper and the Logical Positivists—was seriously challenged by post-positivist/ postmodernist philosophers such as Kuhn, Feyerabend, Foucault, and Rorty.

Modernist thinking basically focuses on the natural world as the point of reference in determining the nature of truth and reality. The assumption is that there exists a mind-independent external reality 'out there' of which our minds and language should faithfully capture and represent as 'knowledge'. The mode of 'getting to' that external reality is through the correct application of the mind, and the 'net' or 'fabric' by which it is captured is through our linguistic representation. Given that

there is this 'pivoting' of the world of nature at one end and that of the 'mind' at the other, postmodernism in the form of social constructivism seeks to 'de-privilege' the natural world as the determiner of truth, and instead shift the focus of knowledge representation to the perceiver, i.e., the human individuals and the social world (McGuire 1992). Following Protagoras' dictum that 'man is the measure of all things'; postmodernists seek to articulate a concept of knowledge where the characteristics of man contribute to the outcome. Although it began as a rationalist project through Kant, where emphasis was placed on the human mind playing a role in the formulation and construction of knowledge (Kant's Copernican revolution), this 'mental scaffolding' was later widened to include 'human interests', in general, in the articulation of knowledge.

## 6. The Impact of Postmodernism on Religious Thought

What are the implications of Postmodernism on religion? It is for certain that Postmodernism is against Modernism in terms of the central ideas. But is Postmodernism critical of religion or compatible? For a start, we must be mindful that the two categories (Postmodernism and religion) are broad categories and that there are differences within each category. Take for example, 'Existentialism', of which there are two versions, namely 'Theistic Existentialism' (Kierkegaard), and 'Atheistic Existentialism' (Sartre, Camus). As Sartre puts it (Sartre 2007, 20):

> What complicates the matter is that there are two kinds of existentialists: on one hand, the Christians, among whom I would include Carl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, both professed Catholics; and, on the other, the atheistic existentialists, among whom we should place Heidegger, as well as the French existentialists and myself. What they have in common is simply their belief that existence precedes essence; or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be our point of departure.

As for theistic existentialism, there is no real conflict with religion in matters of faith and doctrine, but perhaps in terms of their attitude towards organized religion, or the interpretation of those doctrines. However, atheistic existentialism has a clear rejection of the tenets of religion, especially the fundamentals on the existence of God, and what follows from it. In fact, Sartre remarked that 'existentialism is the drawing out of the consequences for unbelief in God'. If one intends to lead an authentic moral life without a belief in God and the associated metaphysical

ontology associated that underwrite our moral codes and values, what form would our beliefs and worldview take? The existentialist project aims to do just that - provide a humanist philosophy that would fill the vacuum left by religious commitment. In other words, Existentialism provides an alternative to religion to thinking individuals who seek guidance in life, whereby 'guidance' is not meant 'dependency on some external authority', but a reliance on oneself as one's own source of moral compass.

Despite the exception in theistic existentialism, majority of schools of thought classified under Postmodernism are not in favour of religion; be it Nihilism, Phenomenology, Deconstruction, Social Constructivism, or Critical Theory. This stems largely from their attitude towards God and organized religion, and the social practice of religion.

The incompatibility between Postmodernism and religion stems largely from the differences in their fundamental assumptions. While religion affirms the existence of absolute truths, and presents a unified view of the world to be embraced by the believers, postmodernist thinking rejects the idea of an absolute and transcendent truth/reality, and sees unified views of the world as metanarratives which postmodernists should reject. Also, the philosophy of language espoused by a typical postmodernist, would go against the grain of religious thinking where religious dogma is unambiguously communicated through language, and not subjected to the fluidity of multiple interpretations.

The crux of the matter lies in the differences between the metaphysics and epistemology of the two groups. While religion posits the existence of a transcendent reality, postmodernist thinking would insist on the primacy and precedence of existence over essence up to the point of denying reality to an intrinsic, independently subsisting essence be it God, angels or spirits. In this regard, as Sartre correctly stated, existentialism is a form of humanism, where there is no higher reality or authority that the individual human being should subject himself to. This difference in ontology and metaphysics between postmodernism and religion, then spills over into epistemology. For the postmodernist, since 'essences' and transcendent realities do not exist, there can therefore be no real knowledge of them. Claims about their existence have to be interpreted accordingly, in line with

humanism. This is the approach adopted by social anthropologists, for example, who interpret worship in social contexts, not as communion with God, but as an act of social bonding.

In religion, the source of moral values is found in religious teachings derived from scripture and is believed to have been revealed to the prophets or the founders of the religion. In the case of organized religions such as Islam, it is even enshrined in the legal code or the *Shariah*. The believer thus inherits a set of moral values through the religious community, where its origin is believed to be from a divine source. For the existentialists and nihilists, there is no such intrinsic moral code from a divine or transcendent source. Human beings discover their own moral values as they engage in and struggle through life—it is not something given to them from the skies. These differences in perspectives about the nature of truth, reality and human life would lead to different beliefs and actions between the two groups. Nevertheless, the possibility remains that a postmodernist approach to religion, albeit with qualifications, can lead to authentic beliefs. One way this might occur is through one's individual search of encountering the 'greater force' within, where the force no longer appears as 'transcendent' but is assimilated into one's own field of experience. Such experiences might be associated with mysticism, but in this case, individuals from both sides could potentially find a common ground—the world of individual experience.

## 7. An Islamic Response to Postmodernism

Thus far, our discussion has only referred to religion in general. In this section, we will focus on the response from the Islamic religion. The discussion will focus on two things: (i) the Islamic philosophy of language, and (ii) the Islamic perspective on the relationship between Allah, man and nature.

A central feature of postmodernist thinking is their focus on the philosophy of language, for example in Derrida's deconstruction, and through Wittgenstein's concept of 'language games'. The essence of the postmodernist philosophy of language is the relationship between language and reality, where the relationship is seen as more complex and fluid than normally understood. The earlier Wittgenstein, for example, viewed language as having a 'structural isomorphism' with external reality, i.e., the structure of language reflects the structure of reality. As such,

language submits itself to the positivist's criterion of meaningful statement, where words in a sentence have a direct reference which can be empirically verified. These two aspects of Wittgenstein's earlier theory of language, where words have a direct reference, and sentential structure (unpacked through logic) reflecting the structural relations of objects and/or events, seem to eliminate any ambiguity in linguistic expression. However, in Wittgenstein's later theory of language, such a view was overturned and replaced by his theory of 'language games', where meaning is context-dependent and not context-free like before. For example, the word 'dragon', which would be meaningless by the positivist's criterion, can be accepted as meaningful in different socio-cultural contexts when we refer to the 'dragon dance' in Chinese culture. The use of language, according to Wittgenstein, is like a game with its own set of rules, just as different games have different rules. Thus, what could be meaningless in a scientific context, could be meaningful in a cultural context, where the linguistic community uses the language socially and confers meaning to it. Similarly, Derrida did not view the relationship between language and what it represents as something direct and straightforward. In fact, for Derrida, language contains its own inherent bias, as seen in his critique of 'binary oppositions' such as 'East-West', 'Male-Female', 'Active-Passive', 'Master-Servant', which he opined reflects hierarchy and power relations. Furthermore, Derrida did not view linguistic expressions as 'unidimensional', but rather 'multidimensional', where the reduction to the cognitive sphere of meaning is labelled as 'logocentric'.

Similar to the postmodernist view of language, Islam also has its own say on language, which has been articulated through an understanding of the Islamic distinction between: (i) *Muhakamat* and *Mutashabihat* statements, and (ii) the notions of *tafsir* and *ta'wil*. The terms *Muhakamat* and *Mutashabihat* can be found in Surah Al-Imran, Verse 7, which reads:

> It is He who has sent down to you the Book (Quran). In it are verses that are entirely clear [*Muhakamat*], they are the foundations of the Book; and others not entirely clear [*Mutashabihat*]. So, as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation (from the truth), they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking *Al-Fitnah*, and seeking for its hidden meanings, but none knows its hidden meanings except Allah.

Clear examples are verses referring to hudud laws, inheritance laws, and religious duties such as praying and fasting. Such statements indeed have to be unambiguous since they impact the actions and practices of the believer. For example, if inheritance laws are ambiguous, then it could lead to conflict between family members since they can be interpreted differently by different individuals in order to benefit the claimant. However, apart from these verses, there are also ambiguous ones, i.e., the *Mutashabihat* statements, which can be subjected to different interpretations. This could also be a source of trouble, since it could be deviously manipulated to serve one's interest or prejudicial view, as referred to in the Quran as 'those in whose hearts is a deviation…'. Nevertheless, there is the understanding that *Mutashabihat* statements contain 'hidden meanings', only known to Allah and those to whom He grants such knowledge. This brings us to the distinction between *tafsir*, understood as 'translation', and *ta'wil* which has been understood as 'hermeneutic interpretation' involving allegories and symbolism, and more applicable to *Mutashabihat* sentences. Some verses in the Quran contain 'layers of meaning'—some literal, some symbolic and metaphorical—where their true meaning cannot be unveiled merely through *tafsir* or direct translation. For example, expressions like 'the face of God', 'the hand of God', or 'God ascending the Throne', cannot be interpreted literally since it would contradict the Islamic belief that God is unlike anything that we know or imagine (Quran 42:11; 112:4). Hence, Islamic philosophy of language accepts the two central features or functions of language, i.e., clear unambiguous linguistic expressions on one hand, and on the other, ambiguous ones capable of multiple or indirect interpretations. However, Islam does not accept 'linguistic anarchy' where sentences bear no reliable or stable relation to what is signified or expressed. This is because any statement could mean anything, defeating the purpose of language as a medium of communication. Another aspect of the Islamic view of language is the role ascribed to the agent or speaker in regards to intent and ethics. While Derrida sees language as already containing a structure imposed through social and cultural conditioning, so much so that a binary like 'Male -Female' already presupposes a hierarchy where the male is dominant, Islam ascribes responsibility to the agent in ascribing meaning to his/her utterance since the 'condition of the heart' matters as stated in the Quran, which says, 'those in whose hearts...'. Following this, the suggested hierarchy then need not exist if the utterer does not intend so, treating both males and females as different but on par or as a complementary relationship in the sense of Yin and Yang.

Apart from the Islamic response to the postmodernist philosophy of language, how the modernist-postmodernist debate is viewed from an Islamic perspective is elaborated in this section. In the debate between modernists and postmodernists, we see that modernists privilege the natural and rational over social/human and the intuitive/psychological, while postmodernists, like the Counter-Enlightenment thinkers, privilege the social and psychological over the natural and rational. By taking science, i.e., study and knowledge of the natural world as the standard yardstick or model which determines rationality, objectivity and truth, we subject our judgement about humanity to scientific and naturalistic criteria, even though human reality cannot be reduced to that of the inanimate natural world. At the other end of the spectrum, postmodernists emphasise the human or social aspect over the natural, forgetting that there is a mind-independent reality in relation to the natural world to which our human whims and fancies carry no influence. Islam, in contrast, does not privilege one aspect over the other, but rather sees both in subservient relation to God. Due to the secularisation of western thinking, God no longer features in mainstream intellectual or academic discourse, hence limiting the field of intellectual vision to the natural and human/social since they alone are amenable to rational and empirical enquiry. Islam though, claims the authenticity, affirms the idea and existence of God, even in the face of the more fashionable secular contemporary western thinking. In Islam, there is a tripartite relationship between God, man and nature, where man has to establish a proper relationship with all three in order to achieve true happiness; i.e., proper and harmonious relationships between man and God, man and man, and man and nature (Nasr 1997). What this implies in the context of the modernist-postmodernist debate is that neither man nor nature are better than the other in the Islamic worldview. Instead, both man and nature, being creations of God, are seen as realities not in themselves as such but in relation to God's power and authority. In this regard, I quote verses from the Surah Ar Rahman, verses 4-8:

> (4) The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed; (5) and the herbs/stars and the trees, both alike, bow down in adoration/prostation (6) and the firmament has he raised high, and he has set up the balance (of justice), (7) in order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. (8) So, establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance.

Verse 4 refers to a natural process and the law which binds its behaviour. The regularity that occurs in nature is '*sunnatullah*' or God's decree on nature and not an autonomous act of nature. Verse 5 refers to nature but not in a straightforward manner. In fact, Al Kindi interpreted it as meaning 'the stars and the trees submitting to the will of Allah' since they cannot literally 'bow down' (Fakhry 2009, 29). Thus verse 4 is closer to a 'modernist' perspective since it is nature-based and can be literally interpreted, while verse 5 can be better understood from a postmodernist view on language as it involves metaphors and symbols. In fact, a similar reference can be found in Surah Yusuf, verses 4-6[6], that supports the view of nature as a symbolic reference involving the human subconscious.

Both approaches, namely, nature-centred (ala 'modernist'), and man-centred (ala 'postmodernist') are needed, and should be set or seen 'in balance'. To privilege one over the other is to lose this balance, resulting in a lop-sided perspective of knowledge and reality. As humans, we possess characteristics that cannot be reduced to the natural, for example the inner life of the mind, that has led to the so-called 'mind-body problem' whose resolution cannot be at the expense of the immaterial mind. In contrast, we also have to accept the existence of a mind-independent physical world that has its own nature, characteristics and laws which are not 'socially constructed'. In Islam, however, nature is not seen as something autonomous or operates in a self-regulating way according to 'the laws of nature'. Instead, the regulating of natural behaviour is interpreted as 'sunnatullah', that is following the course set by Allah. Thus, nature is bound to God in two ways; as a creation of God, and as behaving according to the order set by God. Similarly, man is also bound to God; as God's creation, and as a servant of God. As such, both man and nature are bound to God and are not independent of God. In order to appreciate the Islamic point of view, an understanding of this tripartite relationship involving God, man and nature is necessary so that we do not have a distorted vision of reality.

Finally, in this section, the relationship between Postmodernism and the Muslim profession of faith, namely the *Kalimah Syahadah* that 'there is no God but Allah', will be examined. Most schools of thought regarded as postmodernist, such as Existentialism and Nihilism, would consider God as non-existent. They concur with the first part of the *syahadah*, the denial, although they fall short of its following

affirmation. One way of looking at it, and perhaps a way which is charitable and not condescending, is to see Postmodernism as having the potential to reach affirmation but not in an explicit manner that would be routinised and dogmatized. Should that happen, it would then remind us of Prophet Ibrahim's journey in search of God as related in Surah al-An'am, verses 76-79, where he went through several phases before finding God:

> "(76) When the night covered him over with darkness, he saw a star. He said: 'This is my Lord'. But when it set, he said: 'I like not those that set. (77) When he saw the moon rising up, he said: 'This is my Lord'. But when it set, he said: 'Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among the people who went astray.' (78) When he saw the sun rising up, he said: 'This is my Lord. This is greater.' But when it set, he said: 'O my people! I am indeed free from all that you join as partners (in worship with Allah). (79) Verily, I have turned my face towards Him who has created the heavens and the earth …

Notice that in the narrative above even a prophet such as Ibrahim (Abraham) went through phases whereby he was enamored by things which appeared God-like, but in the end turned out not to be the real God. His redemption, however, lies in him recognising that they are not true gods once he has seen the real thing. This positive affirmation is something which lies in the realm of inner consciousness at first, to which a linguistic utterance conveys a pale shadow of that inner reality at best, but is nevertheless necessary in order to avoid solipsism and maintain a modicum of social communication. The sentence which mediates between his denial and his affirmation is given in verse 78 which reads: '…I am indeed free from all that you join as partners (in worship with Allah)'. Being free of those idols/partners creates that crucial space for God's presence to be realised. Again, the first part can be explicitly stated but the second has no real substitute—not even through a linguistic statement—except through inner experience. This reminds me of Wittgenstein's remark that 'that of which once cannot speak, thereof one should remain silent', which concurs with the description of the Tao as given in the *Tao Te Ching*, which says that the Tao that can be spoken of is not the real Tao[7].

Thus, postmodernists' skepticism towards beliefs associated with God could have the effect of wiping out hypocritical and unauthentic beliefs in relation to God, provided

that it is not itself underlaid and motivated by an egoistic desire to assert the Self. A positive aspect of Postmodernism is the quest for authenticity, which calls for honesty and sincerity. Such a quest, if not tainted by egoism, could lead towards individual enlightenment.

## 8. Conclusion

The discussion on 'Religion and Postmodernism' began by the laying out of three main ideological positions in contemporary thinking, namely Modernism, Postmodernism, and Religion. Before embarking on the discussion of postmodernism in relation to religion, the relationship between postmodernism and modernism was first discussed. Through the latter, it was found that postmodernism can be regarded as a reaction or response to modernism, more so than to religion. Having laid out the discourse on modernism and postmodernism and examining their points of contention, a view from a religious aspect was then presented, specifically that of Islam. The argument was that the modernist-postmodernist discourse was basically framed by different groundings and privileging, where the modernist privileges the natural and rational, while the postmodernist privileges the human/social and the psychological. It was concluded that Islam privileges neither. Instead, Islam views the matter based on the tripartite relationship between God, man and nature, where both man and nature are subservient to God. Narrowing the discussion to the relationship between postmodernism and religion/Islam, it was argued that Postmodernism and Islam are incompatible and this was illustrated using the philosophy of language. However, there was a caveat which acknowledges that despite the differing views of Postmodernism and religion, some of the former's fundamental assumptions of knowledge, metaphysics and epistemology have the potential to complement religious quests at the inner and individual level of human consciousness.

## References:

Berlin, Isaiah. 2013. *Against the Current*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

-----. 2013. *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

English, Jane, and Gia Fu Feng. 1972. *Tao Te Ching*. London: Random House.

Fakhry, Majid. 2009. *Islamic Philosophy*. London: Oneworld Publications.

Gellner, Ernest. 1992. *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

McGuire, James E. 1992. "Scientific Change: Perspectives and Proposals." In *Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*, by Merrilee Salmon et al., 132-178. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Murad, Mohd Hazim Shah bin Abdul. 1996. "'Islam and Contemporary Western Thought: Islam and Postmodernism,." *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 250-259.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. 1997. *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*. Chicago: ABC International Group.

Rorty, Richard. 1979. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

-----1991. *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rouse, Joseph. 1991. "Philosophy of Science and the Persistent Narratives of Modernity." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 22 (1): 141-162.

Sartre, Jean Paul. 2007. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

## Endnote:

[1] Here I would like to clarify that although the term 'modernism' is sometimes used in relation to a movement in art or the philosophy of art, which tends to move away from 'naïve realism' in paintings, and where modern art is mainly abstract art rather than a faithful reproduction of external reality in pictorial form, I have used the term more towards the sense of 'modernity', emphasising on reason, science, and progress. In so doing, postmodernist thinking as found in the works of philosophers such as Sartre, Camus, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard, can be seen and understood as a response to rationalist/modernist thinkers such as Bertrand Russell, the Logical Positivists, the analytic philosophers, Popper, and Habermas.

[2] For a construal of modernism in terms of modernity, see (Rouse 1991, 146) where he lists down 'secularism' and 'rationalisation' as two of the seven traits of modernity in his discussion of the philosophy of science situated within the larger context of the discourse on modernity.

[3] See my review of Gellner's (1992) in Mohd Hazim Shah Abdul Murad, 'Islam and Contemporary Western Thought: Islam and Postmodernism,' published in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Summer 1996, vol.13, no. 2, pp. 250-259.

[4] To quote Rorty: "For pragmatists the desire for objectivity is not the desire to escape the limitations of one's community, but simply the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of 'us' as far as we can" (Richard Rorty 1991:23).

[5] Rorty redefines 'rational' as follows, thereby turning an epistemological notion into something ethical: "Another meaning for "rational" is, in fact, available. In this sense, the word means something like "sane" or "reasonable" rather than "methodical". It names a set of moral virtues: tolerance, respect for the opinions of those around one, willingness to listen, reliance on persuasion rather than force. These are the virtues which members of a civilized society must possess if the society is to endure. In this sense of "rational," the word means something more like "civilized" than like "methodical"...On this construction, to be rational is simply to discuss any topic -- religious, literary, or scientific -- in a way which eschews dogmatism, defensiveness, and righteous indignation" (Richard Rorty 1991:37).

[6] Verses 4-6 of Surah Yusuf translates as follows: "(4) Remember when Yusuf said to his father: 'O my father! Verily, I saw (in a dream) eleven stars and the sun and the moon—I saw them prostrating themselves to me.'… (5) The father said: 'Oh my son! Relate not your vision to your brothers, lest they should arrange a plot against you… (6) 'Thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of dreams (and other things) and perfect His favour on you…'.

The passage above contains a dialogue between the Prophet Yusuf and his father, Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), Yusuf relates his dream involving the stars, sun and moon to his father. Here, the natural objects, such as stars, sun and moon, serve as symbols whose meaning can only be unveiled by the initiated, and in Yusuf's case, through knowledge given by Allah. The Swiss psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung had, in fact, studied symbolic dreams and came up with his theory of 'Archetypes'. What this serves to show is that the world of nature and the world of man can interact in 'strange ways', where the limited worldview of the Positivist cannot be of help.

[7] In chapter one of the Tao Te Ching, we find (English and Feng 1972) :

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.
The named is the mother of ten thousand things.
Ever desireless, one can see the mystery.
Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations.
These two spring from the same source but differ in name;
This appears as darkness.
Darkness within darkness.
The gate to all mystery.

Vol. 18, Issue 1, pp. 21-38

ARTICLE

# Mythopoeia in Akhavan's & Eliot's Poetry

Mahin Pourmorad Naseri[1,*], Parvin Ghasemi[2]

[1] English Department, Literature Faculty, Shiraz University, 71946-84334 Eram Sq. Shiraz, Iran
[2] English Department, Literature Faculty, Shiraz University, 71946-84334 Eram Sq. Shiraz, Iran

***Corresponding author email:**
naseri391@yahoo.com

**Received date:** 3 Feb 2020
**Published date:** 31 Dec 2022

**How to cite:**
Pourmorad Naseri, M., Ghasemi, P. (2022). Mythopoeia in Akhavan's & Eliot's Poetry. *KATHA*, 18(1), 21-38. Retrieved from https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/KATHA/article/view/22061

**DOI:**
https://doi.org/10.22452/KATHA.vol18no1.2

## ABSTRACT

T. S. Eliot, the well-known English poet, and Mehdi Akhavan Sales, one of the pioneers of the Modern Persian Poetry, have applied mythologies in their poetry. The present study is an attempt to make a comparison between Eliot's early poems, i.e. "The Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", and Akhavan's two poems, "Qese-e Shahriar-e Shahr-e Sangestan" [The Story of the King of the Stoned City] and "Khan-e Hashtom va Adamak" [The Eighth Task and the Puppet] from a Tolkienian perspective of mythopoeia. Laying their arguments in Jost's fourth category of comparative studies (themes and motifs), the present authors attempt to depict the similarities and differences in the way the poets approach mythopoeia as a literary technic. In doing so, the mythic figures created by the poets are detected and the characteristics attributed to each are reviewed in the socio-political context of the poets' life. Then, the philosophical viewpoint implied in creating the myth will be discussed. The findings of the study reveal that while there are similarities in the literary devices and techniques (i.e., imagery, pattern of hero's journey, …) that the poets have applied, there are differences in terms of poetic language and the kind of myths each poet creates or alludes to. Finally, it will be argued that in applying mythmaking, both poets seem to be warning their fellowmen against the evil life they are involved in. Thus, it is claimed that from a Tolkienian perspective, both poets are mythopoeic both in vision and method.

**Keywords:** Akhavan, Comparative Mythology, Eliot, Mythopoeia

## 1. Introduction

The As a comparative study, the present paper bases its arguments on Jost's categorization for comparing literary works. In his forward in "Introduction to Comparative Literature", Jost (1974) classified all courses and publications in comparative literature into four categories. The first group, he believed, "shows works in relation to others with which they have organic affinities" (ibid). He included studies about movements and trends into the second group, and into the third, he placed "the analysis of literary works from the viewpoint of their inner and outer forms (or) their genre" (ibid). Finally, he considered studies of themes and motifs as the fourth category. He then elaborated on each category with the reminder that because literature is not a science but rather an art, it calls for value judgment and its detailed understanding requires "knowledge in the most diverse fields ranging from history to religion and to the fine arts" (p.ix).

Mythmaking is believed to be an ever-present technique when writing poetry. World -famous poets e.g., Dante, Shakespeare, Ferdowsi, and Milton, are usually referred to as mythmakers in their own right. However, literary scholars became inclined to view the poetic device of mythopoeia from scientific perspectives in the early 20th century. In trying to include the different roles myths have played in human societies, in each definition, they offered various comprehensive meanings for the term myth.

In her discussion on mythmaking in Romantic poetry, Hopper (2014) quoted Lincoln, who defined myth as an "ideology in narrative form" (p.4) and argued that Romantic poets applied myths to express their revolutionary ideologies. This is in contrast to Barthes who considered mythopoeia as a literary device in the hands of poets in order to approve the social structure of their time by confirming the long-standing values expressed in myths. She concluded that Romantic period mythopoeia was, in fact, a process through which poets demonstrated their philosophical notions.

The English writer, poet, and philosopher, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892- 1973), most well-known for his fancy novels like *The Hobit*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*, is usually referred to as the mythmaker of the 20th century. In the prologue to his famous poem "Mythopoeia" he wrote: "To the one who said that myths were lies and therefore worthless, even though 'breathed through silver'."

Through the long poem, he tried to explain that mythologies originated from man's creative nature, as such they contain spiritual and fundamental truths. He took mythmaking to be "sub-creation", an ability God bestowed upon men in general and particularly on poets and artists. Alluding to the Bible, he noted that we are not just made but we are made in the form of our creator. Therefore, creating is our right: "We make still by the law in which we're made" (Tolkien, 2022).

In "On Fairy-stories", he emphasized that Fantasy is a natural human activity, one that defies neither rational thoughts nor scientific verification. It is, rather, a clue to our supernatural origins.

Accordingly, because of the importance of the epistemological reviews of the works of great literary men have in developing the socio-cultural values of nations, the present article argues that mythmaking in Akhavan's and Eliot's poetries can be studied not only as a literary device competently applied to enhance to the beauty of the poems, but they should also be discussed as a key feature to better understand the time and place in which the works were created. Mokhtari (2000) noted,

> …. rather than judging about a few great people of our time, the outcome of such an analysis is a judgment about the history of thought and psychology of our own society, because the poets are the distinctive examples and obvious phenomena of our culture. So, the epistemological analyses of their works is the analyses of the manifestations of the same culture. (p. 434)

Concurrently, a brief review on the various ways the term mythopoeia has been used and understood, as well as the changes it has undergone due to socio-political and psychological factors, Freer & Bell (2016) explained how Matthew Arnold suggested a solution to compensate for the widespread wading of religious faith at the time in his book, *Literature and Dogma* (1873). Freer & Bell noted that Arnold attempted to defend Christianity by suggesting "the Bible to be read as the literary expression of moral history, rather than the source of a divinely inspired doctrine". He then explained reading the Bible as such can increase the power of literature to the level of the "primordial creator of human world" (66), and added that as a result of the new position and power literature has gained, the application of myth in the works of leading writers and poets at the time found new forms and modes. Freer & Bell,

thus, considered mythopoeia to be the mode of myth application in modernist great works:

> Mythopoeia is the attempt to create, or recreate, the mental modality and sensibility of myth. This does not have to involve the use of existing myths for the mythic dimension lies in the mode of sensibility and perception. And where a known myth is used this may not be the actual locus of mythopoeia in the work but rather the sign under which the world of the work is to be understood. (p. 67)

In contrast, although from the same perspective, Freer (2015) took modernist mythopoeia as "a means of overcoming nihilism" and asserted that Nietzsche's philosophy puts "much store into aesthetic salvation whereby elusive gnostic texts teach self-overcoming" (p.76). He, thus, concluded that, based on such an understanding of myth, Eliot's "The Waste Land" is "mythopoeic in method but not in vision" (p.45).

However, in comparing Eliot's and Akhavan's poetries from a Tolkienian perspective, the present researchers try to reveal how the rhetorical device of mythopoeia embedded in Eliot 's "The Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock", as well as Akhavan's "Qese-e Shahriar-e Shahr-e Sangestan" and "Khan-e Hashtom va Adamak" help the poets express their socio-political viewpoints. The article will also argue that through the reading of the poems from a Tolkienian perspective allows the poets to be regarded as mythopoeic, both in method and in vision.

Among the contemporary Persian poets, Mehdi Akhavan Sales is considered as the one who has most frequently and conspicuously alluded to mythology, particularly Persian mythology, in his poetry. Similarly, the English poet, T. S. Eliot, is relatively well-known for the huge body of myths he has alluded to in his works. As such, the works of these two poets provide appropriate materials to review, compare, and contrast the important role mythopoeia plays in poetries of the 20th century. In addition, discovering the similarities and the differences in each poet's application of mythopoeia as a literary technique informs us about the affinities of nations that are culturally and geographically far apart.

## 2. Prufrock vs. Shahriar

Eliot's Prufrock and Akhavan's Shahriar are usually referred to as anti-heroes or as among the creators of the myth of modern man in the 20th century. The two imaginary figures reveal so many characteristics to qualify them as representatives of the contemporary man and the problems he is challenged with.

1 - Like the heroes of ancient mythologies, Shahriar-e Shahr-e Sangestan was once a king that was apparently strong, brave, and fair. However, after the pirates attacked his land, his people suddenly turned into stone and were no longer able to take any action. From the birds' conversation on the tree, we learn that the king did all he could to bring his people back to life, but his attempts were all in vain.

Prufrock, as an educated middle-aged man living alone in the low-class section of the crowded and modernized city of London, had lost almost all his self-confidence. He compared himself with mythical figures such as John the Baptist, Lazarus, and Hamlet, and confessed that he is not like any of them. Yet, he readily admitted to his own likeness to Ptolonius, whom Hamlet referred to as a fool, whose love for his own voice led to his constant bobbling, "No! I am not prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;/ Am an attendant lord, one that will do/ To swell a progress, start a scene or two, / Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool" (15).

The other conspicuous feature that both Shahriar and Prufrock have is their divided self which makes them swing between hope and fear, as well as between pessimism and optimism. Xue (2009) attributed such dualism in Prufrock's character to 'Bradleyan Philosophy' which Eliot was studying while writing "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in 1910 - 1911.

> In the poem, Prufrock is divided into two selves. One is persuading Prufrock to ask the "overwhelming question", while the other is trying to prevent it. They are never consistent throughout the poem. With this literary form, the poet attempted to reflect the predicament of human beings in modern world. (Xue, 2009:82)

Such instability is also easily detectable in Akhavan's hero, Shahriar, as he is seen to be quite disappointed in the beginning, gets motivated after listening to the birds talk and ends up sad and lonely.

2 - Both Prufrock and Shahriar, who are akin to mythic heroes, undergo journeys that ultimately bear no fruits.

We are told that Shahriar was once a great king who bravely fought against the invaders and voyaged through seas, mountains, and plains for years to find a way to help his people. But he ended up being hopeless, lying under a tree with his arms covering his eyes, as if he did not want to see the world:

نه جوید زال زر را تا بسوزاند پر سیمرغ و پرسد چاره و ترفند
نه دارد انتظار هفت تن جاوید ورجاوند (95-96)

He is neither searching for Zal-e Zar to burn Simorgh's feather and ask him the solution of his problem/ Nor is he expecting the seven immortal angels from Varjavand (to come to his help). (95-96)

It should be mentioned that in this part, Akhavan alluded to two well-known Persian myths - in the first one, Rostam's father, Zal, gives him three of Simorgh's feathers and tells him to burn each of them when he is in danger and needs help; he (Simorgh) will be present to help him (Zal). The second allusion is to the myth of the seven immortal beings of Varjavand. According to Zoroastrian mythology, these angels or immortal beings will come to rescue the oppressed from the tyranny of the oppressive rulers at the end of the world.

According to these lines, it seems as though Shahriar has lost all his faith in the power of myths and is not looking forward to receiving any help from them. However, when the bird instructs him to perform the rituals of salvation, as taught in Zoroastrianism, he carefully follows them as told. Yet, these rituals also turn out to be useless to him.

Similarly, Eliot began "the Love song ..." with the sentence 'Let us go then you and I' to create an initial image of a journey in the mind. Immediately after the poet's allusion to "Inferno" in the prologue, the first line also implies a kind of comparison between Dante's and Prufrock's journeys. It has been widely discussed that in the case of Dante, guided by Virgil and Saint Mary, the journey in "Inferno" is symbolically a spiritual one, a kind of religious development in which the traveler is elevated more and more in faith and religion. In such a journey, the virtues and values gained make the believer deserves the joys of eternal life in God's promised

Paradise as the ultimate reward. On the contrary, in the case of Prufrock's journey, in playing the role of Virgil, he is ironically guiding us through our path to modern salvation. The first image Prufrock presented is as a patient being etherized on an operation table in the evening for the whole city, very much like a dead body. It (the evening) is said to be "spread out against the sky" to imply that in turning against the sky, the modern world has lost its faith and thus, there is no hope for him to move towards God. As such, by letting Prufrock be the narrator of the poem, Eliot seemed to be implying how sad and lonely man has become in the world without God. And that is why the outcome of his trip is just a wish for death rather than the bliss and salvation Dante experienced in Paradise at the end of his religious journey.

> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea/ By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown/ Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (17)

## 3. Merging of Myth and Reality

Self-transformation (metamorphoses) is another conspicuous feature of the characters in "The Waste Land". Basing her arguments on the facsimile copy of "The Waste Land" and Eliot's early poems like "The Death of Saint Narcissus" Comley (1979), Lyndall Gordon described Eliot's early poems as an exploration of "fascination with martyrdom and the cross at the end of the path……the martyrdom is inspired not only by a struggle for belief but by Eliot's concern with the ancient struggle of flesh and spirit" (Comley, 1979: 281). Such a world view can be seen in the last lines of part III of "The Waste Land", The Fire Sermon, where Eliot refers to the cleansing power of the Fire,

> To Carthage then I came
> Burning burning burning burning
> O Lord Thou pluckest me out
> O Lord thou pluckest
> burning (307-310)

Brooker considered "the tendency to move forward by spiraling back and refiguring the past" (1994:54) to be the defining characteristic of high modernism. He also tried to document and clarify this defining characteristic by reviewing Eliot's work as a paradigmatic model of modern poetry. He believed that the process in which "In Memory of Henry James" Eliot called "mastery and escape" is a common impulse for most modernists. Referring to Eliot's different critical articles, Brooker explained

that, to Eliot, only those who mastered an issue (tradition, emotion, …) can escape it. Brooker then took "internationality" as the second major characteristic of modernism.

Self-transformation can also be detected in Akhavan's poetry, to the same effect. "Khan-e Hashtom va Adamak" reads that the narrator enters a teahouse on a cold winter day where an orator tells the story of 'Rostam's Seven Tasks' from Shahnameh to a group of humble audience in a warm and friendly atmosphere. The orator introduces himself as"MAS", which is an acronym for the poet's real name, i.e., Mehdi Akhavan Sales, and adds that he is going to narrate the last part of Rostam's story, which he refers to as "The Eight Task"

خوان هشتم را من روایت می‌کنم اکنون
من که نامم ماث (854-5)

The word "MAS" [in Persian, it sounds like "WE ARE"] is used to imply that the narrator is, in fact, speaking on behalf of the whole nation. Then, in the second part of the poem, "Adamak" (Puppet), the same scene at the teahouse is described, but instead of listening to the orator like in the previous episode, the people are silently watching TV, which the narrator of the poem refers as "the magic box"; the previous orator is now described to be sitting silently in a corner. He is shown to be leaving the teahouse sadly and silently in the end, causing the scene to look like an allusion to a line in *Shahnameh*,

هنر خوار شد جادویی ارجمند

(Art became humiliated, the magic respected)

Ansari (2016) explains that in Fersowsi's time magic meant evil and Akhavan uses the word in the same sense as Ferdowsi did. As such, describing the orator as an honest artist who tried to keep mythic heroes alive by telling their epics,

آنکه از پیشین نیاکان تا پسین فرزند رستم را به خاطر داشت (854)

Akhavan seemed to imply that when the TV, taken as a symbol of technology as well as imperialism, entered people's life, the committed artist, who knew about the country's glorious old times and tried to remind his people of that, was doomed to die and ultimately leaves the scene as Rostam did in the last battle of his life, which Akhavan referred to as Rostam's Eight HeroicTask. Ansari wrote,

> The hero of the Khan-e Hashtom was killed deceitfully, but as long as the orator was telling his story, his memory was alive! However, when the magic box killed the orator, the hero of Khan-e Hashtom died forever! It seems as if the real hero is the orator in the poem. (Para. 14)

In "The Waste Land", the characters Eliot created such as, Madam Sosostris, Stetson, and Phlebas, seem to be very much like the myths of modern man in the desolated waste land of the 20th century. Eliot introduced Madam Sosostris as a contemporary prophetic figure in contrast to the mythic figure he already introduced in the prologue of the poem, that is Sibyl of Cumae. While most of her predictions turned out to be true, Madam Sosostris admitted that she cannot find the hanged man, which symbolizes Christ or religious faith, the feature that seems to be no longer present in men's life. Madam Sosostris is, also, said to have a bad cold, implying her vulnerability against natural forces, and she is seen to be suspicious of the people around her, resulting in her carrying the horoscope herself. Her cards are referred to as wicked while in annotation to the poem, Eliot wrote that Tarot cards used to have religious value in the past.

Stetson is another figure Eliot created to represent an eternal man. He is the man the narrator recognizes as the one in the Mylae war. Eliot explained, "The battle of Mylae (260 B.C.E.) in the First Punic War. Very much like World War I, the First Punic War was fought for economic reasons." Stetson is now seen on London Bridge among the crowd and is said to have performed the mythical ritual of burying a corpse, as they do for the land's fertility, a performance which ironically refers to the death of so many people in the war.

The other character, Phlebas, is said to be dead and had forgotten the pleasure of profit and sorrow of loss, yet "He passed the stages of his age and youth/Entering the whirlpool" (317-8) and the readers are advised to remember him because he was once a young and beautiful man as they are now.

It can be observed that in describing such characters, Eliot intended to demonstrate a man's loneliness in a world without religious faith, a world in which even the long-lived mythical figure, Sybil, who once wished for an eternal life, ultimately longs for death.

## 4. Myth & Modern Poetry

In *Modernist mythopoeia: The Twilight of the gods*, Freer asserted that the starting line of "The Waste Land", that is, "April is the cruelest month…." indicates that opposite to Nietzsche and Frazer, "Eliot's faith is not located in myth", yet myth is important for Eliot because "the rejection of myth is important and part of religious message" (2015:45). Meanwhile, in their attempt to revive religious faith and combine Christianity with contemporary developments in science, modernist intellectuals offered new interpretations of some religion concepts. They denied Christian dogmas like Incarnation and Virgin Birth, instead, they insisted on "The inner voice" in the kind of relation they believed man should make with God. Eliot, however, did not agree with their argument. He believed that individual experience is not enough for such relations and the presence of a spiritual guide is required. Yet, as Rzepa noticed, the impact of the contact with modernist thinkers and contemplation on their notions is observed in Eliot's later writings. She explained that in spite of the fact that Eliot openly opposed modernist thoughts, there are evidence that he was influenced by the way they interpreted religious notions in the end. Taking "The Journey of the Magi" as a multi-layer journey, Rzepa wrote,

> It is a response in which Eliot probes into the hardships that a modern Magus faces on his hermeneutic journey to understand the dogma of the Incarnation–a journey that is an attempt to make the word (which is also the Word) yield "a full juice of meaning" from which a new world can be derived. (2016:114)

The Modernists' view on myth and religious beliefs is present in Akhavan's poetry. As a solution to Shahriar's problem, the bird on the tree (symbolizing the divine inspiration) advised him to do the religious ritual of throwing stones into a nearby well while calling out the Zoroastrian angels by their names. Then, in the last stanza, Shahriar's voice is heard sadly confabulating to a cave, saying that he had done all the rituals step by step, yet instead of water (life and fertility) smoke (devil) had risen up the well.

فکندم ریگها را یک به یک در چاه
همه امشاسپندان را به نام آواز دادم لیک
به جای آب دود از چاه سر بر کرد، گفتی دیو می‌گفت آه (81-83)

I threw all the stones one by one into the well
I called all the angels [Emshasepandan] by their names but

Instead of water smoke rose from the well, as if a monster was saying, 'Ah!' (81-83)

Sad and disappointed, Shahriar criticized the helpfulness of religious rituals, as if he doubted the reality of heaven and divinity,

مگر دیگر فروغ ایزدی آذر مقدس نیست؟
مگر آن هفت انوشه خوابشان بس نیست؟
زمین گندید آیا بر فراز آسمان کس نیست؟

Is not Azar, the divine light, sacred anymore?
Have not the seven angels been sleeping enough?
The earth is rotten, is not anybody there in heaven? (84-86)

Yet, there is an important point here. The poem ends with Shahriar's question echoed in the cave, not being answered. An implication of that can be that Akhavan intended on keeping the last rays of hope shinning in the heart of his readers.

غم دل با تو گویم غار
بگو آیا مرا دیگر امید رستگاری نیست؟
صدا نالنده پاسخ داد
آری نیست؟

I am telling you my sorrows, O Cave!
Tell me, Is not there any hope of salvation left for me?
And the cave sadly answered,
Is not there any? (87-90)

"Akhavan could have put a full stop at the end of the last sentence and made us sure (but he finished the poem with a question mark)" (Mokhtari, 479).

## 5. The Impact of classic literature

Another common feature observed in both Akhavan's and Eliot's poetries, which has deeply influenced their choice of myth and poetic styles, is their close affinity with and interest in classic literature, as well as their passion and knowledge for literary movements at the time. Having a critical mind can also be taken as another important factor in their creativity and innovation in blending the past and the present in their works. Describing the outstanding characteristics of Akhavan's poetic style, Qanbari Ghadivi (2008) wrote, "He had a deep affinity with Persian epical and historical literature and knew and appreciated national myths and heroes very well.

….. He knew classic and modern poetry perfectly" (pp.172-3). More importantly, given Akhavan's admiration and passion for Ferdowsi, the most well-known Persian epic writer, his poetic style and language is very closely similar to that of Fredowsi.

In the same way, Eliot's vast knowledge about world mythology and classic literature is said to have roots in his childhood education and religious family background. Having grown up in a well-educated and religious family, along with his great talent and passion for literature, are said to be the main reasons for his affinity to classic literature. His frequent allusions to myths from different parts of the world, as well as his shifting to various languages have played an important role in making "The Waste Land" a modernist masterpiece.

## 6. Poet's World View

In their discussion on the two types of mythmaking in contemporary poetry, Hoseinpour Alashti and Esmaeeli (2010) referred to myths as being made out of historical figures, as well as those made out of concepts and social events. Basing their arguments on the concept of "Eternal Return", they wrote,

> No matter how important the social events are, they will not be remembered by the masses, neither will their memories create poetic inspirations, unless an especial historical event becomes completely similar to a mythical one. (p. 44)

They noted that in "Qese Shahriar-e Shahr-e Sangestan", Akhavan had, in fact, made a myth out of the concepts of depression and failure that overshadowed the whole atmosphere of the country after Mosadegh's downfall. As such, the king of the stoned city, in his poem, should be taken as a mythical figure standing in for Dr. Mosadegh who did his best to improve the economic and political conditions of the country. However, people became so passive and disappointed after the coup in 1954 that it seemed as though they had turned into stone.

Similarly, in "Khan-e Hashtom", it can be observed that "the orator in the teahouse", like "the king of the stoned city", is a mythical character made to stand in for the present time hero/savior, but he is also doomed to fail. It is evident that Akhavan was quite sure of the importance and practicality of the mythical stories he was alluding to, since by referring to some contemporary characters and events, he tried to mix myths with realities to make them believable:

همچنان می‌گفت و می‌گفت و قدم می-زد:
قصه است این قصه، آری قصه ی درد است
...
این گلیم تیره‌بختی-هاست
خیس خون داغ سهراب و سیاوش-ها،
روکش تابوت تختی-هاست (27-35)

He was still saying and saying and walking:
This is a story, a story, yes; it is a story of pains
...
This is the carpet of misfortunes
Wet by the blood of the Sohrabs and of the Siavashes
It is the pall of the Takhtis (27-35)

He mentioned the name of the famous Iranian wrestler, Gholamreza Takhti, whose suspicious death was one of the hottest political issues in those days. Some people believed that Takhti was killed by the government because of his political activities. In referrence to Takhti's death, while narrating Rostam's heroic stories, Akhavan implied that the societal activities national champions like Takhti were doing were quite comparable and closely similar to Rostam's heroic task of saving the country. According to the narrator of "Khan-e Hashtom", Rostam did not try to save himself in his final battle (Khan) even though he had the chance to do so. He did not fight for his life because he was tired of living in a world where there was no true love and friendship, and a brother was ready to kill his own brother in order to gain power and fortune. Thus, Akhavan made a comparison between the socio-political condition of the country of his time and that of Rostam's, i.e., Rostam and the oracle both preferred to leave the scene of life.

ور بپرسی راست، گویم راست
قصه بی شک راست می‌گوید
می‌توانست او اگر می‌خواست
لیک.... (254-257)

And if you ask the truth, I will tell you the truth
The story no doubt is telling the truth
He could if he wished
But ..... (254-257)

In a general reading of the poem, Shahriar's life story in "Qese-e Shahriar Shar-e Sangestan" embodies enough characteristics to make it a real example of a hero's fate in the 20th century. Some critical reviews took Shahriar to be standing in for Dr. Mosadegh, the beloved ex-prime minister of the time, whose political activities and attempts to save the country and, ultimately improve people's life, had ended in failure. In discussing the socio-political conditions of the country at the time, Akhavan wrote the poem, "Qese Shahriar-e Shahre-e Sangestan". Farzi (2012) noted,

> The overall failure of the hero at the end, contrary to the mythical heroes, is because the poem is reflecting the uneasy and chaotic conditions of the contemporary world. Akhavan tried to show that in such a horrible condition even the attempts of the hero- savoir would be in vain. (p.34)

In "The Waste Land", there are parts when Eliot directly or indirectly referred to contemporary events and related them to those of the past. Perhaps the first impression one has while reading the poem is that the form, structure and even sometimes the theme look fragmented and apparently disordered. Then, towards the end of the poem, the poet asserts "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (431). An implication of this assertion might be that through composing such a fragmented work, he intends to remind people of their ruined culture and civilization, and to help these valuable but degenerated components of life not to collapse but to stay alive.

In another part of the poem, Eliot criticized men for neglecting redemption and spirituality in their greed for wealth and worldly pleasures. Describing how London citizens rush to work in a foggy morning without paying heed to the people around them, Eliot wrote,

> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man has fixed his eyes before his feet.
> Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
> To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
> With dead sound on the final stroke of nine. (64-68)

Then, in the note to this part of the poem, he explained,

> Saint Mary Woolnoth is a church in the City of London (the financial district); the crowd is flowing across London Bridge to work in the City.

According to the Bible, Jesus died at the ninth hour. (Greenblatt & Abrams, 2012: 2298)

War and its destructive traumatic effects on all aspects of a man's life is another issue Eliot touched on in this poem. In part V of "What the Thunder Said", he wrote about the women who cried out for their men lost in the war and there is no certainty that they will return home - "Murmur of maternal lamentation" (368). The unrecognizable troops rushed about in groups, acting wildly and violently on the land, encountering and losing numbers in trenches:

Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth (369-70).

The cities "over the mountains" (372), which were once like magnificent paradises, "fall in the violet air" (373), with "violet" as a color that signifies twilight (i.e., the end of a day). It also reminds us of something that was once unbelievably great, yet they are now covered in the violet light of the dusk, where everything seems almost "Unreal" (377). No one is able to grasp what has happened right before their eyes. The sketch which the poet produces here can be identified with what happened in most European countries during the World Wars. Towards the end of the poem, Eliot created perhaps a more perfect scenario of destruction:

"London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down" (427).

In "A Game of Chess", Eliot attempted to demonstrate another aspect of men's cruelty during his wasteful life by describing an unnamed woman's luxurious life in detail. Here, the narrator focused on a picture on the wall which shows a nightingale singing in the field, alluding to the Greek myth of "Philomel" and the story of the cruel King, he wrote,

The change of Philomel, by barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
"Jug Jug" to dirty ears. (99-103)

## 6. Conclusion

As the discussion has demonstrated, we see the similarities in Akhavan's and Eliot's approach to the notion of myth and mythmaking, which revealed the important role mythopoeia plays in the poetry of the 20th century.

Based on these similarities, it can be concluded that rather than approving the social structures of their time, with the hope and desire for a better life that people could have, both Akhavan and Eliot applied mythopoeia as a literary device to reflect on the evil their fellowmen were involved in. They did so to remain faithful to their commitment as poet-prophets of the time.

Noticeable differences could also be detected in the poetic language, literary style and the kind of myths the poets chose to alluded to. It was noted in Eliot's poems that the characters suffered more from general psychological traumas, while the mythical figures alluded to are mostly among international mythologies. Eliot also intentionally inserted his knowledge of different languages and mythologies in his poetry. Meanwhile in Akhavan's poems, the myths are mostly Persian mythology; the language and poetic style seem to be more classic than modern Farsi. In this sense, Akhavan seems to be more concerned with the problems his fellow countrymen were suffering from, though the problems can be taken as a global issue as well. As such, compared to Eliot's international poetry, Akhavan's can be more appropriately called national poetry.

It was also discussed that the differences in the types of mythology and poetic language applied are related to the different socio-political context in which each poet lived. While Akhavan lived through the coupe of 1953 which was a disappointing social event and regarded as the most important factor in creating the gloomy mood in Akhavan's poetry, Eliot experienced the two destructive World Wars and was so deeply traumatised that it greatly impacted his mind to the point that he could not see the problems that were limited to one single country.

Finally, since the two poets remained faithful to the notion of devoting their sub-creativity to fight against the evil of their time, it can also be concluded that from a Tolkienian perspective, both Akhavan's and Eliot's poetries can be appropriately labeled as mythopoeic in form as well as in vision.

## References:

Akhavan-e Sales, M. (2017). *Collection of Poetry*. Tehran: Zemestan.

Ansari, A. (2016). A Critical Reading of the Poem Khan-e Hashtom va Adamak. *Ashkan Ansari's Blog*. https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/6456896.Ashkan_Ansari/blog

Comely, R. N. (1979). From Narcissus to Tiresias: T. S. Eliot's Use of Metamorphosis. *The Modern Language Review, 74*(2), 281-286.

Eliot, T. S. (1989). *Collected poems 1909 – 1962*. London: Faber and Faber.

Farzi, H. (2012). "Naghd-e Kohanolgui-e Sher-e" Qese-e Shahr-e Sangestan" Mehdi Akhavan Sales [The Archetypal Criticism of Mehdi Akhavan Sales' Poem: "The Story of the Stone City"]". *Faslname Adabiat-e Erfani va Ostureshenakhti [Mystic and Mythological Literature Quarterl]*. Autumn, 28-34.

Freer, S. (2015). *Modernist mythopoeia: The Twilight of the gods*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Freer, S, & Bell, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Religion and Myth in T.S. Eliot's Poetry*. Cambridge: Scholars Publishing.

Ferdowsi, A. Shahnameh (2021). *Padeshahi Shiruyeh, Part 4*. https://ganjoor.net/ferdousi/shahname/shirooye/sh4/

Greenblatt, S., & Abrams, M.H. (Eds.). (2012). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature (8th Edition) Vo. 2.* New York: Norton & Company.

Xue, H. (2009). On "an overwhelming question" in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. *Canadian Social Science, 5*(2), 79- 82.

Hassanpour Alashti, H. & M. Esmaili. (2010). Qese-e Shahr-e Sangestan: Osture-e Shekast [The Story of the Stoned City: The Myth of Failure]. Majale-e Adabiat va Olum-e Ensani *[The Magazine of Literature and Humanities]*. No. 68. pp. 41 -68.

Hopper, N. N. (2014). *From Mythography to Mythopoesis: The Politics of Romantic Mythmaking.* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Alabama].

Jost, F. (1974). *Introduction to Comparative Literature*. New York: The Bobbls-Merrill Company.

Mokhtari, M. (2000) Ensan dar Sher-e Moaser *[Man in Contemporary poetry]*. P. 479.

Qanbari Ghadivi, A. (2008). Gozar az Khan-e Hashtom *[The passing from the Eight Task]*.

Faslname Daneshkade Adabiat va Olum-e Ensani *[Literature and Humanities Quarterly of the College of Literature]*. 4th year. No. 14&15.

Rzepa, J. (2016). Tradition and Individual Experience: T. S. Eliot's Encounter with Modernist Theology. S. Freer, & M. Bell (Eds.), *Religion and Myth in T.S. Eliot's Poetry*. Cambridge: Scholars Publishing.

Tolkien, J.R.R. (2022). Mythopoeia. http://home.agh.edu.pl/~evermind/jrrtolkien/mythopoeia.htm

Vol. 18, Issue 1, pp. 39-55

ARTICLE

# Rethinking International Order According to Islamic International Relations Principles

Muhammad Fahmi Md Ramzan[1,*], Mohamad Zaidi Abdul Rahman[1], Nurfarhana Mohd Daud[2]

[1] Department of Siasah Syar'iyyah, Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

[2] Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), 85000 Johor, Malaysia

***Corresponding author email:** fahmiramzan2020@gmail.com

**Received date:** 26 Jan 2022
**Published date:** 31 Dec 2022

**How to cite:**
Md Ramzan, M.F., Abdul Rahman, M.Z., Mohd Daud, N. (2022). Rethinking International Order According to Islamic International Relations Principles. *KATHA*, 18(1), 39-55. Retrieved from https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/KATHA/article/view/34926

**DOI:**
https://doi.org/10.22452/KATHA.vol18no1.3

## ABSTRACT

The world today needs to recognise the differences and varieties of religions, cultures., societies and economies among countries. It is necessary for states and nations to uphold the law towards a common purpose, i.e. to regulate life in peace and harmony. Similarly, an international order will establish an allied world government or a coalition of allies with the executive machinery that is necessary for its implementation. This government will be supported by the international law in place that can be utilised by all, regardless of governments, institutions, communities or individuals. Therefore, the world today needs to re-establish an international order that would result in a peaceful and rational in fulfilling human needs. Thus, this article elaborates on the international order from anIslamic perspective and notes that Islam has introduced effective principles which are suitable and acceptable to all communities.

**Keywords:** international order, peace, global security, Islamic international relations

## 1. Introduction

In the last 30 years, there have been several significant political, military, and economic events that have profoundly impacted international relations and world politics. Significant "shocks" in the world politics include the collapse of the Soviet Union, the development of nuclear weapons by major powers, the United States invasion into Iraq, civil war in the Middle East and Africa, ethnic cleansing in East Asia, the Russia-Ukraine war in Europe, and financial crises due to the Covid-19 pandemic which affected the whole world. Over the years, various scholars and policy makers have attempted to come to grips with what these events mean for interstate relations. In general, these events have changed or are changing international order.

From the many events that have occurred recently, the existing international order seems to be unable to manage the conflicts that have affected some countries and the global community at large. It is seen as leaning towards major powers in terms of controlling the global politics and economic affairs. This sort of hegemony gives negative impact to some countries and their communities. The invasion into other countries and use of military forces by major powers have become rampant in recent years. Small and developing countries seem to be bullied by the major powers as they depend on the latter in international affairs.

The United Nations' (UN) role as the world's most authoritative organisation has been questionable lately. Conflicts between Israel and Palestine since 1948, as well as between Russia and Ukraine since 2014 remain unsolved. It seems that the UN has been inconsistent in its handling of these conflicts and is unable to resolve them as quickly as expected by the global community. The international order today needs to be re-build and implementations of managing world affairs relooked at. It needs to incorporate principles that promote justice and global security. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to give ideas based on Islamic international relations principles, which emphasises on good values for human needs.

## 2. The Concept of International Order

It is best to begin this topic by briefly defining the basic terms to understand the general concept of order and its implementation at the international level The English word "order" comes from the Latin word, *ordo* and possesses a wide range of

meanings that have evolved greatly but is still attached to its core semantic (Orsi, 2012, p.19). Commonly, "order" is linked to the types of behaviour it allegedly produces. Many scholars particularly identify order with peace. As David Lake (2009, p.94) argued:

> "All political orders must include security against violence resulting in physical harm, an assurance that property will not be subject to constant challenges, and an expectation that promises and agreements will be kept."

While it would be difficult to completely define the order independent of its effects on unit behaviour, adopting this close association between order and peace has been proven to be faulty. Order should not be reduced to peace and war like a unit behaviour. If it could be reduced to those things, there would be no point in discussing order to begin with and scholars would be better off simply focusing their attention on peace and war. Instead, a workable, generalisable definition of order should only point to general patterns of behaviour.

According to Lascurettes (2011, p.3), order is a pattern of equilibrium-perpetuating behaviour among the units of a system. That is, in an ordered system, units behave in ways that maintains the status quo. In terms of individual unit behaviours, an ordered system should experience very few attempts by the units to 'take on' the status quo.

Although order might lead to more peace and justice between units, it is not necessary. Some interpretation premised order on intense inequalities, conflicts or competition between units. But in an ordered system, even antagonistic behaviours are patterned and circumscribed to avoid destabilizing the foundation of that order (Kupchan et al., 2001, p.36). As Lebow (2008, p.14) suggested, "Order does not prevent war, but regulates it and keeps it within bounds." And while "justice is best served by an ordered world" where unit behaviour and inter-unit outcomes are more patterned and predictable, order is at best a necessary albeit insufficient requirement for justice.

According to Bull (2002, p.4), the concept of order refers to an arrangement of social life that promotes certain goals and values. Regardless of the goals pursued, all

societies recognise three essential goals that need to be attained. The first goal is to ensure that life will be, in some measure, secure against violence that will result in death or bodily harm. The next goal is to ensure that promises, once made, will be kept, or that agreements, once undertaken, will be carried out. The last essential goal is to ensure that the possession of things will remain stable, to some degree, and will not be subject to constant and limitless challenges. These three goals are elementary in that they provide the basis for the co-existence of people in a society. They are also universal as all societies appear to take them into account.

From the meaning of order, Bull (2002, p.8) defines international order as a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the "society of states" or "international society". It is imperative that international order is distinguished from "world order"; the latter implies the patterns or dispositions of human activity that sustain the elementary or primary goals of social life among humankind. International order is order among states. However, states are simply groups of people. Nevertheless, people may be grouped in such a way that they do not form states at all (Bull, 2002, p.19).

According to Hanagan (2012, p.123), there are many views on global politics and the implications of major events for international order. The most consistent emerging factor is the absence of con¬sensus. Although theories and arguments by international relations (IR) scholars can help in con¬ceptualising and understanding international politics, interstate relations, and international order, it is important to keep in mind that there is no single, or simple definition of order.

In general, international relations scholars would probably agree that international order refers to the structure, functioning, and nature of the international political system, and that the term is useful for describing the broad pat-tern of interactions among states. However, they most definitely disagree on how order originates and how it functions. To complicate the matter, order can be global or regional, and the concept of international order does not imply peace.

A given international order can be "disorderly" and conflict-prone, such as the classical Greek city-state system, the regional order in China during the Period of Warring States, and Europe during the Napoleonic era. Furthermore, international or

-ders can be stable or unstable. A stable order can withstand, or absorb, serious political, military, and economic shocks without breaking down. It can endure over a long period. For example, the United States was largely responsible for creating and leading international order after 1945, and that order has endured under the U.S. leadership despite significant shocks such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of China, and a variety of political and financial crises (Hanagan, 2012, p.124).

An international order structure refers to the distribution of power among states. Sources of power can be military, political, or economic. However, when scholars and policy makers talk about the structure of a specific international order, they usually refer to how military power is distributed among states. This is because not all states possess equal quantity of power. As such, international structures can be bipolar, unipolar or hegemonic, or multipolar.

Fur-thermore, a given state's reservoir of power is constantly changing due to demographic, economic, and technological factors, so that states are constantly rising and falling in terms of power with each other. Therefore, a given international structure or distribution of power is not permanent; it changes over time. Changes in the structure of the international system, such as from bipolar to unipolar, can lead to changes in international order. In fact, many scholars focus on the sudden major changes in the distribution of power that occur after major wars and the impact that these changes have on the breakdown of the previous international order and the construction of a new one (Ikenberry, 2001, p.35).

## 3. The Relationship Between International Order and International Relations

International relations are presently involved in an undesirable order at present time. It is emphatically necessary to propound firm principles for to regulateing the relationships among between states and nations, as well as enact and the new orders to be enacted at the international level. Contemporary international orders have been reachedare in a fragile condition and the prevailed disciplines and arrangements, unfortunately, cannot prepare promote stability and peace at the international scene. Public international law also could not provide the necessary conditions with its current mechanisms (Bidabad, 2011, p.314).

While many laws have been derived, the capability of uniqueness and publicity at the international level is lacking due to a variety of reasons, which are mostly at country level. Due to the different ethnical, governmental, geographical, political, racial, climate and other characteristics, unique laws are not able to be legislated. The differences at country/local levels are reasonable but a set of international order is needed to handle the international community in order to establish peace and rationality in fulfilling human needs worldwide.

## 4. Model of Islamic International Relations Principles for the International Order

It is well known that Islamic preaching, which includes Islamic values and ethics, law and doctrine, has a universal tendency as it aspires to see welfare prevail and Muslim principles spread worldwide. It does so not for economic, material, racial, imperialist or nationalistic interests but to achieve salvation, happiness, welfare, justice and prosperity for humanity, both in this life and thereafter. The doctrine is based on recognition and confirmation of the absolute oneness of God, both in Divinity and Lordship, without any blemish of atheism or paganism. Thus, belief in God alone, in His angels, in His revealed books to His messengers, the hereafter and in the acts of God are the pillars of this religion.

In a human relationship, freedom, persuasion, dialogue, and tolerance are the foundation of the works by Islamic preachers for Almighty God. People are equal in terms of humanity, respect for human rights and dignity, and no category or individual is better than the other, except in piety and good deeds. God said in the Qur'an:

> "Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." (Al-Hujurat, 49:13)

According to Barderin (2018, p.71), this Qur'anic provision is the fundamental basis for Islamic social norms in respect of human co-existence and reflects the common bonds of humanity based on our common human ancestry and equality of birth. Ethnicity is acknowledged as a natural phenomenon that should be positively

appreciated and not negatively exploited to discriminate against or despise one another.

Apart from that, there is no coercion in the Islamic religion, nor is there any compulsion in disseminating this doctrine. God said:

> "Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error…" (Al-Baqarah, 2:256)

This is the principle of freedom of religion. During the dissemination of the Islamic message, the principle and slogan are: put the mind and logic into gear, and enforce justice. God mentions this in many verses, such as this one:

> "And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): But say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you, our God and your God is One, and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)"." (Al-'Ankabut, 29:46)

The principle of peace and security is a firmly established rule that should not be violated in any way, except in the case of aggression by others and when the enemy resorts to arms. God said:

> "Ye who believe! Enter into Islam whole-heartedly, and follow not the footsteps of the evil one, for he is to you an avowed enemy." (Al-Baqarah, 2:208)

The order governing the relationship between Muslims and People of the Book (Jews, Christians and others) is the ideal, most rational and unmistakable methodology, expressed in two verses of the Qur'an:

> "God forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for God loveth those who are just! God only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong." (Al-Mumtahanah, 60:8-9)

In their long history since the days of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Muslims have been committed to following this path. Thus, the Prophet's Message and that of his Companions and followers is a faithful expression of the one and only message, addressed to the world's monarchs, princes and leaders:

> "O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God, that we associate no partners with Him, that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords or patrons other than God …" (Ali 'Imran, 3:64)

In their various wars with the Arabs, Persians and Romans, Muslims resorted to combat only in defence of their existence, to repel aggression, to empower themselves to raise the banner of freedom among all nations on an equal footing, to declare the absolute truth, namely servitude and submission to God alone, without any influence from an oppressive sultan, an unjust ruler or a despotic leader (Navaid, 2010, p.271).

The State of Islam (the Caliphate) was the only system based on the emancipation of individuals and society from the prevailing phenomenon of "domination and subordination". For "domination and subordination", Islam substituted justice, consultation (shura), equality, mercy, freedom and brotherhood, which are the most noble of Islamic foundations in the politics of government (Sultan, 1970, p.115). In light of those fundamental values and premises, we can identify the rules of peace and security according to Islamic principles and Muslim practices.

## *4.1 Islamic principles that relate to international order*

Islam provides a manifold of principles to establish landmarks for external or international relations. The most important of them can be summed up as follows:

### *4.1.1 Human brotherhood*

Muslims are committed to Almighty God's guidance, as expressed in the Qur'an, when He (God) confirmed the unity between creatures and the Creator, the unity of the human race, and fully fledged human brotherhood. Almighty God is the Creator and people are His creation; His will and wisdom require people to be disparate in their intellectual faculty, opinions, ideas, beliefs and doctrines.

People are free to decide what is in their best interest, in light of the divine revelation and messages of reformist prophets and messengers from ancient times to the era of the Seal (the last) of the Prophets, that is, Mohammed (peace be upon him), God's blessings and peace be upon them all. After making their choice and putting their freedom into practice, people are responsible for the soundness of their choice. They should choose what would benefit them to achieve their salvation and happiness in this life and the hereafter (Al-Zuhayli, 2005, p.272). In specifying the path to salvation, which includes following the messages of prophets and messengers, peace be upon them, God said:

> "Mankind was one single nation, and God sent messengers with glad tidings and warnings, and with them He sent The Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed, but the People of the Book, after the clear signs came to them, did not differ among themselves, except through selfish contumacy. God by His Grace guided the believers to the truth, concerning that wherein they differed. For God guides whom He will to a path that is straight." (Al-Baqarah, 2:213)

### *4.1.2 Honouring the human being and preserving human rights*

Honouring human beings, protecting each person's existence and preserving their rights, regardless of their attitude or behaviour, are considered by the Holy Qur'an as basic elements in the perception of humankind. God said:

> "We have honoured the sons of Adam, provided them with transport on land and sea, given them for sustenance things good and pure, and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our Creation." (Al-Isra', 17:70)

The rights of human beings, whom God created and for whom He ensured primary and permanent livelihoods, namely the right to life, freedom, equality, justice, consultation and ethical conduct, are the essential and fundamental principles that should be preserved. Relations with other human beings should be governed by those principles, under all circumstances: in dialogue and debate, in peaceful coexistence, as well as in peace and war.

Thus, it is prohibited under God's legislation and religion to harm or inflict injury on another person because of their faith. They also should not be coerced into changing

their religion. Their dignity should be inviolable and not be tortured in a way that offends their dignity. Their honour should not be attacked, nor should their modesty be violated. They should not be oppressed, nor should they be subjected to any practices that contravene morality and codes of ethics. These are the fundamental principles to which Muslims or pious people of any religion are committed (Al-Zuhayli, 2005, p.273).

### *4.1.3 Commitment to the rules of ethics and morality*

Ethics is the container of religion, the pillar of civilization, and the setting of the basis and standards for dealings and relations between individuals and States alike. No human being, nation or state should be treated in a way that transgresses the values of ethics and morals, especially the criteria of virtue and nobility of spirit. It follows that enslavement, degradation, oppression and coercion are prohibited for any reason whatsoever. Demolition, destruction, and the expulsion of human beings from their homes, houses or land are also forbidden, as is the violation of the sanctity of honour and cherished values, even if the enemy's behaviour is deemed excessive, biased or dishonourable.

According to al-Zuhayli (2005, p.273), one should not be treated similarly based on reciprocity because honour is one of God's sacrosanct values on earth. It is inviolable and untouchable, regardless of whether the person is an ally or an enemy, irrespective of their sex, religion, belief or doctrine. Any offence or sin is prohibited and incurs guilt, whether committed by a friend or foe.

In one of his messages to the leader of his armies, Sa'ad Ibn Abi Waqas, Umar Ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with them) said:

> "I order you and those accompanying you to be most careful about committing offences against your enemies, as the sins of the army are more fearful than their enemy. Muslims win because of their foe's disobedience to God, had it not been for this, we wouldn't have power over them, because their numbers surpass ours, they are better equipped than we are. Hence, if we are equal in wrongdoing, they would be superior to us. Unless we prevail because of our values and good deeds, we will never overcome them with our force. (…) Never say: Our enemies are worse than us, thus they will never empower us even if we commit an

> offence, for many a people have been targeted and subjugated by people worse than they are." (Ayyad, 1951, p.43)

### *4.1.4 Justice and equality in rights and duties*

Justice is a natural right one has in dealing with others; it is the basis for a governmental system to survive. Oppression is the harbinger of the destruction of civilization and prosperity and the collapse of a system. Islam emphasises justice and equality among human beings. The dispensation and establishment of justice in human dealings are its fundamental objective (Chaudry, 2000, p.46).

Hence, Almighty God said: "God commands justice, the doing of good …" (An-Nahl, 16:90), whereby doing good is added to justice to eradicate any rancour from people's minds and foster friendship among them. God also said:

> "O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that ye do." (Al-Maidah, 5:8)

The Divine Saying, as related by the Prophet and narrated by Muslims reads "O My subjects! I forbade injustice to Myself, and forbade it among yourselves. Do not do others injustice." The right to equality in terms of rights and duties, as well as litigation are natural rights; the latter is complementary to and expressive of the right to justice. Hence no group or person, not even a monarch, should be treated with favouritism, with discrimination over others.

### *4.1.5 Mercy in peace and war*

As the very word implies, Islam means "peace" and "security". It also means "submission" to God and hence salvation. Islam is thus, a religion of peace and it is no wonder that the slogan to illustrate some Islamic states relationships with foreign countries is "*al-Aslu fi al-Alaqah as-Silmu*", which means peace with all and war against none or, in other words, friendship towards all and malice towards none (Ali Mansur, 1971, p.137). According to Chaudry (2000, p.21), al-Qur'an, the revealed book of Islam, does not allow an aggressive war; it allows to take up arms only as a last resort in self-defence. The Qur'an enjoins upon its followers: "Fight in the way of

Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors." (Al-Baqarah, 2:190)

The ethics and main principles of Islam also prescribe tolerance, mercy and the granting of amnesty when dealing with harsh situations, and demand that strictness, intransigence or cruelty in excess of the normal limits be avoided, in accordance with the nature of the Islamic Message as described by Almighty God when addressing the Prophet in these words: "We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures." (Al-Anbiya', 21:107). In other words, human beings, animals, jinn and inanimate beings, and all things, must be treated as thus prescribed.

## *4.2 Recognition of the international personality of other States*

The rise of statehood went hand in hand with the recognition of the international personality of states, which was consolidated by the principle of "equal sovereignty among all members of the international community", as stated in Article 2 (1) of the United Nations Charter. This is an acceptable principle from an Islamic point of view, for its purpose is to enable every state to live freely, securely and peacefully and dedicated to fulfilling its obligations toward its people (Al-Zuhayli, 2005, p.276).

No state has the right to infringe upon the sovereignty of another state, nor is it entitled to invade or control another's destiny and wealth, as otherwise, its sovereignty will be impaired. Furthermore, no state is allowed to interfere in the affairs of other states. The evidence that Islam respects this principle lies in its recognition of the principle of international peace and security for all states.

The long history of Islam shows that Muslim states have been faithful to a policy of peace with other nations and peoples. The practices of the previous Muslims have been evidence that they did not attack neighbouring territories that were not hostile to them. For example, the excellent relationship between the Muslims and the people in the region of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia). Before the migration to Medina, some Muslims were given asylum in Abyssinia. Because of their generosity, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encouraged Muslims to maintain peaceful relations with them, and this practice continued. He said, "Let the Abyssinians as long as they live in peace with you, and let the Turks as long as they live in peace with you" (Al-Sijistani, 1980, p.114)

This is also proven based on the historical records of Ibnu Rushd (2007, p.426), who reported that the people of Medina never attacked the Abyssinians or Turks. He said, "Malik was asked about the authenticity of the hadith. He did not recognize it, but said people keep avoiding attacking them."

Another example of an event is when Mu'awiyah Ibn Abi Sufyan, the first Umayyad ruler, recognised the sovereignty of the Armenian people and their right to exercise control over their territory in the year 653. The same was seen in the case of the peoples of Samarkand vs. Qutayba Ibn Muslim in the year 702. The Muslim judge agreed with the claims of the people of Samarkand and passed a judgement against Qutayba Ibn Muslim, the leader of the Muslim army. The judge ruled that the Muslim army must withdraw from the city, and take immediate steps to enable the people of Samarkand to exercise their rights to territorial sovereignty and self-determination, peacefully and freely (Zawati, 2015, p.269).

These events illustrate the prohibition of interfering in the affairs or attempting to weaken the structure of another state, as Muslims have no right to act in this manner. Consequently, this is a recognition or an acknowledgement of the existence of other nations and a prohibition of any attempt to eradicate them or the standa--rds they have set for their guidance.

### *4.3 Precedence given to the principles of peace, human brotherhood and international cooperation*

Islam is keen to reach solutions with other nations on the basis of peace and security, the recognition of partnership in shared interests, and the respect for the bond of the human brotherhood since all creatures exist by divine order and will. Hence, it is prohibited to kill another human being except for a legal reason; otherwise, it would be considered aggression against the Creator's creation (Imam Yahya, 2015, p.135). God said in the Qur'an: "And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden (to be killed) except by (legal) right." (Al-An'am: 6:151)

A group of Muslim legal scholars, like al-Qaradhawi (2015, p.363), decided that the basis (general rule) of the relationship between Muslims and others is peace and not war, for God mentions this in many verses of al-Qur'an. Accordingly, these legal

scholars decided that the reason for combat in Islam is to fight those outside the law or fend off aggression, not because of atheism or religious difference.

The evidence is that killing civilians or non-combatants is prohibited, and *dhimma* (covenant) agreements are made with non-Muslims living in the abode of Islam in peace and without complaints. Furthermore, Islam encourages new venues for interaction and trade with other nations, establishing good relations between Muslims and others. The legal scholar Ibnu Salah (n.d., p.224) said:

> "The original opinion is to keep the atheists and settle them down, because Almighty God does not wish to exterminate the creatures, nor did He create them to be killed. However, they may be killed because they inflict injury and not as a punishment for their atheism. Life on earth is not for punishment, but punishment is in the hereafter…If the matter is as such, then it is not allowed to say: killing them is the rule."

Advocates of the opposing view hold that the rule in the relationship between Muslims and others is war, not peace. This is a confirmation, or rather a description, of bad relations that have prevailed in the past because of the continuous attacks on Muslims and recurrent wars between Muslims and others. The aim of that counter-trend was perhaps to boost the morale of combatants so that they would not lay down their arms, relax and rest, but would be ready for combat, determined to persevere against adversaries who surrounded Muslims on all sides.

Its supporters argue that in large-scale wars (expeditions or campaigns), of which 27 were campaigns against Arabs at the time of the Prophet, Muslims were victims of aggression. The same applied to wars against other adversaries such as the Crusaders, Tartars or Mongols. Unfortunately, wars of aggression are not confined to those examples but are frequently seen in the history of nations in both ancient and modern times. Nonetheless, the conduct of war must be subject to legal rules based on the Islamic principles stated above (Al-Zuhayli, 2005, p.278).

## 5. How Islamic Principles Can be Implemented in International Order?

It has not been easy for Islamic principles to be accepted in international relations, even more so when the world has been presented with a set of international order that is monopolised by the Western world. However, openness in accepting the

views of a nation or religion should be practiced by all countries and world organisation bodies. Islamic principles can be accepted as one of the values in the international order as follows:

1. To consider including Islamic ideas in the context of international order as a new order, alongside the other international norms and regimes. According Zandi (2015, p.11-12), it reduces the cost of interaction, promote coordination between the Islamic countries on one hand and on the other, the rest of the world. It will also be helpful in resolving conflicts and regulating the interest in any parts of interactions.
2. It allows the flourishing of cultural relations within which fosters mutual interactions, international cooperations and open-minded ideas. It raises consciousness and prevents any misinterpretation, especially in the critical situations.
3. Make attempts to brief an international multi-dimension platform which condemns any religious conflicts, commits to the peaceful culture, promotes a just order and war, engages honesty and cooperation, concentrates on the self-sacrifice and devotes herself/himself to the way of the peace and friendship, denies demonizing rivals, rejects any discrimination, and resists on any violence.

In the end, the intention is to introduce Islam as the international order so that it could change the hierarchical relations in international relations, reduce supremacy and inferiority to yield social equality, de-escalate racial, ethnical and religious conflicts, and also protect the environment. The inclusion of Islamic international relations principles will result in a peaceful world.

## 6. Conclusion

This article discussed on the principles of Islamic international relations and provided an idea for a new international order that is more effective and beneficial to the world. As a religion of peace, Islam is very concerned about the principle of justice, equality and human brotherhood. Islam is not a religion for terrorists as portrayed by the Western media as it strongly opposes any form of violence and oppression of a nation and humanity.

Today, the world requires a new international order that is more universal and ensures justice and peace. Conflicts that occur nowadays are most likely due to

weaknesses in the current international order and organizations responsible for addressing them. The international society needs one authoritative body that can conduct and manage international affairs by practising and implementing the solid principles of international order. Principles that should be incorporated in future international order should be of human brotherhood, the honouring of human beings and preservation of human rights, commitment to the rules of ethics and morality, justice and equality in rights and duties, as well as having mercy in both peace and war times.

## References:

Abu Dawud, Sulayman Ibnu al-Ash'ath Ibnu Ishaq al-Azdi al-Sijistani. (1980). *Sunan Abi Dawud*. 4th Volume. Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Asriyah.

Al-Qaradhawi, Yusuf. (2015). *Fiqh al-Jihad* (Fauwaz Fadzil, et al. Trans.). 1st Volume. Batu Caves: PTS Islamika.

Al-Zuhayli, Wahbah. (2005). Islam and International Law. *International Review of the Red Cross, 87*(858), 269-283.

Ali Mansur, Ali. (1971). *al-Shariah al-Islamiyah wa al-Qanun al-Duwali al-Am*. Cairo: Majlis al-A'la li al-Shu'un al-Islamiyah.

Barderin, M. A. (2018). Islamic Socio-Legal Norms and International Criminal Justice in Context: Advancing an 'Object and Purpose' cum 'Maqasid' Approach. In T. Gray (Ed.), *Islam and International Criminal Law and Justice* (pp. 45-82). Brussels: Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher.

Bidabad, B. (2011). Foundations of International Relations: An Islamic Sufi Approach. *International Journal of Law and Management, 53*(5), 313-341.

Bull, H. (2002). *The Anarchical Society, 3rd edition*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chaudry, M. S. (2000). *Dynamics of Islamic Jihad*. Lahore: Shir Kat Printing Press.

Hanagan, D. L. (2012). International Order. In J. B. Bartholomees Jr. (Ed.), *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues* (pp. 123-136). 5th Edition. Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College (SSI).

Ibnu Rushd, Abu al-Walid Muhammad Ibnu Ahmad. (2007). *Bidayah al-Mujtahid wa Nihayah al-Muqtasid* (Yusuf bin Ahmad al-Bakri, Ed.). Amman: Bayt al-Afkar al-Dawliyyah.

Ibnu Salah. (n.d.). *Makhtut (manuscript) Fatawa*. Cairo: Dar al-Kutub of Cairo.

Ikenberry, G. J. (2001). *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Imam Yahya. (2015). Jihad dan Perang dalam Literatur Muslim. In Hilman Latief and Zezen Zainal Mutaqin (Eds.), *Islam dan Urusan Kemanusiaan* (pp. 134-162). Jakarta: PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta.

Kupchan, C. A., et al. (2001). *Power in Transition: The Peaceful Change of International Order*. New York: United Nations University Press.

Lake, D. (2009). *Hierarchy in International Relations*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Lascurettes, K. M. (2011). The Disorderly State of 'International Order' in Search of an Elusive Concept. *Committee on Concepts and Methods Working Paper Series 52*.

Lebow, R. N. (2008). *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Navaid, M. I. (2010). *Political System in Islam*. 4th Volume. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House PVT. LTD.

Orsi, R. (2012). Rethinking the Concept of Order in International Politics: Carl Schmitt and Jurgen Habermas. *Ph.D Thesis*. The London School of Economics.

Sultan, H. (1970). *Ahkam al-Qanun ad-Duwali fi ash-Shari`a al-Islamiyya* (Rules of International Law in Islamic Shari'a). Cairo: Dar an-Nahda al-'Arabiyya.

Zandi, D. G. (2015). Islam and International Relations: Ontological Perspective. *Proceeding of the International Conference on Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization iCasic*. Kuala Lumpur, 4-5 March.

Zawati, H. M. (2015). Theory of War in Islamic and Public International Law. In N. A. Shah (Ed.), *Islam and the Law of Armed Conflict* (pp. 249-287). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishers.

Vol. 18, Issue 1, pp. 56-72

ARTICLE

# Social Acceptance of Green Electricity: A Case Study in Putrajaya

Suzana Ariff Azizan[1,*], Ahmad Nazirul Akmal Ahmad Sayuty[1]

[1] Department of Science and Technology Studies, Faculty of Science, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**[*]Corresponding author email:**
suzana_ariff@um.edu.my

**Received date:** 20 Jul 2022
**Published date:** 31 Dec 2022

**How to cite:**
Azizan, S.A., Ahmad Sayuty, A.N.A. (2022). Social Acceptance of Green Electricity: A Case Study in Putrajaya. *KATHA*, 18(1), 57-72. Retrieved from https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/KATHA/article/view/38000

**DOI:**
https://doi.org/10.22452/KATHA.vol18no1.4

## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the majority of the renewable energy programmes and initiatives introduced have been industry and commercial centric. Little focus has been given by the government to domestic consumers' acceptance. The concept of "social acceptance" is used to evaluate the readiness of the public in embracing renewable investments within their area. It is a tool to measure the attitude of citizens, either active or passive, towards different green products or technologies. This study aims to identify factors that influence the social acceptance of green electricity among consumers and, subsequently, the relationship between these factors. An empirical study was conducted on the residents of Putrajaya, involving 185 respondents. Descriptive analysis and Pearson correlation were used as analysis methods in this study. The results showed that attractiveness, compatibility, and reliability are the main factors that influence their intention to use green electricity. These results suggest that the respondents' intention to use green electricity is not affected by their level of environmental knowledge or the cost of using green electricity.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, green electricity, social acceptance

# 1. Introduction

Climate change is one of the most debated issues among scientists and policymakers as it poses a major threat to the environment, public health, and economic development (Bell et al., 2011). One of the main causes of climate change is energy consumption through economic and human activities, such as the mass production of technological goods, rapid intensification of agricultural activities, increased urbanization, and rising fossil fuel demands for energy and transportation (Ockenden et al., 2014). Consequently, the process of burning fossil fuels to generate electricity has increased greenhouse gas emissions and, undoubtedly, global temperatures (Stern, 2015).

Green electricity has been introduced as a sustainable alternative. Green electricity, in general, is produced using renewable energy sources such as photovoltaic, wind turbines, hydropower, and other renewable energy sources (Zhang & Wu, 2012). Nevertheless, as renewable energy infrastructure is deemed to be costly for society, it is currently trending downward. There are also arguments that the growth of renewable energy in most countries is influenced by social awareness and understanding of the community (Fredric, 2005; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007). Therefore, to garner the public's support of renewable energy development, it is important to explore and understand their attitudes and intentions to use renewable energy or green electricity.

By focusing on Putrajaya as one of the pioneer cities that has actively promote green technology development in Malaysia (Putrajaya Corporation, 2012), the current study aims to determine the factors that influences the social acceptance of green electricity. The development of Putrajaya was based on two concepts, Garden City and Intelligent City, which embraced sustainable development practices. In fact, in 2010, Putrajaya Corporation introduced an initiative called Putrajaya Green City 2025, which focuses on three pertinent themes (Azhar & Wang, 2019):

- Low Carbon Putrajaya: a 60% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions due to energy consumption.
- Cooler Putrajaya: reduction of 2 degrees Celsius of the peak temperature.
- 3R Putrajaya: reduction of 50% of final disposal of solid waste to landfill and greenhouse gas emissions.

Under the initiative, Putrajaya Corporation increased the use of solar photovoltaics through the concept of Building-Integrated Photovoltaics (BIPV) systems by installing the systems in residential and government buildings with a capacity of 12 kWh and 48 kWh, respectively. As it has been more than a decade since this initiative was introduced, it is reasonable to evaluate the social acceptance of green electricity in Putrajaya and the extent to which the green agenda has been adopted by its community. Accordingly, this study will provide inputs for government policy and planning in expanding the renewable energy incentive for the community.

This paper begins with an introductory section, Section 2 presents a literature review, Section 3 explains the methods used in this study, while Section 4 discusses the data analysis and research findings. Finally, the paper ends with concluding remarks.

## *1.1 Green Electricity and Sustainability*

The consumption of fossil fuels and the production of cement has resulted in about 400 billion tonnes of coal being released into the atmosphere since 1751 (Boden et al., 2017). For example, in 2013 alone, the power sector contributed approximately 54.8% of total carbon dioxide (CO2) emission (World Bank, 2017). As such, the Paris Climate Agreement was ratified by 196 countries in 2015 who jointly declared that greenhouse gas emissions should be almost zero by the end of the century. Accordingly, an exit strategy from the issues of carbon dioxide (CO2) emission, aimed at decarbonizing the energy sector, was rolled out and it has been one of the most effective strategies to date. As an early measure to phase out fossil fuels and coal in the energy sector, renewable energy has been introduced as an alternative. Hence, making the switch to renewable energy as an alternative energy source is believed to support the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

Due to the depletion of natural resources caused by human-driven activities and their impacts on the environment such as greenhouse gases, alternative energy supplies are required (Harris, 2003) .This involves decentralizing the current non-fossil systems so as to adapt to local conditions and utilize the advancement of technological innovations, especially those related to renewable energy such as wind, geothermal, biomass, biogas, solar, bioenergy, and tidal/wave power (Smith-Sebasto, 2013). Furthermore, the use of renewable energy technologies has a

significant impact on economic development as they can turn solar, wind, water, thermal, and plants into forms of energy and further provide clean energy for human needs (International Renewable Energy Agency, 2016).

Green electricity is one of the pillars for achieving the sustainable development goals of a green economy. Green electricity refers to electricity generated from renewable energy sources and its usage is based on self-contained facilities such as solar panels, wind turbines, hydropower, and other renewable energy sources (Zhang & Wu, 2012). To attain a green economy level, extensive studies are required, particularly that in formation conditions, the formation of system components, and their impact on national-level sustainable development. Therefore, cooperation between the government, the industry, and the public is crucial for achieving a green economy.

While "green innovation" is aimed at generating high-quality and innovative products to help reduce environmental footprint, green management knowledge is crucial in sustainable development, specifically in the creation, exchange, acquisition, and use of knowledge, in addition to assessing the implications of green technology, eco-innovation, and the socio-economic aspects (Abbas et al., 2019). In the same vein, market orientation contributes to an improved environmental performance (Minjian et al., 2020); hence, this calls for a study on the social acceptance of green electricity in order to better understand the actual demands of society.

## *1.2 Social Acceptance of Green Electricity*

Energy systems are more than just a symbiotic relationship between technology and its associated infrastructure. They are a part of society, or in other words, a socio-technical system, in which institutions, social practices, and economics play vital roles in a specific type of social connection. The transfer from the steam engine to the internal combustion engine, for example, is the outcome of social, political, economic, and spatial development (Ellis & Ferraro, 2016). In this regard, the ongoing interplay and the relationship between society and energy technology must be acknowledged (Bijker & Law, 1992). Moreover, since technical development is reliant on social factors and society's intricate interaction may influence the success or failure of technologies, understanding social dynamics is, therefore, of the utmost importance (Sovacool, 2009).

Through the "social acceptance" concept, public willingness to adopt renewable investments in their area can be assessed (Liu et al., 2013). According to Upham et al. (2015), acceptance in this context denotes “a favourable or positive response (including attitude, intention, behaviour and – where appropriate – use) relating to a proposed or in situ technology or socio-technical system, by members of a given social unit (country or region, community or town and household, organization)” (p.17). Meanwhile, Caporale et al. (2015) described “social acceptability” as a technique for analysing people's active or passive attitudes toward various green technologies. As such, understanding the influence, structure, and type of collaboration is required in the study of social acceptance (Gaede & Rowlands, 2018).

Several frameworks related to the idea of social acceptance and renewable energy technology have been developed, for example, the "triangle of social acceptance" by Wüstenhagen et al. (2007). The framework suggests three components to characterize social acceptance, as follows:

- Market acceptance: Market acceptance refers to a financial institution’s willingness to invest in or lend to the technology, including large-scale production of technology and consumer participation in markets created by the technology.
- Socio-political acceptance: Socio-political acceptance reflects the larger scale acceptance-related issues such as state policies and institutional frameworks that would encourage the deployment of specific technologies and broader public opinion which would further contribute to the technology's improvement.
- Community acceptance: Community acceptance refers to residents' and local governments' acceptance of specific siting resolutions and energy projects.

Although Wüstenhagen et al. (2007) did not specify which of the three components is the most important, socio-political acceptability, according to Wolsink (2012), is most crucial for assessing social acceptance of renewable energy. Furthermore, while acceptance in the community and marketplace is dependent on institutional and governmental support, institutional changes are likely to necessitate the establishment of a link to the current system.

Later, in 2015, Upham et al. (2015) revised Wüstenhagen et al.'s (2007) framework by categorizing the key elements that influence social acceptance. The authors introduced three different levels of acceptance-related analysis which comprises of three stakeholders: macro (policy or country level), meso (community and town levels), and micro (household or organization level).

Globally, numerous studies have been conducted to discuss factors that influence the public's affinity towards the use of green electricity, such as the attractiveness of benefits (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibanez, 2012), knowledge (Fashina et al., 2018), and risk factors (Friedl & Reichl, 2016; Tampakis et al., 2017). Notwithstanding the barriers to green electricity usage, highlighting the lower risk or harm to customers makes it easier in gaining the public's trust in green electricity. Cost is another major barrier to the use of green energy (Sarangi, 2018). For instance, based on a study by Zahari and Esa (2018) involving 501 residential users, cost was found to be the only factor that negatively correlated with the intention to adopt renewable energy and this finding was supported by Zakaria et al. (2019) who demonstrated that cost is a major barrier to the adoption of renewable energy in Malaysia. However, Kardooni et al. (2018) found that cost, knowledge, and trust significantly influence the use of renewable energy in Malaysia.

## *1.3 Green Energy in Malaysia*

Among Southeast Asia's top CO2 emitters, Malaysia came in third after Indonesia and Thailand, emitting 236.5 Mt of CO2 in 2013 from only 56.6 Mt in 1990 (Rina et al., 2017). Hydropower, for instance, one of the main sources of electricity in Malaysia, has contributed to the high CO2 emission (Sharvini et al., 2018). Thus, to address these issues and pursue the green agenda, Malaysia ratified the Paris Agreement for 45% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 instead of 2005 as the base level, where 35% of the reduction constitutes unconditional terms while the remaining 10% constitutes conditional commitments such as climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity building based on the receipt of incentives from advanced countries.

In 2000, Malaysia introduced the Five-Fuel Diversification Policy which included renewable energy as part of the sources in the national energy mix (Mendonca et al., 2020). Subsequently, in the Eighth Malaysia Plan from 2001 to 2005, the renewable

energy target was set at 5% of energy demand - equivalent to 500MW. Furthermore, to promote more private sector investment in the renewable energy business, especially in small-scale energy generation projects, the Small Renewable Energy Programme was introduced and contributed 0.3% of the national energy mix in 2005 (Mendonca et al., 2020). Later, in the year 2009, the Malaysian government introduced the National Renewable Energy Policy and Action Plan (NREPAP), followed by the gazettement of the Renewable Energy Act (Act 725) and then the formation of the Sustainable Energy Development Authority. Correspondingly, various initiatives were introduced under these policies, namely Feed-in Tariff (FiT), Net Energy Metering (NEM), Large Scale Solar Programme, Green Investment Tax Allowance, and Green Investment Tax Exemptions.

Indeed, the Malaysian government has made remarkable efforts to incorporate renewable energy into the country's energy mix with the target of fulfilling Malaysia's commitment of a 45% reduction of CO2 emissions by 2030 (Haiges et al., 2018). Nonetheless, most of the initiatives and programmes designed by the government have been industrial-driven and commercialisation-centric, with less attention given to the public's needs. Therefore, it is important to investigate users' attitudes and intention to use renewable energy in order to have continuous public support for renewable energy development. Given the crucial role of social acceptance in the implementation of renewable energy technologies in Malaysia, this study intends to investigate the factors that influence domestic customers' social acceptance of green electricity as a basis for government policy and planning to increase the public's affinity towards renewable energy.

## 2. Hypothesis and Conceptual Framework

Park's (2019) research model in examining the drivers and barriers to social acceptance of green electricity in South Korea was applied in this study. Using the theory of planned behaviour, Park (2019) showed the relationships between attractiveness and reliability, benefits, value, and intention; as well as between cost and reliability, risk, value, and intention in adopting green electricity (Figure 1).

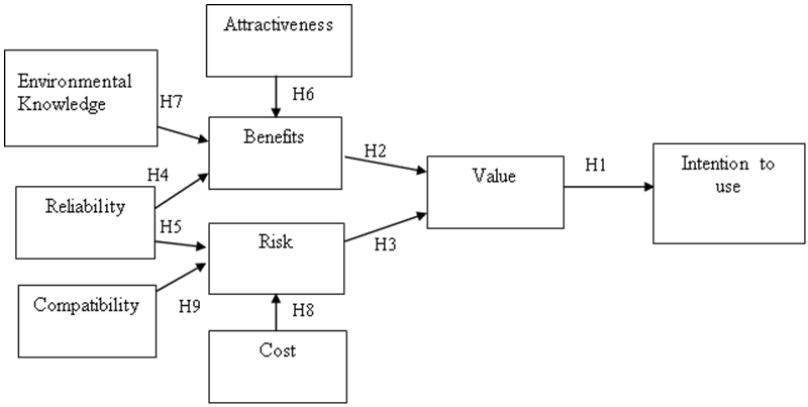


**Figure 1:** Research Model by Park (2019)

Based on Park (2019), the following hypotheses were proposed:

**H1:** Positive perceived value of green electricity will lead to high intention of using green electricity.

**H2:** Perceived benefits of green electricity will eventually lead to a higher perceived value of green electricity.

**H3:** Perceived risk of green electricity will lead to a lower perceived value of green electricity.

**H4:** Perceived reliability of green electricity will lead to higher perceived benefits of green electricity.

**H5:** Perceived reliability of green electricity will lead to a lower perceived risk of green electricity.

**H6:** Attractiveness of green electricity will lead to higher perceived benefits of green electricity.

**H7:** Significant environmental knowledge of green electricity will lead to higher perceived benefits of green electricity.

**H8:** Negative perceived cost of green electricity will lead to a higher perceived risk of green electricity.

**H9:** Higher compatibility of green electricity will lead to a lower perceived risk of green electricity

## 3. Methodology

Using a quantitative method, the sample size for this study was derived from the formula of multiple correlation analysis proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007).

$$N > 50 + 8m$$

N= number of participants

m = number of independent variables

Correspondingly, based on the calculation, the study requires a minimum of 122 respondents.

$$N > 50 + 8 (9) = 122$$

The survey instrument for this study was adopted from Park's (2019) research on the social acceptance of green electricity in South Korea. The questionnaire developed by Park (2019) has been tested on approximately 1,200 respondents, thus confirming its reliability. However, before adopting Park's (2019) questionnaire, written permission to use the questionnaire in this study was first obtained from Park through e-mail and the questionnaire was used upon receiving consent.

The questionnaire is designed with a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) to indicate the level of respondent perception of each question in each variable. Specifically, each of the variables in this study is measured with 3 sets of questions and the total number of questions designated for all variables is 27.

The questionnaire was distributed to residents and individuals working in Putrajaya between March 15, 2021, and April 11, 2021. The administrative capital of Malaysia, Putrajaya, is located 25 kilometres south of Kuala Lumpur on a 4,931-hectare plot of land. The city has a population of about 91,900 people, the majority of whom serve in the government (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). To distribute the questionnaire to respondents, the survey link was shared via the Google Forms platform with the Putrajaya community via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook. The survey was actively distributed for three weeks and was halted when the number of responses received became stagnant for more than five days. In the end, the study obtained a total of 185 respondents who completed the survey.

The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation. Descriptive statistics were employed to determine the elements impacting consumers' social acceptance of green electricity, while Pearson's correlation was utilised to characterise the relationships between variables and the correlation between two variables.

## 4. Data Analysis and Findings

### *4.1 Descriptive Analysis*

Table 1 depicts the results of descriptive analysis, which was carried out to determine the factors that influence domestic consumers' acceptance of green electricity. From these results, we can explain the key factors that influence the respondents' attitude towards green electricity and their intention to use it over conventional electricity from fossil fuel sources. Overall, most of the respondents were interested in using green electricity and this finding coincides with Park's (2019) study, where notable factors such as attractiveness, compatibility, and reliability of green electricity affect the intention to use green electricity based on the benefits and risks.

Table 1: Summary of Descriptive Statistics

| Factor | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Attractiveness** | 185 | 4.2018 | .14846 | .022 |
| **Environmental Knowledge** | 185 | 3.0811 | .05213 | .003 |
| **Reliability** | 185 | 3.8162 | .13792 | .019 |
| **Compatibility** | 185 | 4.0360 | .20755 | .043 |
| **Cost** | 185 | 3.7586 | .07198 | .005 |
| **Benefit** | 185 | 4.3604 | .07496 | .006 |
| **Risk** | 185 | 4.0486 | .02703 | .001 |
| **Value** | 185 | 3.6775 | .05930 | .004 |
| **Intention to use** | 185 | 4.2595 | .00541 | .000 |
| **Valid N (listwise)** | 185 | | | |

Based on the current findings, the respondents perceived green electricity to be more attractive than fossil fuel electricity and they believed that the use of green electricity is not only reliable and able to meet their electricity demands but it also does not jeopardize compatibility. These findings verify Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibanez's (2012) assertion that the attractiveness of benefits is one of the factors to be considered in evaluating the intention to use green electricity.

The findings of this study, however, differ from Kardooni et al.'s (2018) in which high costs and the lack of knowledge have discouraged consumers from using green electricity. On the contrary, the current study suggests that the respondents' attitudes toward green electricity are changing and are becoming more dynamic and open to new products on the market. This has resulted in the respondents being more willing to shift to green electricity rather than making decisions based on rigid and timid regimes such as cost and knowledge.

## *4.2 Pearson's Correlation*

Figure 2 summarizes the results of Pearson's correlation analysis in this study.

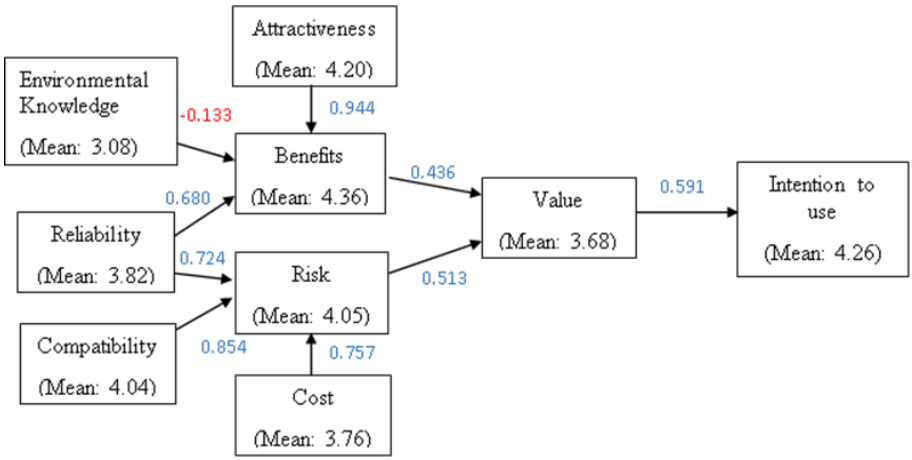


**Figure 2:** Summary of Pearson Correlation Result

Based on the results, H1 indicates a significant relationship between value and the intention to use green electricity. However, to further discuss value, the benefit and risk factors outlined in H2 and H3 must also be considered because the respondents'

decisions regarding the value of green electricity is associated with the benefits and risks of green electricity. The results showed that both H2 and H3 have a positive and significant relationship with H1, confirming Hartmann and Apaolaza's (2012) assertion that the element of benefits and the value of technology and services are both influential. Similarly, as for the risk factor, Friedl and Reichl (2016) and Tampakis et al. (2017) suggested that the element of risk also influences consumers' intention to use green electricity; therefore, by minimizing the risk factor, consumers are more likely to be confident in using green electricity.

Subsequently, based on the positive and significant relationships shown in both H4 and H5, the reliability of green electricity has been proven to be one of the main factors that influences the respondents' decision to use green electricity apart from its benefits and risks. Perceived reliability plays a big role in users' perceptions of the systems and services (Chung et al., 2008). Reliability, for instance, is closely related to the technical aspect of the product and system involved such as network, stability of the supply, and security. Reliability is important because if the features of a product or system seem reliable, the respondents will be more convinced to use it.
H6 shows a positive and significant relationship between attractiveness and perception of green electricity. It can be seen that while the respondents analysed the benefits of green electricity, the attractiveness of green electricity itself is able to influence the respondents' decisions to use green electricity. H7 surprisingly showed a negative relationship between environmental knowledge and the intention to use green electricity, hence suggesting that the respondents do not rely on their knowledge when it comes to making decisions about whether to use green electricity. Of all the factors proposed in the current study, environmental knowledge is the only factor that exhibits a negative relationship with intention to use.

Finally, H8 and H9 showed a positive and significant relationship between cost and compatibility where both are proven to influence the respondents' intention to use green electricity. In terms of compatibility, the technical aspect of green electricity is often considered, particularly in the quality of electricity received from the distribution network. This is because the respondents are only likely to use green electricity if its performance is on par with or better than conventional electricity.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to study the factors that affect domestic consumers' social acceptance of green electricity. In essence, it can be concluded that attractiveness, compatibility, and reliability are the key factors to be considered in promoting social acceptance of green electricity. As evidenced in the study, the respondents are more concerned about the benefits of using green electricity than the risk of using it. However, among all the factors taken into consideration, environmental knowledge was the least important factor in their decision-making process.

By using the framework proposed by the previous research, this study has shown that all factors directly impact the respondents' attitudes and intention of using green electricity. Thus, the findings of this study has provided new insights into the social acceptance of green electricity among domestic consumers in which factors such as attractiveness, compatibility, and reliability play vital roles. This suggests that while the cost of utilizing green electricity has become the main impediment and is burdensome for the people, the supply consistency and security provided play an important role in meeting the expanding green electricity demand.

Green electricity offers prospects that will support the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals, including energy access, mitigating climate change, and lowering environmental impacts. Pertinent to this, to encourage society to adopt green electricity, policymakers, regulators, and utility companies must be creative in promoting green electricity to persuade more people to use it. This study could provide the government with an early indicator and empirical evidence on public's perception of green electricity. Furthermore, the findings of this study will help policymakers strike the right balance in the energy trilemma, that is, allowing Malaysia to avoid an energy crisis that would have a negative impact on social, infrastructure, and economic development. In addition, dialogue between the main stakeholders—the government, industry, and community—is crucial for fostering an environment that will support the promotion of green electricity.

Sustainable development, which promotes environmental, social, and economic balance, can serve as the foundation for human civilization. Civilization, according to Abdul Razak and Sanusi (2010), necessitates that society is responsible, respects and

lives in harmony with nature. Therefore, since humans and nature must coexist in order to thrive, the sustainable development approach allows for a better decision-making process on the issues that affect human lives apart from strengthening the pursuit of a sustainable society and human civilization.

## 6. Conclusion

This study's sample size was too small to be generalised. However, the amount is sufficient to demonstrate the link between variables and identify the key criteria or aspects to be considered by the respondents. Additionally, since this study was carried out during the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, the government's movement control measures made it challenging to conduct a physical survey and obtain a higher response rate.

## References:

Abbas, J., & Sa ˇgsan, M. (2019). Impact of knowledge management practices on green innovation and corporate sustainable development: A structural analysis. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 229*, 611–620

Azhar, O., & Wang, T. W. (2019, May 31). *Putrajaya Green City 2025 (PGC2025)*. Putrajaya Corporation Malaysia. Retrieved from https://www-iam.nies.go.jp/aim/aim_workshop/aimws_16/presentation/s05_wang_ppt.pdf

Bell, A.R., Cook, B.I., Anchukaitis, K.J., Buckley, B.M., & Cook, E.R. (2011). Repurposing climate reconstructions for drought prediction in Southeast Asia: A letter. *Climate Change, 106*, 691–698

Bijker, W.E. and Law, J. (1992). *Shaping technology - building society: studies in sociotechnical change*. MIT Press, London.

Boden, T.A., Marland, G., & Andres, R.J. (2017). *Global, Regional, and National Fossil-Fuel CO2 Emissions*. Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, U.S. Department of Energy: Oak Ridge, TN, USA

Caporale, D., & De Lucia, C. (2015). Social acceptance of on-shore wind energy in Apulia Region (Southern Italy). *Renew. Sustain. Energy Rev., 52*, 1378–1390

Chung, B.Y., Skibniewski, M.J., Lucas Jr., H.C., & Kwak, Y.H. (2008). Analyzing enterprise resource planning system implementation success factors in the engineering-construction industry. *J. Comput. Civ. Eng. 22*, 373-382

Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2019). *Federal Territory of Putrajaya*. https://www.dosm.gov.my/

Ellis, G., & Ferraro, G. (2016). The Social Acceptance of Wind Energy. *European Commission - JRC Science for Policy Report*, EUR 28182 EN, http://doi 10.2789/696070

Energy Commission. (2019). *Malaysia Energy Statistics Handbook, Malaysia*

Fashina, A., Mundu, M., Akiyode, O., Abdullah, L., Sanni, D., & Ounyesiga, L. (2019). The Drivers and Barriers of Renewable Energy Applications and Development in Uganda: A Review. *Clean Technol., 1*, 9-39. https://doi.org/10.3390/cleantechnol1010003

Fredric, C.M. (2005). Green electricity policies in the United States: Case study. *Energy Policy, 33(*18), 2398-2410

Friedl, C., & Reichl, J. (2016). Realizing energy infrastructure projects – A qualitative empirical analysis of local practices to address social acceptance. *Energy Policy, 89*(C), 184-193

Gaede, J., & Rowlands, I.H. (2018). Visualizing social acceptance research: A bibliometric review of social acceptance literature for energy technology and fuels. *Energy Research & Social Science, 40*, 142-158

Hagen, Bjoern & Pijawka, K. (2015). Public Perceptions and Support of Renewable Energy in North America in the Context of Global Climate Change. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science, 6*. http://doi.10.1007/s13753-015-0068

Hartmann, P., & Apaolaza-Ibanez, V., (2012). Consumer attitude and purchase intention toward green energy brands: the roles of psychological benefits and environmental concern. *J. Bus. Res., 65*, 1254 – 1263

Haiges, R., Wang, Y.D., Ghoshray, A. & Roskilly, A.P. (2018). Optimization of Malaysia's power generation mix to meet the electricity demand by 2050. *Energy Procedia, 1452*, 2844-2851

Harris, J. M. (2003). Sustainability and sustainable development. *International Society for Ecological Economics, 1*(1), 1-12.

International Renewable Energy Agency, IRENA (2016). *Renewable Energy Benefits: Measuring the Economics*. http://www.irena.org/DocumentDownloads/Publications/IRENA_Measuring-the-Economics_2016.pdf

Liu, W., Wang, C. & Mol, A. (2013). Rural public acceptance of renewable energy deployment: The case of Shandong in China. *Appl. Energy, 102*, 1187–1196

Mendonça, A.K., De Andrade Conradi Barni, G., Moro, M.F., Bornia, A.C., Kupek, E., & Fernandes, L. (2020). Hierarchical modelling of the 50 largest economies to

verify the impact of GDP, population and renewable energy generation in CO2 emissions. *Sustain. Prod. Consum., 22*, 58–67. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/ j.spc.2020.02.001.

Minjian, G., Nowakowska-Grunt, J., Gorbanyov, V., & Egorova, M. (2020). Green Technology and Sustainable Development: Assessment and Green Growth Framework. *Sustainability, 12*, 6571

Ockenden, C.M., Deasy, C., Quinton, J.N., Surridge, B. & Stoate, C. (1993). Keeping agricultural soil out of rivers: Evidence of sediment and nutrient accumulation within field wetlands in the UK. *J. Environment Management, 135*, 54–62

Park E. (2019). Social acceptance of green electricity: Evidence from the structural equation modeling method, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *215*, 796-805. https://doi.org/10.1016/ j.jclepro.2019.01.075.

Putrajaya Corporation (2012). *Putrajaya Low Carbon Green City Initiatives Report*. http://2050.nies.go.jp/report/file/lcs_asialocal/PutrajayaReport_2012.pdf

Sarangi, G. K. 2018. Green Energy Finance in India: Challenges and Solutions. *ADBI Working Paper 863*. Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute. Available: https://www.adb.org/publications/green-energy-finance-india-challenges-and -solutions

Sharvini, S.R., Noor, Z.Z., Chong, C.S. Stringer, L.C. & Yusuf, R.O. (2018). Energy consumption trends and their linkages with renewable energy policies in East and Southeast Asian countries: Challenges and opportunities. *Sustain. Environ. Res., 28*, 257–266

Smith-Sebasto, N.J. (2013). *Annual Editions: Sustainability, 1st ed*. McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., New York

Sovacool, B.K. (2009). Rejecting renewables: The socio-technical impediments to renewable electricity in the United States. *Energy Policy, 19* (1), 4500-4513

Stern, N. (2015). *Why Are We Waiting? The Logic, Urgency, and Promise of Tackling Climate Change*. MIT Press

Tampakis, S., Arabatzis, G., Tsantopoulos, G., & Rerras, I. (2017). Citizens' views on electricity use, savings and production from renewable energy sources: A case study from a Greek island. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, 79*, 39-49

Tabachnick, B.G., & Fidell, L.S. (2007). *Using Multivariate statistics (5th ed.)*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon

United Nations General Assembly. (1987). *Report of the world commission on environment and development: Our common future*. Oslo, Norway: United Nations General Assembly, Development and International Co-operation: Environment.

Upham, P., Oltra, C. & Boso, À. (2015). Towards a cross-paradigmatic framework of the social acceptance of energy systems. *Energy Research & Social Science, 8*, 100 - 112.

Wolsink, M. (2012). The research agenda on social acceptance of distributed generation in smart grids: Renewable as common pool resources. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, 16*, 822–835

World Bank (2017). *CO2 emissions by country*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC

Wüstenhagen, R., Wolsink, M., & Bürer, M. J. (2007). Social acceptance of renewable energy innovation: An introduction to the concept. *Energy Policy, 35*(5), 2683-2691.

Zahari, A.R. & Esa, E. (2018). Drivers and inhibitors adopting renewable energy: an empirical study in Malaysia. *International Journal of Energy Sector Management, 12*(4), 581-600, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJESM-02-2017-0004

Zakaria, S.U., Basri, S., Kamarudin, S.K., & Majid, N.A. (2019). Public awareness analysis on renewable energy in Malaysia. *IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science 268*, Article 012105

Zhang L., & Wu Y. (2012). Market Segmentation and willingness to pay for green electricity among urban residents in China: the Case of Jiangsu Province. *Energy Policy, 51*, 514-523

ISSN 1823-2159

eISSN 2636-9265

Published by:
Universiti Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue
50603 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia