

The Contribution of Muhammad Syukri Salleh to Contemporary Islamic Economic Thought

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An argument that is frequently defended when developing Islamic economics is that the Western approach cannot be excluded. Hence, either this approach is used exclusively or in part; it can be accepted as long as it does not contradict Islamic values. This is the approach that has infiltrated mainstream Islamic economic thinking; however, some scholars have chosen a different viewpoint, feeling that it is rather odd that Islamic economics has been developed according to a non-Islamic approach. Muhammad Syukri Salleh emerged from this group of scholars. When creating a concept based on the views of Islamic universalism, his thoughts were inside a new box and not outside the box. He felt an urgent need for Islamic economics to be built according to an Islamic framework based on an Islamic worldview as an epistemology; he redefined various concepts and principles. The findings in this article were summarised based on a textual analysis of several of his literary works on aspects such as economics, interviews and observations. The article creates a vivid image of a contemporary Islamic economics scholar.

Key words: *Islamic economics, Muhammad Syukri Salleh.*

Introduction

The Western approach, adopted either wholly or partly, cannot be excluded when formulating Islamic economics. Whatever dimension that is appropriate from philosophical and value aspects as well as because it does not contradict Islamic values, should be accepted and improved according to the Islamic spirit. Quoting from the views of al-Alwani (2005), Maszlee Malik (2014) states that a symbiosis of the best Islamic values could offset the weaknesses found in the best Western values. This is the frequently defended argument when the Western approach is adopted as a basis for building an Islamic discipline. This approach has infiltrated mainstream Islamic economic thinking, yet some scholars have chosen a

different viewpoint as they find it rather odd that Islamic economics is built on an approach that originates from a non-Islamic world. Muhammad Syukri Salleh, an Oxford University graduate and a professor in the field of Islamic development management from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), was one scholar who emerged from this group. He also founded the Centre for Islamic Development Management Studies (ISDEV) at USM and was appointed as a Visiting Scholar by the Islamic Development Bank, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia as well as a Visiting Professor in numerous local and foreign universities. Based on his academic achievements and contributions to Islamic development in Malaysia, he was awarded the Maulidur Rasul Figure Award at the Pulau Pinang State Level awards for 1439H/2017M.

Line of Thought

Professor Dr Muhammad Syukri Salleh is not new to discourse on Islamic economics. Although he was not a product of a formal education system featuring the field of Islamic economics, his background in the field of Islamic-based development has helped him immensely in adducing various views on Islamic economics. It is not surprising that he started by emphasising Islamic-based development aspects. His first book, *Falsafah Ilmu Pembangunan Berteraskan Islam*, which was published in the 1980s, was an important source for expanding advanced concepts about development and, later, economic development. This book emerged at a time when Islam was experiencing a resurgence, similar that stressed by Dr Salleh during his professorship appointment speech in Universiti Sains Malaysia on 28 July 2001 (see also Salleh, 2003):

The resurgence of Islam in the 1970s has seen various outcomes. Besides creating a more Islamic way of life, there also emerged efforts to unearth Islamic knowledge that has long been neglected, such as knowledge related to Islamic-based Development.

In the mid-1990s, Dr Salleh began to focus on Islamic political economy. His early works, such as *Islamic Political Economy in Capitalist Globalization: An Agenda for Change* (1997) and *Political Economy of Islamic Development: Case Analysis of Kelantan and Terengganu* (1999), had outlined a basic understanding of the Islamic-based political economy. This understanding later became the platform for understanding his next body of work, which was more empirical – for example, *Islamic Political Economy: A Special Reference to the Use of Tahaluf Siyasi in the State of Kelantan, Malaysia* (2014). When examining his work, it is clear that most of it were written by one individual, probably due to the desire to maintain the fluidity of the writing style and registers (sociolinguistics). Each writer has a particular style of writing and register (sociolinguistics); hence, the work concerning *tahaluf siyasi* was not written just by Dr Salleh, but together with Mohd Syakir Mohd Rosdi. This means that Dr Salleh was tolerant of various writing styles and registers (sociolinguistics) in a literary work as long as the contents were related to the desired field. When expressing his thoughts about

Islamic economics, whether there is a consensus or otherwise, Dr Salleh was steadfast about his position while repeating his ideas and concepts that have traversed various disciplines of knowledge. However, his ideas and thoughts have been challenged at times. For example, from the mind and heart (*qalbu*) aspects, a famous thinker, Tan Sri Professor Dr Muhammad Kamal Hassan, has criticised Dr Salleh's views, which he regarded as more focused on the element of *qalbu*. For Professor Hassan, the mind is more important compared with the heart or emotions (*qalbu*). The irony is that Muhammad Kamal Hassan has recently been discussing the element of *heartware* instead of *hardware*. Muhammad Syukri Salleh's views on the Islamisation of economic concepts have not received much consensus. Islamic economists who have formulated the idea of an Islamic economy, such as Muhammad Abdul Mannan, Monzer Kahf and Muhammad Nejatullah Siddiqui, believed elements in a conventional economy could be considered as long as they were suitable, reinterpreted according to Islam if necessary, and not contrary to *syariat* Islam (Muhammad Syukri Salleh, 2012). This line of opinion has tended to dominate. According to Muhammad Syukri Salleh, it is a view of accommodative-modification, which is eclectic-methodological in nature. Accommodative means willing to accept, whereas modification means revamping; eclectic-methodological refers to a method for choosing (Muhammad Syukri Salleh, 2012). Put simply, it is understood as being pragmatic, which in this case means develop economic knowledge in a practical manner based on benefits. Elements deemed non-Islamic were rejected, while other elements were maintained. The pragmatist approach forms the basis of mainstream Islamic economic thinking.

Apart from the pragmatic approach, two other approaches have been summarised by scholars: the ideologist and dialectic approaches. The ideologist approach builds economic knowledge from the overall and fundamental aspects of contemporary economic theories while totally revamping the theories. Islamic economics has expanded without relying on the Western approach and has gone on to produce various concepts, theories and models that have emerged from the Islamic worldview (*tasawur*) and epistemology. With the dialectic approach, economic knowledge was developed by criticising contemporary economic theory that emerged from the application of either Western or Islamic approaches. Islamic economics was developed by criticising inherent errors and posing doubts until the engineered theory was built.

Muhammad Syukri Salleh clearly rejected the pragmatist approach. Although he accepted the dialectic approach, it is the idealist approach that dominates his work, so it projects a greater image of his thoughts, as vindicated in his work entitled *Islamic Economics Revisited: Re-contemplating Unresolved Structure and Assumptions* (2011). This work not only criticised the Islamic economics framework, which is actually bound by the conventional economic premise; it also suggested a redefinition of all the existing concepts. It highlighted seven weaknesses of Islamic economics. First, the Islamic economic mould still followed the conventional economic mould. Second, it was bound to conventional assumptions, which stated that nature was limited

but human wants were unlimited. Third, the concept used was not created from an Islamic paradigm. Fourth, the eventual aim to seek *al-falah* (happiness on this earth and in the afterlife) was inaccurate because seeking *mardhatillah* (blessings of Allah SWT) was the ultimate aim. Fifth, the operational mechanism was confused with Western operations. Sixth, the research methodology was not based on the *syarak* approach. Finally, there were barriers to practising what was written by Islamic ecologists. All these seven weaknesses or shortcomings are found in mainstream Islamic economics. This line of thinking has surely made Dr Salleh rather unique. Regardless of the form of thinking he suggested, it does not necessarily indicate that he is trying to think outside the box;¹ to the contrary, he is trying to think *inside* the box, which fulfils the specifications of *syarak* – or, in other words, he is thinking inside a new box – a shariah-compliant box.² This is the ideologist approach.

Dr Salleh's Islamic economics line of thinking was brought to attention through his book *Islamic Economic Line of Thinking in the Malay World* (2014), which examines the Islamic economics line of thinking of contemporary scholars in the Malay world. This line of thinking was then analysed in the context of the theoretical construct found in Islamic economics. Muhammad Syukri Salleh cleverly justifies the importance of this literary work by disclosing three insecurities. First, the contemporary Islamic economic line of thinking uses the accommodative-modification and eclectic-methodologic approaches. Second, the unfettered first insecurity could cause the disappearance of the original Islamic economic thinking. Third, the dominant influence of the accommodative-modification and eclectic-methodologic approaches could only turn economists in the Malay world into followers, rather than dynamic and innovative pioneers. He had also grouped the Islamic economic line of thinking into two groups. The first is the accommodative-modification thinking that was eclectic-methodologic in nature; the second is the Islamic economics line of thinking as a whole, which subscribes to the view that Islamic economics must be built from an Islamic mould itself. Based on the findings of the textual analysis on 19 books by selected scholars in Malaysia and Indonesia, Dr Salleh found at least four types of Islamic economic thinking: (1) an accommodative-modification and eclectic-methodological line of thinking; (2) a line of thinking that mixes other 'isms' with Islam; (3) an alternative line that tries to offer a choice to the current form of Islamic economics after being disappointed with contemporary Islamic economics discourse; and (4) a total Islamic economics line of thinking. This article conclusively demonstrates that a majority of scholars belong to the total Islamic economics line of thought – especially those who were born within the confines of the Islamic studies discipline. However, Muhammad Syukri Salleh admits that the

¹ 'Thinking outside the box' refers to thinking beyond the parameters of the problem or a thinking style that uses a new perspective (Walker, 2015).

² 'Thinking inside a new box' is a new term coined by the author and refers to a style of thinking within the parameters of the problem by using a new perspective based on the views of Islamic universalism.

accommodative-modification and eclectic-methodological lines of thinking consistently dominate mainstream Islamic economics.³

Islamic Economic Thought from Different Perspectives

Islamic economic thought as introduced by Muhammad Syukri Salleh clearly covers various aspects, both macro and micro. The following is an account of some of these aspects.

Conventional Economic Premise: Limited Natural Resources and Unlimited Human Wants

Examination of the economic discipline – especially consumer behaviour – traverses numerous dimensions. Although there are variations, these theories actually share similar presumptions. All believe that natural resources are limited, whereas human wants are infinite in nature. Since it is a presumption, surely its truth is not absolute and prone to debate. For example, Saiful Azhar Rosly (1992) emphasised that Islam does not consider this presumption to be wrong since this weakness is a fact of life. In the context of limited natural resources, it reflects the limited capability of humans to exploit resources due to their limited knowledge. Similarly, in the context of unlimited human wants, Islam admits to its truth, as mentioned in the al-Quran and al-Hadith.

Muhammad Syukri Salleh does not completely agree with the views of Saiful Azhar Rosly. According to him, there is some truth to this argument if it is measured from the physical and quantity aspects. Hence, from the aspect of sustenance (*rezeki*) stipulated by Allah SWT to all humans, this view is inaccurate because each human being has been guaranteed their own portion. The author shares the views with Muhammad Syukri Salleh in this matter. Furthermore, the prosperity of humankind is closely related to the motive for its creation in this universe according to the exhortations of Allah SWT:

It is He who created for you all of that which is on the earth. Then He directed Himself to the heaven, [His being above all creation], and made them seven heavens, and He is Knowing of all things. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:29)

All the contents of this universe are actually utilities or conveniences bestowed by Allah SWT, as His exhortation implies, ‘simplified for you (humankind) in order to use it’. The presumption of how limited all the resources reveals the prejudice shown towards Allah SWT. Behind this polemic, rather than finding a more accurate assumption, it is more

³ This summary was not based on any systematic study since there are no studies that have stated the number of scholars for each line of thought. It was summarised based on observations by Dr Salleh over a period of 30 years in the academic world.

important to understand the consequences of understanding the assumption. The most worrying aspect is that existing resources would be exploited to fulfil humankind's needs. Based on this premise, Muhammad Syukri Salleh (2002) developed the concept of mass consumerism, which became the main aim of conventional consumerism.

Humankind as Actors of Economic Development

The Seven Principles of Islamic-based Development was popularised by Muhammad Syukri Salleh. Although this publication is brief, it has contributed immensely to our understanding of Islamic development philosophy. It would not be far-fetched to say that any literature related to Islamic-based development is presumed to be imperfect if it does not turn the literary work into a form of reference material. One of Dr Salleh's seven principles is that humans are the actors of development, which portrays the importance of the human element in the discipline of Islamic economics. When debating Islamic consumerism, Dr Salleh related this concept to efforts to examine actual human behaviour. The failure to define humans accurately would cause consumer behaviour to be related more to maximising economic satisfaction. Income needs to be increased in order to fulfil satisfaction without considering whether the human instinct (*nafsu*) factor becomes more prominent or otherwise (Salleh, 2002). Hence the concept of Islamic consumerism emphasises qualitative compared with quantitative consumerism, such as the concepts of sustenance (*rezeki*), blessing (*berkat*), *qana'ah* and so on.

Islamic Political Economy

It is not easy for Dr Salleh to describe the Islamic political economy. Moreover, the number of references or literature is limited. Compared with the conventional political economy, the discourse pertaining to Islamic political economy only began at the end of the 1990s. Similar to other fields, the concept of the Islamic political economy also faced the issue of definition based on an Islamic worldview (*tasawur*) and Western epistemology.

When examining Dr Salleh's writings about the Islamic political economy, it is difficult to guess why just a few of his writings were written by him alone. Moreover, some of his writings were written by more than two authors (see Choudhury, Abdad & Salleh, 1997; Ghosh & Salleh, 1999; Salleh & Choudhury, 1999). This study is confident that this occurred because certain strategies were difficult to foresee.

Of Dr Salleh's numerous publications, his work with Mohd Syakir entitled *Islamic Political Economy: A Special Reference to the Use of Tahaluf Siyasi in the State of Kelantan, Malaysia* has provided some explanations that are easy to understand from both the theoretical and practical perspectives pertaining to the Islamic political economy (Salleh & Mohd Syakir,

2014). This work provides a detailed account of Islamic political economy based on three main characteristics. First, the Islamic political economy originated from the al-Quran and al-Hadith. Based on these two resources, three main *fiqh* evolved, which was refined in Islamic political economy, comprising *fiqh iqtishodi* (understanding Islamic economy), *fiqh ijtimai'ie* (understanding Islamic social values) and *fiqh siyasi* (understanding Islamic politics). All three aspects of *fiqh* have their own principles, which form the fundamentals of the Islamic political economy. Second, all three *fiqh* aspects must be based on faith (*iman*), knowledge (*ilmu*), practices (*amal*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*). These four fundamentals dictate the implementation of a political economy truly based on Islam. Third, an Islamic political economy driven by the three aspects of *fiqh* produces several characteristics, principles and modes of implementation that need to be adhered to. These are socio-political development, socio-economic development, a balance in societal development, public importance and human resources management.

Consumerism According to Tasawur (Islamic Worldview)

Consumer behaviour theory within a conventional economic framework was created in the West after the emergence of capitalism; it refers to the 'economic rationalisation' and 'utilitarianism' concepts of economics. Both concepts presume that maximum consumption of utility is the objective of the consumer, whereas the monetary element is the main driving force behind any consumption (Monzer Kahf, 1992). Clearly, the capitalist system has succeeded in creating individuals who hold steadfast to the concept of 'the intention makes the means *halal*' in an effort to achieve self-interest. When debating this matter, Dr Salleh chose to focus on the consumerism and ownership concepts. In his view, money was the main motivator for consumerism activities in the capitalist system by increasing income and productivity. The buying power caused by money would achieve utility of consumption or satisfaction (Salleh, 2002). He then stressed that conventional consumerism clearly denied the concept of an actual owner – the idea that whatever exists in this universe absolutely belongs to Allah SWT. His characteristic of being anti-dogmatic and anti-theology leads to the understanding that that the sub-structure (economy) determines the superstructure (religion, legislation, governance, culture, etc.) (Salleh, 2008).

The aim of conventional consumerism is focused solely on interests or importance of humans as consumers without considering their relationship with religious practices (*ibadat*). The individual's absolute interest is prioritised in order to achieve all that is desired based on rational and logical evaluations. Hence, the acquired wealth is the absolute property of the individual and can be spent according to the individual's desire without the interference of third parties. According to Dr Salleh, this relationship is limited only to the relationship amongst humans (*habl min al-nas*) without achieving a more important dimension, which is the relationship between humans and the Creator (*habl min Allah*) (Salleh, 2002). His

argument did not differ much from the conclusion by Mohammad Nejatullah Siddiqi (1981) concerning the three main presumptions of conventional economic methodology. First, each human places great importance on the self and individual rational behaviour; second, the main aim is to increase property or material worth; and third, each individual has absolute freedom to maximise their property. Hence, the concepts of paying *zakat*, abstaining from what is forbidden (*syubhah*) in sales and purchase transactions as well as transactions that contain elements of interest (*riba*), gambling, *gharar* cheating and so on are avoided in conventional consumerism.

The position portrayed in conventional consumerism differs from Islamic consumerism, which makes the Islamic worldview (*tasawur*) the core of Islamic behaviour. *Tasawur* here refers to the overall picture of basic Islamic principles that are accurate and comprehensive, which then blends with anyone who understands it (Salleh, 2008). Dr Salleh (2003) and Ahmad Azrin Adnan et al. (2017) also outline three important elements that form *tasawur*: Allah SWT as the Creator, as well as humans and natural resources as the creatures of Allah SWT. All three elements help create faith (*iman*), practices (*amal*) and morality (*akhlak*). Based on the fact that faith (*iman*) and practices (*amal*) complement one another and are conjoined, faith (*iman*) without practice (*amal*) would lose its value as well as motivational capability, and become contrary to Islamic teachings. Combining both these elements would produce good or bad actions that emerge as morality.

Islamic-based Hierarchy Consumption

Scholars do not agree about how to determine the level of need of particular products or services. Surtahman Kastin Hasan and Sanep Ahmad (2005) state that Islamic scholars hold several views on the different levels of priority given to consumption. Mannan (1989) divides it into three: basic necessities, comfort and luxury. Afzalur Rahman (1980) divides it into four: basic necessities, efficiency needs, comfort and luxury. Sadeq (1987) divides it into five: needs in life, basic needs, comfort, luxury and emergencies. Surtahman Kastin Hasan and Sanep Ahmad (2005) summarise the views of all Islamic scholars and divide them into six: needs in life, basic needs, efficiency needs, comfort, luxury and emergencies.

Ahmad Azrin Adnan (2012) and Basri Abd. Ghani and Ahmad Azrin Adnan (2017) adduced a more concise argument by dividing it into three levels. The *daruriyat* (emergency) level consists of items that are compulsory, whereby a person cannot live without these items. The *hajiyyat* level consists of items that must be present, whereby a person can still live even without it although the person's life will not be perfect. The *tahsiniyat* level consists of items that are cosmetic in nature. However, Dr Salleh (2003) divides it into four levels: fulfilling needs, fulfilling conveniences in life, and luxury as well as decorations and beauty. It is rather difficult to understand his reasons for categorising *tahsiniyat* into decorations and beauty, especially when

both these words have the same meaning, which is to make something better. His categorisations show that there are differences between decoration and beauty. Wan Ji Wan Hussin (2013), however, differs from Dr Salleh on this matter, stating that, 'for women, beauty is a need, whereas for men beauty is an add-on. Hence, it is not surprising that in discussions on *maqasid syariah*, beauty for women is categorised as *hajiyat*, while for men, it is categorised as *tahsiniyat*. This is seen in the permission given by *syarak* to women to wear gold, while it is forbidden for men to do so; it is permitted for women to wear a necklace, while it forbids men to do so.' Concerning matters pertaining to *daruriyat* and *hajiyat*, Dr Salleh explains the correlation between these two aspects as fulfilling the needs and conveniences of life.

Moderation in the Islamic Economics System

The moderation or balanced value is characterised as the soul of the Islamic economics system (Yusuf Qaradhawi, 1998). Hence, Muslim consumers need to possess a moderate and balanced attitude when implementing economic activities. The use of Islam in Dr Salleh's principles was aimed at seeking the blessings of Allah SWT, and it is mandatory to preserve a particular form of benefit. On the contrary, the consumption becomes *haram* if it is intended for spending on luxuries. For example, Syed Othman Alhabshi (1989) stresses that an optimum level of consumption is a level that produces maximum time and energy in order to devote oneself to Allah SWT. The aim of consumption such as this could avoid wastage, which is consistent with the demands of moderation when using and saving energy. It is clear that the priority of a consumption must be based on the tenets of *syarak*: it is *fardhu* (permitted), *wajib* (compulsory), *sunat*, *mubah* (allowed), *makruh tanzih*, *makruh tahrimi* or *haram* (forbidden) and not based on the level of need to achieve the aims of moderation (Syed Othman Al-Habshi, 1989).

Dr Salleh (2003) agrees with this view. He maintains that the consumption permitted in Islam is only limited to fulfilling the needs and conveniences of life. Any form of consumption at the luxury, cosmetics or beauty levels would only lead to defects in the heart and soul, a physical and spiritual imbalance as well as wastage: the tenets of *syarak* are *makruh*, impending or absolute *haram*. The author of this article, however, has a different view for two reasons. First, the three types of wasteful expenditure mentioned by Surtahman Kastin Hasan (2002) comprise expenditure on vice activities, spending for vainglorious reasons and wasteful spending. Out of the three forms of expenditure, spending for vainglorious reasons is frequently related to the consumption of luxurious goods. According to Hassan, the consumption of luxurious goods is surely instigated by factors such as prestige, modern lifestyle, luxurious lifestyle, vaunting and swanking, which is consistent with characteristics that trespass the limits of need and comfort. If all these are not curtailed, it could encourage behaviour such as *riya'* and *takabur* in an individual, as well as jeopardising general benefits. It is therefore forbidden in Islam. According to the author, it is forbidden not due to the use of

luxurious goods but rather the continuous use of them to a point where is difficult to differentiate between actual needs and wants according to Islam. Here wastage occurs, as exhorted by Allah SWT, meaning:

And [they are] those who, when they spend, do so not excessively or sparingly but are ever, between that, [justly] moderate. (Surah al-Furqan, 25:67)

On the basis of this revealed religious tenet, ‘in-between’ actually refers to those who implement frugal practices – meaning spending wealth at a required rate or amount, at the appropriate time and place for the individual concerned. Based on this elaboration, the message is that one can spend on luxurious commodities so long as the expenditure is not categorised as excessive or stingy. It is clear, first, that the existence of ostentation (*riya'*) and arrogance (*takabur*) characteristics is not only related to the consumption of luxurious goods but also goods that satisfy needs and comfort. Second, the consumption of luxurious goods is permitted in Islam. This permission refers to the principle agreed upon by the Ulama according to the statement, ‘the original law for all commercial matters () in Islam is permitted until *muamalah* there is a religious proposition that forbids (*haram*) it’ (Majmu‘al-Fatawa Ibn Taymiyyah, t.t:28/387; al-Fawa'id al-Bahiyyah, t.t.:115). The word ‘all’ refers to all types of consumption as long as it fulfils the objectives of *syarak*. In other words, it is permitted insofar as it renders benefits and avoids harm either to oneself or to society. Hence, if using luxurious goods could take someone closer to Allah SWT, it is surely better compared with using non-luxurious goods that distance the individual from Allah SWT. This matter is explained further by Imam Hassan Al-Banna, as follows:

If a person spends a huge amount of his wealth, which indicates allegiance to Allah SWT, then this does not include those who over-indulge. And if a person spends one dirham on an act that indicates a mark of disobedience to Allah SWT, then he is one of those who have over-indulged. (an excerpt from Yusuf Qaradhawi, 1998)

The views of Imam Hassan Al-Banna show that it is not wrong to spend big as long as the objectives of *syarak* are always adhered to. Hence, consumption of luxury goods, although permitted, is not encouraged in Islam because of concerns that it would encourage human instincts (*nafsu*) to commit vice. Therefore, its consumption should be at a minimum and possess the main precondition, which is affordability. However, the views of Dr Salleh do not indicate that he rejects the use of luxuries. It is just a reminder that this consumption could lead to physical and spiritual damage if religious fundamentals are not used as a yardstick.

Poverty

According to the studies of Dr Salleh, this is rather a special aspect. His thoughts about this matter are not only about challenging persecution but also creating new concepts. His phrase ‘challenging persecution’ is a prompt for the current definition of ‘poverty’ to be revised. He stresses that the basic philosophy applied to the definition is unable to understand the phenomenon of poverty from an Islamic perspective (Salleh, 2004). The current definition is being used by Islamic institutions to encounter the phenomenon of poverty. The author, Dr Salleh, had the opportunity to interview a senior executive from the Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in May 2010 to complete his academic study related to the eradication of poverty. The interview was intended to confirm that an influential Islamic institution, such as the Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah, was still bound by conventional philosophy and interpretation used to understand the phenomenon of poverty. It is evident that the pragmatist approach is dominant among executives there.

When discussing the aspect of poverty, it is difficult to find literature by scholars that portrays a positive side to poverty. At most, the negative effects of poverty that could drive humans to the depths of degradation would be discussed. This argument is supported by a *hadith*, stating that ‘Bordering on poverty is considered to be in poverty’. Abdullah Taslim (2013) considers this *hadith* to be weak based on all aspects of its history of narration, while other scholars have considered this *hadith* to be both weak and false. Dr Salleh wisely portrays the positive aspects of poverty, arguing that if poverty is disgraceful and vile, then surely the Prophet SAW would have commanded the poor, such as the *ahlus-suffah*, to seek work and become rich. However, nothing has been mentioned about this in the history of narration. This is the essence of his work *Development During the Time of the Prophet SAW: Between Poverty and Riches* (Salleh, 2000).

The poverty aspect is frequently related to the spiritual element. Dr Salleh’s work *The Poor People’s Perception of Poverty and Its Implication on the Realization of Islamic Development in Kelantan, Malaysia* concludes that when the spiritual element is involved in the management of poverty, determining who qualifies for help becomes very tedious. More specifically, Dr Salleh profiles people into four categories. The first category involved those who are rich in both wealth and spirit. The second comprises individuals who are poor in wealth and spirit. The third includes individuals who are rich in wealth but poor in spirit, while the fourth comprises individuals who are poor in wealth but rich in spirit. Of these four categories, the second and third categories need to be handled seriously because the poverty and richness experienced by these groups creates hardship not only to themselves but also society (Salleh & Yusoff, 1997). Carrying out this profiling is clearly a new form of thinking that acts as an effective remedy for solving the poverty problem.

In order to prove this, Muhammad Syukri Salleh continued his study in an empirical fashion. A study on Muslims in a village called Ban Nua in the District of Songkhla in Thailand was intended to explore an Islamic-based poverty-management approach in a situation where Muslims were the minority group (Salleh, 2015). There were three important findings. First, the mosque successfully functioned as a ‘port’, where the community’s physical and spiritual elements were built. Second, *zakat* was one of the important items in the agenda. It not only functioned as an instrument to combat the problem of poverty but was also the motivation for the local community to offer *zakat* and not to ‘pay’ *zakat*, probably due to the credibility of the local leaders who were able to instil confidence among the local community pertaining to the sources of revealed knowledge (*dalil naqli*) concerning the nobility of those who give. The motivation was translated into business activities that generated local economic growth.

Zakat

This aspect has been debated frequently by Muhammad Syukri Salleh, either together with other aspects or by itself, but in both cases focusing on efforts to empower *zakat*. In his early works on *zakat*, Dr Salleh tried to highlight a method for optimally benefiting *zakat* for all the poor. He named this method the ‘localisation of *zakat*’, which involved the decentralisation process. In order to achieve his objective, the *zakat* collection centre needs to delegate power to its staff to collect and distribute *zakat* at the local level (Salleh, 2004).

Dr Salleh’s stand on *zakat* is easy to understand, especially when he writes about the tenets of *zakat* transformation (Salleh, 2011). This work provides two important suggestions for optimising the function of *zakat* as a *manhaj* for enriching wealth and the soul. First, Dr Salleh stresses that the transformation of *zakat* cannot be achieved if all the concepts, theories, methods or anything related to this matter are not redefined. Second, he outlines four important themes pertaining to the transformation of *zakat*: the quality of life, poverty, fair distribution of income and the performance of *zakat* management institutions.

Both these suggestions have yet to be fully achieved. Hence, Dr Salleh concludes that the current achievement of *zakat* collection and distribution is far from perfect. Its achievement is focused more on achieving the collection target instead of the distribution. This causes an imbalance between them so that *zakat* is currently unable to function as an effective instrument in removing the poor (*asnaf*) from the list of *zakat* recipients. These shortcomings are not due to insufficient collections but rather weaknesses in current *zakat* distribution, in the form of complementing subsistence rather than initiatives to encourage production.

Conclusions

When pursuing the writings of Muhammad Syukri Salleh, it is obvious that his extraordinary way of thinking was somehow influenced by his journey in life. He had travelled much and formed extensive networks. His received commendable religious education from his parents and guidance from his teachers not only made him 'Syariah-compliant', may All SWT protect him from being *riya*', but also gave him the determination to dignify Islam. Due to this, he was able to analyse a situation or any matter as well as a subject according to Islam in an inclusive manner. This is what is meant by *thinking within a new box*.

Although his thinking was sometimes difficult to read or anticipate, the intention of Dr Salleh's thoughts was clearly to dignify Islam across various disciplines, including Islamic economics. However, such an aim is not easily achieved. He had mentioned about six challenges that should be topics for future studies related to Islamic economics (Salleh, 2013). The first is the concern on the framework or tools used in research analysis that are not based on *tasawur* and Islamic epistemology. The conventional framework, which is presumed to possess neutral values that are not contrary to Islamic principles, only substantiates conventional economics and does not inspire or boost Islamic economics. The second is economic concepts that are not defined according to Islamic teachings. Using an inaccurate definition of concepts would discredit Islamic economic research. The third is about the method used to answer all questions related to research, and hence to achieve the objectives of the research that is not anchored completely on Islamic resources. Thus, if the research methods are not appropriate according to *syarak*, how can the findings actually explain the phenomenon being examined. The fourth is the confusion about the actual meaning of the Islamic economic system. He gave the example of *zakat* and *wakaf*, which is presumed to be capable of eradicating poverty but the concept and theoretical framework pertaining to poverty were never constructed according to Islamic understanding. The fifth is about the extent to which the Islamic community can become more Islamic due to the implementation of an Islamic economic system. Perhaps the implementation of the Islamic banking system, for example, only fulfils the demands of the market and not the demands of Islam. The sixth refers to whether Islamic economic scholars truly practise what is written. It would surely be difficult for a person to accept something where the person propagating it lacked character and embodied no noble values.

The legacy of Muhammad Syukri Salleh's thoughts will continue to be of value. Moreover, his stand could become the basis for new study of economic theories and make a large contribution to enrich the discipline of Islamic economics. With the Mercy of Allah SWT, may he have a long life by being obedient to Allah SWT and be blessed with an intellectual mind in order to carry on writing in the name of Islam. *Wallahua'lam*.

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