The term ‘islamization’ has been quite popular within the Muslim community for some time. Many issues and matters have been brought up for discussion, especially those felt to be in need of islamization. Among issues like economics, social order, and laws, education and knowledge have so far been the ones given the most emphasis. Despite the two being epistemologically different, we will be referring to both domains as ‘knowledge’ and the process, the islamization of knowledge, in this paper.

Before we proceed with the elucidation of this process, let’s look into the background of the term islamization and what it connotes. Islamization was first used by Dr. S. M. Naquib al-Attas in his book “Islam and Secularism”, first published 1978. It was essentially taken as an approach to improve Western modern thought via introduction of modified concepts that go in line with Islamic principles and values. The focus on knowledge as an element in need of islamization was later proposed in a comprehensive program by the Palestinian scholar, Ismail Raj'i al Faruqi, in 1982. The aim was practically to tackle the ‘malaise of the ummah' pertaining to the Muslim community's desensitization and unreactivity to violations of the Islamic ethics, having been exposed to a Western/European outlook in education totally detached from the spiritual dimension of life.

Dr Omar Hasan Kasule, Sr. in his paper presented at the 6th World Conference on Islamic Education, pointed out that there currently exists a duality in education systems and disciplines of knowledge (Kasule Sr.,1996), a problem that needs to be tackled, and fast. This duality is illustrated by the existence of two parallel and largely contradicting systems of education; the traditional Muslim system and the imported European system (Kasule Sr.,1996). Graduates of these systems are largely different in terms of spoken languages, terminologies, outlook and worldviews—which are more often than not competing and contradictory. The first system is constituted by disciplines categorized under Ulum al Deen, sciences of religion with the opposing system, Ulum al Dunya, sciences of the world. With the major differences between the two systems and the students and scholars involved in each, the two have oft been put in opposition of each other i.e. sciences of religion vs. sciences of the world. The result so far has included divided loyalties, confusion in the minds of students and intellectual schizophrenia of the ummah's educated elites (Kasule Sr.,1996). This kind of division, or any division in the Muslim society for that matter, has historically been shown to be detrimental to the well-being of the ummah as a whole. Thus, it has been thought of utmost importance by the concerned Muslim scholars to Islamize this crucial point in shaping a better society, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. However, it is also important to note that islamization of knowledge is more of an evolution of the European-influenced modern education system, rather than a revolution, taking what is good, beneficial and in line with what Islam centralizes on, and replacing methods against the better side of human ethics and spiritual fulfillment with Islamic approaches instead. With this measure, knowledge can be ensured to be purely contributive to a better society and environment, and more
importantly, the whole of mankind can reap the benefits of this improvised realm of knowledge, regardless of culture and religion. This is certainly part of the universal attribute of the Deen itself, where the good that it brings is not confined to one group of people only, but more holistic in its reach.

However, in order to achieve this ultimate benefit, islamization must be carried out in the most appropriate strategy and mechanisms. There have been plenty of attempts so far to close the gap between the two sciences mentioned above and thus eliminate the duality like e.g. introduction of European disciplines at traditional universities like al-Azhar, introduction of traditional disciplines at modern universities like the International Islamic Universities in Islamabad and Kuala Lumpur, establishment of full-time schools in UK, USA, South Africa and other countries; all of which have been only partially successful. This degree of success has been linked to the relative failure in addressing intellectual and basic conceptual issues to enable development of complete curricula and the writing of textbooks reflective of Islamic paradigms. At the end of the day, it was pretty much another manifestation of duality, only this time occurring in one building. (Kasule Sr., 1996). There have also been plenty of other wrong approaches to Islamizing knowledge that have not succeeded for their failure to address the core issues of the paradigms and methodology of the disciplines; that Dr Omar mentioned such as:

‘Insertion’ of Qur'aanic verses and ahadith in an otherwise European piece of writing, searching for scientific facts in the Qur'an, searching for Qur'aanic proof of scientific facts, searching for Qur'aanic scientific miracles, searching for parallels between Islamic and European concepts, using Islamic in place of European terminologies, adding supplementary ideas to the European corpus of knowledge, and adding Islamic subjects to European school or university curricula. (1996)

These are all merely dressings of the wound that is the problem of duality and the division in the educated Islamic community, approaches that do not seek to heal the wound but merely render it more superficially tolerable. Unfortunately, these have so far been the favorite measures of islamization by the average Muslim of this contemporary age. When we seek to truly Islamize knowledge, we must look beyond these 'dressings' and tackle the core problem and issues and come up with an effective and stable prescription.

For that, Dr. Omar has proposed a process of Islamizing knowledge that focuses on discipline reform as the most important item on the agenda of contemporary islamization. According to his proposal, such a reform must have the following characteristics: pro-active intellectual effort, academically and methodologically rigorous, objective, and has practical consequences. The vision, in the long run, is basically to accelerate the growth of objective, universal knowledge beneficial to mankind and de-europeanizing paradigms of current disciplines, changing their parochial states into a more objective and universal one, using Islamic guidelines to reconstruct

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basic paradigms and the reclassification of disciplines. Before we move to the methodology, may we clarify the fact that reform of a discipline does not imply that all that is in it is unislamic. There are many good aspects and true things in the modern discipline acceptable by Islam for its all-encompassing nature that does not seek to tailor knowledge to fit a culture or people which is by the way, a form of parochializing knowledge in itself. The process is aimed to reform the paradigms and methodology currently governing the contents of knowledge. As Dr. Omar has pointed out, content is dynamic and ever-rapidly changing that reforming it is clearly futile. Therefore, he has specified the aforementioned areas of reform and stressed on the need to revive ijtihad and research, motivation to excel in knowledge, and the inculcation of correct attitudes in the use of knowledge; and most importantly, the appropriate centralization of the Quran and Sunnah in this objective, as opposed to the wrong approaches previously highlighted. Despite the fact that the Quran does contain facts and data that are well-grounded and established, Muslims and pioneers of knowledge islamization must always avoid referring to it as a textbook of sorts, and taking literally whatever is contained in the holy verses.

In carrying out this process, there are several proposed steps that need to be taken as part of the methodology of Islamizing knowledge.

First and foremost, there needs to be a strong grounding in Islamic sciences namely the disciplines of usulul fiqh i.e. the principles of Islamic laws, uluum al Quran which basically refers to proficiency in Quranic terminology and understanding, and uluum al hadith where the genealogy of the prophetic traditions and narrations should be well established in the minds of the muslims.

Secondly, the reading of the Quran and the sunnah must be done with full understanding and acknowledgement of the changing time-space dimensions while at the same time knowing the limitations of literal reading and interpretations.

Third, basic epistemological issues and their relations should be given excellent clarification. These issues include the wahy (revelation) and aql (rational thought), ghaib (the metaphysical) and shahada (the physical), and ‘ilm (sciences) and iman (faith). This way, each of these items can be given their rightful, balanced emphasis and notions of mutual exclusiveness of any of these pairs e.g. faith and science can be eliminated.

Fourth, to encourage greater ijtihad in the members of Islamized education as opposed to the predominant practice of taqlid (imitation) in all the wrong places, for all the wrong reasons, Islamic critique of paradigms and various disciplines must be encouraged, but to a certain extent, as Islam places great emphasis on the general well-being (maslahah) and formation of a well-structured and organized society where a fair hierarchy of authority takes place.

Fifth, in terms of educational literature, Islamic reviews of existing text-books and teaching materials must be produced in order to identify current deviations from the tauhidic episteme, and followed by the publication new and improvised textbooks and
other materials—a mechanism not entirely alien in the existing education system where it is dynamic and constantly revamped over time; only this time the evolutionary process is a well-guided and directed one.

Then, it also calls for the establishment of specialized research institutions to continue perfecting this process and developing better and more effective approaches over time. Apart from that, this move also provides, perhaps, a more centralized operation for the agenda of Islamizing knowledge and prevents the formation of scattered groups that will simply not amount to a successful movement/evolution.

Finally, basic knowledge is to be developed into applied knowledge in science and technology, a move that should be done in line with the steps preceding it. In doing so, the knowledge in science and technology developed will be ensured to be universal, objective, and beneficial to mankind and the world they dwell in.

Apart from knowing these steps, executing them according to priority of discipline reform also plays a significant role in this evolutionary process. The order for discipline reform has been laid out by Dr. Omar in his paper as the following, along with the rationale for such an order:

Natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, applied sciences and technology, and Islamic sciences. Natural sciences are trend-setters both in the field of methodology and social change. Social sciences will be easier to reform because they have now largely adopted the empirical methodology of the natural sciences. Humanities need to be recast using the Qur'anic methodology of analyzing the growth and decline of human civilizations and societies. Islamic sciences became fossilized over the centuries when ijtihad was limited; they need a major revival. They will have to be purged of hellenic, Judeo-Christian and other influences and will have to be rebuilt directly on the basis of the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah. These important sciences will have to be approached taking the time-space dimension into consideration. (1996)

With the background of the process of Islamization elucidated along with the objectives, process and methodology, we now come to the conclusion for this topic. Truly Islamization of knowledge is indeed crucial at this contemporary age where the crisis of duality is threatening to further marginalize the Islamic principles and ummah, and the problem should never be approached from the wrong angle and with the wrong tools. As such, a mechanism like the one proposed by Dr. Omar Hasan Kasule, Sr.—on which we base our paper on—must not be left ignored for more ‘popular’ or conventional methods that have in fact, failed miserably in their attempts. It is time that the Islamic community took up this seemingly enormous but not at all impossible task to tackle this intellectual schizophrenia of the educated Ummah. Change will inevitably take time, but if the benefits are indeed for the long run at the end of the day, it is a task well worth taking.
Reference: