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(Re)Theorising heterodoxies

Labour in Islamic economic philosophy

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The past two decades, marked by ongoing global crises and escalating inequality, have sparked significant discourse advocating for diverse exploration in economic thinking, particularly within the field of global political economy. A fascinating space for such exploration is the discipline of Islamic economics. Since the late 19th century, there has been a notable rise in research interest and subsequent development in modern Islamic economics, particularly in banks and financial institutions throughout the 20th century (Iqbal & Llewellyn, 2002; Iqbal & Mirakhor, 2011; Zaman, 2009). More recently, there has been a surge of interest, coinciding with a global curiosity for heterodox economic thought following the financial crises of the 2000s (Ahmed et al., 2014; Diwany & Ahmad, 2010). However, this research interest has largely neglected the pressing needs for theoretical development, focusing primarily on Islamic financial institutions, banking and related products and regulations. Similarly overlooked is the discourse on meta-theory, addressing issues of ontology, epistemology, and methodology. This chapter is part of a broader research project seeking to explore Islamic economics beyond the conventional categories found within the discipline, which often consist of either apologetics or critiques of capitalism. It aims to foster a more productive exploration of economic philosophy, advocating for advancements in philosophical discourse.

Islamic economics is deeply rooted in the broader worldview and has been part of the Islamic discourse since the very inception of the faith in the 7th century. During the classical period of Islam, which spans roughly from the 8th to the 14th

century, economic thought flourished as part of the broader intellectual and cultural developments of the Islamic world. Prominent scholars such as al-Ghazali (1058–1111), Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), and Ibn Taymiyyahh (1263–1328) made significant contributions to economic thought during the classical period, addressing issues related to taxation, public finance, property rights, labour, and the role of the state in the economy. In the post-classical period scholars such as Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi (1703–1762), furthered the intellectual heritage of Islamic economics. From the late 19th to the 20th century Islamic economics played a significant role in the anti-colonial struggles in various Muslim-majority regions during the 20th century. Scholars such as Abul A'la Maududi (1903–1979), Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (1935–1980), and Ali Shariati (1933–1977) used Islamic economic principles as a framework for resistance against colonial powers and as a means of promoting self-sufficiency and independence.

Though initially a cornerstone in the fight against imperialist oppression, economic thought within Islam has evolved. A cursory examination of current Islamic economic and financial institutions reveals a lack of revolutionary thought or claim. Islamic banks, the primary institutions in this structure, are far from radical. They operate fully within the prevailing structure of the global economic order (Hanieh, 2011). This same trend extends to research, teaching, and practice within the Islamic intellectual sphere. The transformation of Islamic economics from a space of struggle to a sub-category of conventional finance is a noteworthy example of the absorption of alternative economic ideas into neoliberal economics. Unfortunately, this assimilation has been detrimental to the broader tradition of economic thinking within Islam. The singular focus on the development of religiously approved financial instruments, banking practices, profitability without interest rates, and catering to a consumption-centric market has overshadowed other critical areas of inquiry.

To break this impasse, in this chapter, I would like to analyse a pertinent aspect of economic thought: labour. The goal of my research is to bring forth the complexity of Islamic economic philosophy to i) engage anew with neglected theories in Islamic economic thought and ii) introduce Islamic economic philosophy into the discipline of Global Political Economy to broaden the discipline beyond its Eurocentric approaches. Eurocentrism is a worldview that places Europe at the centre of historical, cultural, and intellectual development while marginalising or ignoring the contributions and perspectives of non-European societies and cultures (Amin, 2009). Addressing Eurocentrism in GPE requires a concerted effort to diversify perspectives and critically examine the underlying assumptions and biases inherent in dominant economic theories and narratives.

This piece is part of this multidisciplinary effort. In examining labour from a global political economy perspective, I will endeavour to provide a new understanding of labour in Islamic economic philosophy, one that centralises the humane aspect of work and focuses on work as an aspect of spiritual enlightenment and central to the discussions of a moral, sustainable economy. I believe that theorising Islamic economic philosophy is paramount if we are to understand Islamic economics as an

independent economic system rather than a niche in the global capitalist order. In the following sections, I provide a brief history of Islamic economic thought followed by a discussion of labour within Islamic economic discourse. I then harness the concepts of *khilafah* (human agency) in Islamic ethics literature to conclude that labour should be recognised as a pathway to spiritual emancipation and advocate for a more inclusive and emancipatory approach to Islamic economic philosophy.

Islamic economic thought: A brief history

Muslims believe that Islam encompasses more than just the pursuit of spiritual growth; it encompasses the conduct of worldly affairs as well. As a result, they believe that worldly matters like politics and economics can, and should, be conducted under the auspices of Islam's ethical teachings. This, in turn, led to the emergence of Islamic economics and finance in the post-colonial era of the 1970s. The Quran, the sacred text of Islam and the primary source of Islamic ethics does not cover all the issues that concern a modern economy. However, it does guide on financial matters such as property and inheritance (4:5, 4:12, 2:188, 2:220), and trade and charity (2:271-2:275, 5:55 8:43), thus providing a moral basis for economic conduct for the followers of the faith. It is important to remember that the Quran imagines a society of justice, unity, and order as an ideal (Iqbal & Mirakhor, 2011). The same is true of the functioning of the economy. Islamic scholars have found it possible to create an Islamic economy based on the principles of the Quran.

A significant aspect of Islamic philosophy is its view of the economy as a domain where believers express their moral and spiritual obligations. This concept underpins the notion of the 'economic man' or '*homo Islamicus*' in Islam. The concept of the 'economic man' or '*homo economicus*' refers to a theoretical construct used in classical economics to model human behaviour within economic systems. The economic man is characterised by rationality, self-interest, and utility maximisation. According to this model, individuals make decisions based on a rational assessment of costs and benefits, aiming to maximise their utility or satisfaction. This self-interested behaviour is believed to drive market interactions and allocate resources efficiently within an economy (Demsetz, 2008; Watson, 2011). However, critics argue that real-world decision-making is often influenced by psychological, social, and cultural factors that cannot be fully captured by the rational actor model (Anderson, 2000). According to Islamic teachings, humans are spiritual beings entrusted with the noble role of God's representatives on Earth.

As such, individuals are expected to fulfil their divinely assigned duties to attain enlightenment. These duties extend beyond mere ritualistic practices or adherence to dietary guidelines; they encompass every aspect of one's interactions within society. Islamic jurists aim to guide individuals on how they can fulfil their economic responsibilities as part of this broader framework. Various interpretations exist regarding the principles of Islamic economics; Nurizal (2016) summarises its

essence as being rooted in the Quran, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (*Sunnah*), and reasoned interpretations derived from the works of scholars and contemporary thinkers. Like other fields of Islamic scholarship, there are differing views on the extent of interpretive flexibility allowed. However, a consistent theme is the recognition that economics is inherently ideological, influenced by preconceived notions about human nature and societal organisation (Tripp, 2006). Therefore, Islamic scholars do not rely solely on rational choice to understand economic behaviour but rather perceive the economy as governed by man-made laws. It is implicitly understood that these laws can be inspired by secular or religious codes. Thus, the economy is a social construct governed by socially constructed rules of engagement, there are no similarities drawn in Islamic thought between economic laws and natural laws.

Islamic economists (Chapra, 1999; Siddiqi, 1981) lay down the conceptual framework of Islamic economics by upholding the ethics of a moral economy as the gauge to evaluate economic policies. To operate within the framework of the Islamic system and remain faithful to its epistemological sources, certain guiding principles are followed. The central principle in this context is the concept of *Maqasid-al Sharia*, which translates to the objectives of Sharia or Islamic law. al-Ghazali (1058-1111), renowned theologian, legal theoretician and mystic of Islamic thought provides the quintessential primer on *Maqasid-al Sharia* in his seminal work *Al-Mustasfa min 'Ilm al-Usul* (transl. *The Essentials of Islamic Jurisprudence*: al-Ghazali 1100/2017). This work delves into the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, including the objectives of Sharia. al-Ghazali discusses the objectives of Sharia in the context of safeguarding human well-being and fulfilling fundamental needs, such as preserving life, religion, intellect, progeny, and wealth. These principles extend beyond economics to guide rulings in all areas of jurisprudence and are also significant in the personal lives of Muslims. Siddiqi (2004) contends that these objectives should not be limited to individualistic pursuits but should encompass broader notions such as justice and equity. However, given the inherent vagueness of concepts like justice and equity, they cannot be exhaustively captured in a list. The goal of Islam as a way of life should be the reference point rather than solely that of Islamic Law, especially since many issues, such as inequality, fall outside the purview of law (Dusuki & Abozaid, 2007). Therefore, several scholars, including those mentioned here, assert that reason should be the ultimate guide in ensuring adherence to these principles. This emphasis on reason has contributed to the push for *Ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning) in Islamic economics (Al-Alwani, 2005; Rafikov & Akhmetova, 2020).

The rise of Islamic economic thought as a modern discipline in the 20th century was aided by the changing geopolitical situation between the West and the Middle East. One of the reasons for this was the rise in oil prices during the 1970s (Hanieh, 2020). The goal of developing an Islamic economy was to offer a moral and ethical alternative to capitalism. In this period of anti-colonial struggle, capitalism was seen as the product of the intellectual colonialism of European modernity (Nasr, 1987). Hence, Islamic scholars aimed to create an alternative economic system in which Muslims could integrate their religious beliefs and live out their moral duties in their day-to-

day lives. They were able to create a somewhat flexible version of a moral economy, but it cannot be called an ideal model, largely because it cannot be called complete. Interestingly, over the years research in Islamic thought has moved to specific genres, questions or subjects. Even though Islam remains a fascinating topic of research in the more mainstream universities in the Global North, economic thought has been sparsely discussed. In the post-9/11 world, the Global War on Terror (GWOt) brought renewed attention to specifically the Islamic faith and its relationship with violence, the oppression of women and the denial of human rights (Tabassum, 2019). This may be why there has been little theoretical development of different concepts within the framework of Islamic economics.

Hamid Dabashi (2011) offers an interesting discussion on the emergence of the so-called comprador intellectuals in the post-9/11 era. The idea of comprador intellectuals as individuals who serve the interests of foreign powers or dominant external forces by promoting their ideologies, policies, or cultural values within their own society was first introduced by Fanon (1974). Dabashi (2011) argues that in the decade following 9/11, a great deal of literature was produced by such comprador intellectuals that contributed to the hegemonic narrative that the American media used to promote its imperial and militaristic policies in the Middle East, and Asia. Western powers' tendency to find and empower 'native' informers in the Islamic world led to the emergence of several dubious public intellectuals and dishonest and provocative discourse. The emergence of the Islam-terror conversation in popular media and the academy impacted the research in wider Islamic studies as more attention was being paid to reactionary and apologist accounts as well.

There has been a strong influence of US/European/Western political narratives on discourse within Muslim societies and Islamic scholarship, which is then weaponised by these hegemonic powers. Consequently, research and scholarship that align with the interests of the 'empire' receive more attention, funding, publishing opportunities, and career advancements, often overshadowing other marginalised lines of enquiry. As shown by Dabashi, critical and derogatory examinations of Islam have proven lucrative for many in Europe, academics included. Ideas and terms are co-opted by state and media outlets in the US and other Western countries to further their religious agendas as part of a broader hegemonic mission. Therefore, research rooted in a decolonial and emancipatory perspective within the Islamic tradition is crucial. This becomes especially pertinent in the field of global political economy, where these intersecting ideas elucidate the power dynamics shaping contemporary societies and their interactions.

As such, my own approach falls under Global Political Economy (GPE), which is a multidisciplinary field of study that examines the dynamic interaction between politics and economics on a global scale. It seeks to understand how political institutions, processes, and actors shape economic outcomes, and conversely, how economic forces influence political decisions and structures (O'Brien & Williams, 2016). At its core, GPE investigates the distribution of power and wealth in the international system, analysing how states, international organisations, corporations, and other

actors compete, cooperate, and negotiate to advance their interests. It examines how processes such as colonialism, imperialism, neoliberalism, and globalisation have contributed to economic disparities between and within countries. However, it should be noted that even GPE as a discipline remains deeply Eurocentric. Eurocentrism in GPE refers to the tendency within the field to prioritise European perspectives, theories, and experiences, often at the expense of non-European perspectives and voices. Indeed, much of GPE has frequently advocated for, upheld, or glorified Western civilisation as the ultimate standard or ideal reference point (Hobson, 2013). This chapter aims to challenge Eurocentrism in GPE by advocating for diversified perspectives and questioning dominant economic narratives.

Although many scholars in various genres of Islamic studies have focused on imperialism, globalisation and capitalism, there is little synthesis of these in the discourse on Islamic economic philosophy. I would argue that much of the Islamic economics scholarship today is focused on the development of financial products and economic practices yet little space is provided to the power relations between states and institutions. Adam Hanieh (2011, 2020) for one, discusses at length the development of capitalism and Islamic finance in countries in the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC). Although insightful, this research falls within the discourse in GPE without any connection to Islamic economic philosophy. With this discussion, I aim to break this impasse and provide an interdisciplinary critique that can prove mutually beneficial to both GPE and Islamic economic philosophy. By integrating GPE and Islamic economic philosophy both disciplines can be enriched, though it must be said anyone engaging with such theoretical interaction must be wary of the subsumption of one discourse into another. I am ethically committed to avoiding any such Eurocentric narratives and on the other extreme the political vilification of any Western or European philosophy just for the sake of it. Hence, I will present labour as an example of the theoretical possibilities within Islamic economic philosophy beyond Eurocentric GPE.

Labour in the Islamic tradition

In this introduction to labour in Islam, I will explore key concepts related to the labour market as found in the Islamic tradition. This will be followed by a brief critique of the concept of labour. The goal here is to present an example of a concept that is lacking in Islamic economic philosophy and discuss interventions towards retheorisation. Labour is a fundamental component of any economy. It represents the physical and mental work individuals contribute to create value and generate income. The study of labour is essential for understanding economic systems, as it influences productivity, wages, employment levels, and overall economic growth (Borjas, 2013; Cahuc et al., 2014; McLaughlin, 2019). By delving into the intricacies of labour economics, we gain insights into how individuals make decisions regarding work, how firms hire and compensate employees, and how government policies affect labour market outcomes.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers, employers, workers, and researchers seeking to address labour market challenges and promote inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Note that it is almost impossible to summarise the entirety of the literature on the labour market in Islamic economics in the space provided. Muslim scholars' economic perspectives on labour economics have spanned from the 7th century to the emergence of modern economic thought. A variety of Muslim scholars contributed to various economic theories during this period. Examples include al-Ghazali's ([1096] 1993) discussions on market mechanisms and social justice and Ibn Khaldun's (1332-1406) development of the labour theory of value (al-Ghazali, 1096/1993; Ibn-Khaldun, 1377/2015). These theories, rooted in divine laws and spiritual dimensions, aimed at achieving salvation and embodied an ethico-moral socioeconomic context. The ethico-moral ideals in Islam refer to the combination of ethical and moral teachings in Islamic thought. Ethicists such as al-Ghazali construct their ideas of ideal human behaviour in the context of a society where Islamic ethico-moral considerations are primary. Azid and Asutay, (2007) explore this concept further in relation to Islamic economics. In this chapter, I will include elements of the debates around labour that I find most pertinent for the discussion of an emancipatory understanding of the concept.

The Islamic economy is formulated based on the dual relationship between the rights and responsibilities of all the agents involved. For instance, workers and employees are responsible to do right by each other. The Quran and *Sunnah* (the life and conduct of the Prophet Muhammad) provide the guidelines for these while *shariah* (Islamic law), and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) formulate these into practical codes of conduct. The leader of the community (we would equate that with the state today) is meant to act as an arbiter in the economy and ensure that these rights are protected (Azid et al., 2021). It is incumbent upon the worker that he does not shirk his responsibility to fulfil the task that he has been contracted to do. Punctuality, honesty and respect for one's work are paramount in Islamic thought and labour should ensure that they maintain trustworthiness with their employees (Azid, 2005). For an employee to avoid her responsibilities on the job and receive an unjustified wage, is considered *haram* (prohibited and thus sinful). Inversely it will also be considered *haram* for the employer to not pay the just wage for contracted work. In Islamic theory, the employer and employee are viewed as participants in a collaborative effort, each performing distinct tasks yet deserving equal respect (Zaman, 2009). This means that while entrepreneurial abilities are acknowledged in Islam, they are not elevated above other forms of contribution. The employer must feed and clothe his workers or pay enough wages so that they can meet their own needs (Khan, 1975). The work contract between the worker and the employee is supposed to be such that it provides for the basic necessities of the employee. Wages may differ from one place to another based on the economic conditions of the society, but the difference cannot be insurmountable (Mawdudi, 1969/2011).

As such, wages and wage rates then receive attention in Islamic thought. As early as the thirteenth century Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) argued that the state should fix the wages of artisans and cultivators if their services were needed in the economy, but they refused to offer them due to low wages or imperfections in the market (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1982). This wage control was supposed to protect both the employer and the employee from exploitation from the other and ensure the availability of essential goods and services in the market. Contemporary Islamic scholars too have argued for the responsibility of the state to ensure decent wages (Al Faruqi, 1980; Chapra, 1971). On the other hand, some scholars have suggested that the wage rate should be linked to the profit of the employer (Azid, 2005). The ideal wage should be the one that bridges the gap between the living conditions of the employer and the employee. Several scholars are in favour of profit sharing between the worker and the employer as this will increase a worker's interest in the prosperity of the employer (Mawdudi, 1969/2011). This idea is based on the incentivisation of work rather than the mechanisms of the free market that practically coerce workers into labour. Here I am referring to not only the financial hit that the unemployed take but also the social stigma attached to the unemployed. In a similar vein, Iqbal & Mirakhor (2004) contend that firms owned by labour would best embody the principles of Islam.

In Islamic thought, labour is not only a fundamental factor of production but also the main source of value. Even capital is considered to be the embodiment of natural resources and past labour rather than a factor of production in itself (Mannan, 1970). This is different from the Marxist labour theory of value. According to Marx (1867/1992), the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of socially necessary labour time required for its production. In other words, the value of a commodity is not determined by its utility, or the amount of labour put into its production alone, but rather by the average amount of labour time needed to produce it within a given society. Marx argued that under capitalism, workers are paid for their labour power—the ability to work—rather than the full value of the goods and services they produce. The surplus value generated by workers' labour, exceeding the value of their wages, is appropriated by capitalists as profit. This exploitation of labour forms the basis of capitalist accumulation and leads to the inherent contradictions and inequalities within the capitalist system. For Azid et al. (2021), the Marxist labour theory of value is political in that it highlights the struggle between two classes. Such a class division is not found in the Islamic system, as the Quran and the entire ethical system of Islam are built on the equality of people. There is no concept of struggle and distinction between different groups in society. Rather all groups of people are meant to exist in harmony and cooperate. An ideal Islamic economy is designed to encourage generosity and welfare of all as it is only a means to an end: eternal salvation. Here, the normative claims of Islamic thought supersede the economic reality. Instead of observing whether distinctions of class exist in society at all, economic scholars refer to how in an ideal Islamic economy they will not.

With this brief overview of labour in Islam, I return to the key question of this chapter: how can we (re)theorise labour in Islamic economic philosophy? Here the important,

perhaps political, element is that I do not deny the differences in power between the workers and capitalists in society. Indeed, laws, regulations and worker action have improved the bargaining power and living standards of labour yet challenges remain. Towards this, let us turn to the literature on ethics in Islamic thought.

Ethics, khilafah and labour

Any discussion of the human in Islamic economic thought must be contextualised in the notion of economic agency in Islamic economics. This concept is cushioned in the theological framework of moral agency or *khilafah* in Islam. This section examines the concept of *khilafah* as portrayed in medieval ethical literature authored by al-Ghazali (2015), Tusi (1964), and al-Davani (1839). The writings of these Islamic scholars continue to exert influence on Islamic thought, both directly and indirectly. Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058–1111), a Persian scholar, was a versatile figure, renowned as a theologian, jurist, and mystic within Islam. Similarly, Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, also known as Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201–1274), was a Persian philosopher, theologian, and scientist, celebrated for his contributions to prose, mysticism, and science. Muhammad Ibn Jalal Ad-din Davani (1427–1502/03), hailing from the Kazerun region of Iran, was a jurist and philosopher.

Much like Aristotle and Plato, classical Islamic philosophers placed great emphasis on the pursuit of human happiness (Butterworth, 1983). According to al-Ghazali, ultimate happiness, or *sa'adat* (flourishing), is achieved through adhering closely to the principles of *adl* (justice) and *khilafah* (vicegerency of God). Ibn-e-Sina argued that justice could be attained through moral virtues such as temperance, courage, and practical wisdom (Parens & Macfarland, 2011). These virtues, transcending religious doctrines, were crucial for individual spiritual development and, consequently, communal cohesion and flourishing. In the context of classical ethicists, *khilafah* signified the vicegerency of God, representing the universe's macrocosm within the mortal realm. A person could only reach the enlightenment of *khilafah* by actively engaging with others in society. The soul, referred to as *nafs* (the mystical driving force of life and the source of desire in Islamic theology), must interact with others in the mortal realm to fully realise its ethical self. This engagement occurs in the domestic and the public spheres. As products of their time, these literary works are masculinist in their understanding of and interpretation of *khilafah*. Ayubi (2019) provides valuable insights into the historical and cultural contexts that have shaped gender norms and values within Islamic societies by engaging with classical ethics literature noted above from a feminist critical perspective.

Indeed, classical ethics literature visualises a rather masculinist and elitist world where spiritual enlightenment is limited to only men at least in the public arena. A pious woman can rise to spiritual height, but this level will always be below that of a man. Additionally, the acts that gain her this enlightenment are always in service of her husband and his household whereas for men these acts are to be found in

engagement with the wider public sphere and religious/spiritual pursuits. This is contrary to Islamic theology where the centre of human identity is *nafs*. *Nafs* does not have gender, nor does it imply any. However, when the ethicists discuss *nafs*, they differentiate between the *nafs* of men and women thus writing their patriarchy in the texts that they produce. Indeed, the three ethicists begin their treatises with a gender-neutral understanding of *nafs* but end up with a masculinist explanation of its manifestation.

In an earlier work, I discuss the works of al-Ghazali, Tusi and al-Davani and the concept of economic agency and argue for a gendered approach to the idea of economic agency as the *homo Islamicus* is designed as a man. The literature discussed here does not recognise the presence of women in the economy and thus following discourse on economic agency excludes them as well. In my earlier work, I provide a gendered understanding of *khilafah* and argue for the same in Islamic economic philosophy, as gender is an important category of analysis for economic philosophy (Khawar, 2023). Here, I will not discuss the masculinist lenience of our esteemed ethicists in detail. Rather, the discussion is limited to the category of class and its relation to labour.

In premodern Muslim societies, urban centres held significant importance, serving as primary sources of identity and loyalty (Euben, 2008). al-Davani likened the city to a household, while Tusi viewed it as a reflection of individual and household dynamics, suggesting that a virtuous city stems from virtuous individuals and households. Drawing from Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), both ethicists emphasised the role of ethics in politics, highlighting the importance of social order and civic engagement (Butterworth, 1983). Thus, the city became a vital arena for ethical practice, paralleling the significance of the household for virtuous individuals. While these concepts are presented as universal, they were influenced by the civic realities of the ethicists' lives (Ayubi, 2019), who were often supported by court funds. Furthermore, the ethicists envisioned the public sphere as masculine, relegating women to the private sphere, despite the presence of women in various social roles across medieval Islamic societies (Katz, 2014). Hence, not only were these sketches of the ideal city informed by their personal experiences and positionality, but they also reflected what would be the ideal city in their minds.

Cities in the classification provided by Tusi (1964) are divided into four classes, with philosophers comprising the first and highest class and craftsmen and farmers forming the fourth and lowest class. Notably, slaves are absent from these categories, while women are considered a distinct class separate from these classifications of the profession. Interestingly, Tusi does not mention the ruler of the city in this classification, asserting instead that the head of the city is responsible for organising and overseeing all classes to ensure proper political order. This hierarchical arrangement, managed by the ruler, places each group relative to one another, with those deemed fit for authority positioned higher in the city's hierarchy. According to Tusi (1964), suitability for authority is measured by knowledge for the upper class and skill for the lower class. Similarly, al-Davani (1839) presents four categories, with philosophers and knowledge producers in the first category and tradesmen and providers of basic necessities in

the last. For al-Davani (1839), a man's distinguishing quality is his spiritual pursuit, he considers saints as the highest-ranking ones due to their unblemished intellect. This intellect, equated with the ability to perceive the Divine Unseen, determines a man's status in society beyond his profession. Men from the middle and lower classes are considered unable to perceive the Divine Unseen, according to these scholars. Moreover, a man's intellect dictates his position within the homosocial hierarchy beyond his occupation.

Rational thought is seen as the factor that propels a man's social standing granting him power and influence. Nonetheless, despite the theoretical importance of intelligence, both Tusi (1964) and al-Davani (1839) acknowledge the possibility for lesser men to hold power based on birth rather than intellectual capacity. Tusi and al-Davani advocate for a nuanced approach to interactions between social classes, emphasising the importance of speaking to others according to their intellectual capacity. When engaging with those of higher status, one should aim to elevate oneself, while maintaining dignity when interacting with those of lower rank. Special etiquette should be observed when conversing with rulers or employers. The underlying principle is to determine how individuals of lower status can be corrected, uplifted, and educated. The efficacy of these interactions defines one's virtues, according to Tusi (1964) and al-Davani (1839). Ultimately, privileged individuals are entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the most marginalised members of society. The ethical framework in Islam emphasises the interconnectedness of worldly affairs and spiritual conduct, underscoring the necessity of virtuous behaviour in interactions with others to attain the rank of vicegerency or *khilafah*. This discussion reveals to us that ethics literature in Islamic tradition views society in clear structures. Here those with authority must manage those without. The descriptions of these relationships of patrimony are not manuals on power relations yet they allude to them.

The ruler is not questioned with revolutionary zeal in these texts. This may be due to the preference for civic order in classical Islamic tradition, where civil war is considered a great evil, a *fitnah*. We must also remember that these texts are directed to the elite man. These discussions are for the benefit of the elite man, although they do speak at length about his moral responsibilities in the home and society. However benevolent these relationships may seem; they are part of a patriarchal status quo. Here patriarchy is protected not only by the exclusion of women from the public space but also by the relegation of men to their birth stations. Indeed, we cannot separate masculinity from class, as class itself is a gendered category where men are assumed to be the agents of their class (Morgan, 2005). In the ethics literature too, we see these class and gender divisions which ultimately cause a deep tension. On one hand, the *nafs* is free of class hierarchies, on the other human engagement is tied to the role that each plays in the social hierarchy. I would argue that this is a quintessential tension in much of Islamic thought. Theologically we want to argue against class and for egalitarianism, if not equality in the Western sense of the term, yet we must attempt to reconcile this ethical principle with the social realities in which we work. It does not help that much of mainstream Islamic thought has become married to the idea of

maintaining civic order, which ultimately maintains the status quo. More and more scholarly work today is addressing this issue centralising the need for emancipatory thought and frameworks of analysis (Dabashi, 2008; Esack, 2002; Rahemtulla, 2017). This is my framework of analysis within Islamic economic philosophy as well.

Islamic economic scholars have argued that since the rights of labour have been established by *fiqh*, there is no need for worker action such as strikes in the Islamic system (Azid et al., 2021). Islamic economics is built on the principles of maintenance of responsibilities and rights. These rights and responsibilities operate in the same homosocial categories that are described by the three ethicists mentioned here. However, contemporary Islamic economics does not discuss them exactly in the same way, for instance, none of the economic works noted here speak about removing women from the public space. Yet their omission of the special conditions of women in the domestic and public economy is tantamount to the active erasure of women. Similarly, Islamic economic thought has foregrounded the idea of spiritual fulfilment as the goal of an ethical economy, yet the systematic hindrances placed in the path of the lesser privileged is missing from the discussion. Frankly speaking, we cannot speak about the spiritual fulfilment of the domestic workers in Pakistan (Bhatti, 2023; Mehmood, 2023) and India (Neetha, 2023) or the construction workers in UAE and Saudi Arabia (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Lakhani, 2023) without addressing their material conditions.

These examples clearly show that even if *fiqh* ensures labourers' rights, workers' action will only become unnecessary when the Islamic system is built in a way that makes it impossible to exploit labour. To theorise labour then, we must consider not only the conceptual goals of Islamic economics, but we must also consider contemporary challenges. Indeed, we can repeat one after the other the Prophet's teachings on generous behaviour towards one's hired workers but remaining within that discourse means that we are only speaking from the position of the master. This is the central issue with the ethics literature as well as the economics literature in Islamic thought about labour. We will continuously see that employers are asked to be equitable and just while workers are told to be honest and trustworthy. We are also told what to do when a worker shirks their responsibility. However, we are not told what to do in the face of egregious class repression. Conveniently that is not recognised in the discourse to begin with. With the above discussion, I have attempted to show that class divisions have very much been a part of the patriarchal understanding of Islamic society. Hence, discourse on labour must also incorporate said class discussion.

The inclusion of class in the theory of labour requires an in-depth analysis, carried over at least a few years. I would like to take this space to briefly introduce this with the hope that I can develop this notion in detail over the next few years. As I have noted, *khilafah* is the foundational concept of human action and agency in the mortal world be it domestic or public sphere. This is the key theological responsibility of humans and in Islamic scholarship, it is a foundational theoretical device. Indeed, *khilafah* is an epistemology in itself as knowledge from the Divine is received by positioning oneself in relationship to It via *khilafah*. As is clear from the influential texts produced by al-Ghazali, Tusi and al-Davani, *khilafah* has also informed the perception of

social structures in the world. It is a concept further nuanced by Islamic feminist and womanist interpretations which have expanded it beyond its patriarchal readings (Lamrabet, 2015). I have attempted to harness these in towards a gender-sensitive reading of economic agency. Here, we must consider the act of work in conjunction with *khilafah*.

As ethics literature itself points to the centrality of work for the spiritual emancipation of men we must consider work in its nature to be emancipatory. For one's work and related social engagement to be a way to enlightenment, work must be removed from oppressive systems even in the world. Of course, we cannot do that if we do not recognise the oppression written into the codex of work in the capitalist system. Indeed, the global economic system is capitalist, and it is the system within which we are imagining heterodoxies too. How can in Islamic thought we safely deny the presence of class? Especially when class structures are so clearly visible in Muslim-majority countries, even the ones with supposedly Islamic laws. Instead of repeating the rhetoric that there is no class in Islam, we must focus on eliminating class-based power that does exist in society. This ontological shift is necessary and made powerful with the expansion of Islamic scholarship and praxis. If I must aim to achieve *khilafah* as a person born outside the upper class, if I must work and be part of labour, then to achieve *khilafah* I must be an active agent in my liberation. *Khilafah* is not only ruling in the household and society but also work. Thus, to labour is to pursue *khilafah*.

Conclusion

Islamic economics is rooted in Islam which extends beyond spiritual pursuits to encompass worldly affairs such as politics and economics, guided by ethical teachings. Despite the Quran not explicitly addressing all modern economic issues, it offers moral foundations for trade and finance. The rise of Islamic economic thought in the 20th century was catalysed by geopolitical shifts and aimed to provide a moral alternative to capitalism. However, challenges persist, including the marginalisation of Islamic economic philosophy within academia, exacerbated by post-9/11 narratives and Eurocentric biases. Hegemonic domination of global political discourse by European or Western thought has been accompanied by a general hostility towards Islamic episteme that does not comply with the current political narratives of the West. In 2015, when I initially delved into Islamic economics, a colleague questioned whether it was wise to associate the word 'Islamic' so emphatically with my academic pursuits, hinting at the perceived detriment to my career prospects if I were to associate too closely with Islamic thought. This was emblematic of the clear prejudice against Islamic theories/worldviews/epistemologies. Indeed, this has remained. It is visible not only in the elements of Islam that are allowed more berth in academic discourse but also in who and which identity is allowed to take this space of power.

Nonetheless, there is potential for interdisciplinary dialogue between Islamic economics and GPE to enrich both fields, provided it is conducted ethically and avoids the dominance of Western narratives or the assimilation of one discourse

into another. To remain clear of both Eurocentric narratives and the unwarranted vilification of Western or European philosophies, I have attempted here a prudent conversation between both traditions. By incorporating Islamic economic philosophy into the framework of GPE I have broadened the perspectives within both Islamic economic philosophy and GPE. The specific concept for such an elaboration here is the idea of labour in Islamic thought. Islamic scholarship has elaborated on employers' and workers' rights and responsibilities, the role of the state in ensuring justice in the labour market, and the determination of wages. Islamic scholarship has also provided a precursor to modern debates on the labour theory of value contrasted with the Marxist labour theory of value. The absence of class struggle within the Islamic framework remains detrimental to the praxis of the emancipatory ethics of the Quran. Despite acknowledging power differentials in society, the focus remains on ideal Islamic principles of harmony, cooperation, and welfare for all.

In this chapter, I have explored the foundational concept of *khilafah* or moral agency in Islam. Through an analysis of medieval ethical literature authored by influential Islamic scholars such as al-Ghazali, Tusi, and al-Davani, we can observe the complexities of *khilafah* and its implications for human action and societal structures. The examination of classical Islamic philosophy reveals a masculinist and elitist interpretation of *khilafah*, wherein spiritual enlightenment and societal engagement are predominantly associated with men, while women are relegated to subordinate roles within the private sphere. This gendered understanding of *khilafah* perpetuates patriarchal norms and excludes women from meaningful participation in the public sphere, despite the theological premise of gender neutrality in human identity. The intersectionality of class and gender in shaping societal structures within the ethics literature is clear to see. Class divisions, often overlooked in mainstream Islamic discourse, intersect with gender hierarchies to reinforce existing power dynamics. The patriarchal understanding of *khilafah* is intertwined with class-based oppression, necessitating a critical revaluation of the concept in Islamic ethics and economics.

Contemporary Islamic economics, while rooted in the principles of justice and spiritual fulfilment, must confront the systemic barriers faced by marginalised groups, here the group in concern is labour. The omission of women from economic discourse and the perpetuation of class-based inequalities underscores the urgent need for a more inclusive and emancipatory approach to Islamic economic philosophy. This chapter proposes the recognition of labour as a pathway to spiritual emancipation. By acknowledging the presence of class divisions and advocating for social justice within Islamic thought, scholars can contribute to the realisation of *khilafah* in both individual and collective spheres. In essence, the pursuit of *khilafah* entails not only ruling in the household and society but also active engagement in the struggle for liberation from oppressive systems. By reimagining work as a means to achieve *khilafah* and advocating for structural change within the global economic system, Islamic scholars and practitioners can work towards a more just and equitable society, grounded in the principles of Islamic ethics and social justice.

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