

Ihsani Social Capital: A Conceptual Exploration to Faith-Inspired Social Capital

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Abstract

The current Post-developmental discourse suggests amongst others, the effective role of social capital to development in its own unique way. Additionally, culture, religion, social networks and family institutions as part of the motivations that lead to 'social capital' are proposed by some researchers to have their significant role in the re-constructed concept of development, which transcend beyond growth and materialistic barometer. This study is an attempt to explore how Islam could contribute towards development of societies by establishing a unique model of social capital from its explicit ontological worldview through a directed descriptive epistemology. A deductive method is applied to its epistemological sources in explaining the emerging conceptual approach of 'ihsani social capital' that will lead towards development within the framework of 'Social Capital'.

Keywords: Development, Falah, Ihsan, Ihsani Social Capital, Islamic Values, Social Capital

Introduction

Social capital can be depicted closely to what some have called "civic virtue"¹. Hanifan first used the term in her discussions of rural school community centers to describe 'those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people'², which particularly are concerned with the cultivation of good will, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among those that 'make up a social unit'. Accordingly, Jacobs utilizes the term 'social capital' to coin the 'relation to urban life and neighborliness'³, while Bourdieu in contrast, relates the term to social theory⁴. Coleman then has brought the term into a different dimension of usage in his discussions of the social context of education⁵. The term 'social capital' has been developed into a more substantive usage when it moves into academic debates.

Eventually, it was Putnam that has successfully introduced the social capital into what it is known today as a popular focus for research and policy discussion⁶. The central thesis of social capital theory according to Putnam is that 'social networks based relationships are a valuable asset'⁷.

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¹ Putnam, R. D., 2000. Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon and Schuster.

² Hanifan, L. J., 1916. The Rural School Community Center. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 67: 130-138.

³ Jacobs, J., 1961. The Death and Life of Great American Cities. Random.

⁴ Bourdieu, P., 1983. Forms of Capital. In Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. Eds., Richards, J. C. Greenwood Press.

⁵ Coleman, J. C., 1988. Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. American Journal of Sociology, 94: 95-120.

⁶ Putnam, R. D., 1993. Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton University Press.

⁷ Putnam, R. D., 2000. Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon and Schuster.

People's interaction among themselves within the realm of social relation and networking enables them to build communities with each other, through the well-knitted social fabric. As argued by many, this trust-based relation within the community will bring great material benefits for development and economic growth⁸.

Equally, the articulation of the social capital will also cultivate all the social, human, cultural and natural capitals towards the achievement of development, through an inclusive meaning of capital and a wider definition of development. The inclusive definition of capital, which encompasses the wide-spreading interactions of humanistic elements (education, health, skills, ownership and lifestyle), social factors (networking, rules of society, solidarity, welfare) and cultural aspects (social relations, customs and structures, environment, sustainable development, natural resources)⁹, has been acknowledged as an active contributor to economic development, which ensures technical progress, competitiveness, sustained growth, good governance and stable democracies¹⁰.

Due to the function of social capital as one of the means for development, this study is an attempt to investigate on how Islamic values could be incorporated into this latest *fad du jour* to present a whole new set of Islamic *ijtihad* (reasoning). This paper will analytically investigate on how the over-arching concept of *ihsan* (benevolence) could be an essential tool to incorporate Islamic values into the framework of 'Social Capital' as another approach for development for modern Muslim society, which aiming the well-being of the society.

Social Capital: Conceptual and Development

In expanding the discussion of Social capital, Woolcock divides the relations of the social capital into three major types: '*The bonding*' type is the relation of community which is based on enduring, multi-faceted relationships between similar people with strong mutual commitments such as friends, family and other close-knit groups; while the '*bridging type*' is formed from the connections between people who have less in common, but may have overlapping interests, for example, between neighbors, colleagues, or between different groups within a community; and finally the '*linking type*' is derived from the links between people or organizations beyond peer boundaries, cutting across status and enabling people to exert influence and reach resources outside their normal circles.¹¹

In contrast to the mainstream belief that growth is the only way to solve the problem of poverty and underdevelopment, Arizpe insists that development theory and politics should incorporate the concepts of values and culture due to their role in developing the social fiber on which politics and economy are based¹². Alternatively, there are growing concerns on human and social capital along with other types of material capital in formulating an alternative approach to the conventional economic thought¹³. With regard the subject, the President of World Bank, James Wolfensohn believes that the interdependency of growth and social development is necessary to ensure a satisfactory/ an effective economic development.¹⁴

8 Kliksberg, B., 2000. The Role of Social and Cultural Capital in the Development Process. Latin American Studies Center Issues in Culture, Democracy and Development, University of Maryland.

9 Cochrane, P. 2006. Exploring Cultural Capital and Its Importance in Sustainable Development. Ecological Economics, 57: 318-330.

10 Kliksberg, B., 2000. Op. Cit.

11 Woolcock, M. and D. Narayan, 2000. Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy. The World Bank Research Observer, 15 (2): 225-49.

12 Arizpe, L., 2004. The Intellectual History of Culture and Development Institutions. In Culture and Public Action, Eds. Rao, V. and W. Michael. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

13 Kliksberg, B., 2000. The Role of Social and Cultural Capital in the Development Process. Latin American Studies Center Issues in Culture, Democracy and Development, University of Maryland, pp. 9-10.

14 Kliksberg, B., 1999. Social Capital and Culture: Master Keys to Development, CEPAL Review, December, p. 85.

Similarly, Kliksberg maintains the importance of social development through social justice and equality to complement the institutional and structural reform for political economic growth and human prosperity.¹⁵ Social capital and culture are key components of these interactions.

In explaining the significant role of both culture and social capital, Coleman emphasizes that culture (value) along with social capital will contribute towards the production of good citizens that live on mutual cooperation, mutual assistance transcending conflicts, and eventually leads to social stability¹⁶. Accordingly, this social cohesion, social behavior and cultural expressions also play an important role in stimulating solidarity and overcoming market flaws by means of collective actions and the use of community resources¹⁷. This in turn will provide ground for good governance and social equality. UNESCO discerns in its report that culture (if it is being strengthened and supported) could be an enormous potential key element in the struggle against poverty¹⁸. Stiglitz on the other hand, insists that the preservation of cultural values is extremely important for development for it functions as a cohesive force in an era in which many other values are weakening¹⁹.

Similar to culture, values also lay the foundation for concern between one individual and another that goes beyond just personal well-being, which is the essence of the culmination of social capital. Values determine whether networks, regulations and trust will evolve in formulating social capital.²⁰ In expressing the role of values and culture and their imperative role in development, Kliksberg asserts that: “Values that are rooted in culture and strengthened or weakened by that culture, such as the degree of solidarity, altruism, respect, or tolerance, are essential for sustained development”²¹.

Despite the externalities that it may produce (and has already produced in many cases), religion, as a motivation for social capital, works very well to enhance the role of a civil society, encouraging active participation in community, eradicating poverty and corruption, strengthening education and ensuring accountability. The effects of religion on social capital and development can be seen in the contemporary empirical studies, which show how the current global uprising of religion contributes towards the fields of the political-economic and the social sphere²², as these lead to capacity development for economic development in communities.

Similarly, Khan and Bashar deconstruct the functions of religion and present the way through which religion can contribute to development from several dimensions²³. For instance, Islamic ethics will affect productivity through certain personal traits of ethics, thrift, honesty, and openness to people. Furthermore, the enhancement of economic growth and development by promoting a positive attitude toward honesty may increase levels of trust and reduce levels of corruption and criminal activity. Religious rituals, on the other hand, also play a significant role in economic activities by promoting in-group trust and cooperation that help overcome collective-action problems.

15 Kliksberg, B., 2000. The Role of Social and Cultural Capital in the Development Process. Latin American Studies Center Issues in Culture, Democracy and Development, University of Maryland.

16 Coleman, J. C., 1990. Foundations of Social Theory. Harvard University Press.

17 Baas, S., 1997. Participatory Institutional Development. Presented at the Conference on Sustainable Agriculture and Sand Control in the Gansu Desert Area.

18 UNESCO, 1997. Records of the General Conference: 29th session, 21st October – 12th November 1997. UNESCO.

19 Stiglitz, J., 1998. Towards a New Paradigm for Development: Strategies, Policies and Processes. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

20 Chang, H. N., 1997. Democracy, Diversity and Social Capital. National Civic Review, 86 (2): 141-47.

21 Kliksberg, B., 2000. The Role of Social and Cultural Capital in the Development Process. Latin American Studies Center Issues in Culture, Democracy and Development, University of Maryland, p. 19.

22 Coleman, J. C., 1990. Foundations of Social Theory. Harvard University Press; Newton, K., 1997. Social capital and Democracy. American Behavioral Scientist, pp. 575-86.

23 Khan, H. and O. Bashar, 2008. Religion and Development (U21Global Working Paper Series, No. 006/2008, Graduate School for Global Leaders, Singapore). Graduate School for Global Leaders.

In the meantime, religions also exert a positive impact on human capital by enhancing education levels through the encouragement of seeking knowledge to epitomize wisdom. All these motivations will accumulate the creation of ‘social capital’, which is essential to growth and development.²⁴

Embracing similar spirit but in different circumstances, the emergence of what is known nowadays as global political Islamic movements all around the Muslim world has some portion in contributing towards the democracy and development process. Their contribution is evident in the constant struggle of those movements in providing welfare, charity, and in their fight against administration misconducts of the autocratic regimes that lead to ineffective governance and underdevelopment. It is becoming apparent in most Muslim countries that a significant number of Islamic movements has relatively emerged as the voice of the people for reforms and criticizing the massive size of corruptions committed by the regimes. Throughout the movements’ democratic activities, they manage to prove the non-state actors capability in providing welfare for the people through a constant struggle to produce a ‘better society’²⁵.

Consequently, the activism and orientations of those movements manage to reasonably influence development priorities in their own nations. In the same token, the Islamism phenomenon also creates the most impact on the social capital aspects of the communities in many Muslim nations. Their continuous strive in providing the welfare, charity and education to the people as part of their *modus operandi* has benefited a larger size of their community. The movements have also rigorously manipulated the vacuum left by most of the Middle Eastern and North African states ruled by autocratic and corrupted regimes with their mechanisms and institutions. Despite their initial aims, which are to spread their ideologies and recruit members by using the activities as the pretext, the movements have massively contributed in tackling the many social problems that the regimes normally overlook²⁶.

In contrast to other social capital entities, the motivation that pushes Islamic civil society or political organizations to cultivate their own ‘spiritual’ social capital may differ from the other versions of social capital. In most cases, the movements elucidate this ideal into their vision to establish a Muslim state or Muslim caliphate order. This inner factor of their zeal can only be understood by further exploration on the ontological roots of the Islamists ideology. To summarize these inner motivations, and the uniqueness of the Islamists version of social capital, the term ‘*ihساني* social capital’ is suggested. This term will expound the underlying motivational factors that lead towards the passion of these movements in their contribution towards development through the social capital framework²⁷.

***Ihsani* Social Capital**

However, the supposed motivation that pushed Muslims to cultivate their own ‘spiritual’ social capital might differ from the other versions of social capital. The inner factor of their zeal could only be understood by further exploration on the ontological roots of the inner motivation, and the unique of the Islamic version of social capital, I would suggest the ‘*ihساني* social capital’ term. This term will expound the underlying motivational factor that lead towards the passion of Muslims in their contribution towards development through social capital. The Tawhidic worldview that implies human being as the vicegerent (*Khalifah*) of God in the world to accomplish certain mission was always becoming the ontological root for Muslim individuals.

²⁴Marshall, K., 2005. Faith and Development: Rethinking Development Debates. World Bank; Haynes, J., 2007. Religion and Development. Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁵ An-Naim, A., 1999. Political Islam in National Politics and International Relations. In the Secularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics, Eds., Berger P. L. Ethics and Public Policy Center.

²⁶ Bayat, A., 2007. Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn. Stanford University Press.

²⁷ Malik, M., 2011. Constructing the Architectonics and Formulating the Articulation of Islamic Governance: A Discursive Attempt in Islamic Epistemology, PhD thesis, Durham University. Available at: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/832/>, p. 266.

Ihsan (Perfection) connotes the comprehensive excellence, and the final crowning glory or finishing embellishment. It is the ultimate aim of the dynamic process of development in the economic, social and spiritual sense, and attaining it implies the attainment of *falah* (holistic success in both worldly and hereafter. While the ‘*ihsani* social capital’ concept is deeply rooted in the Islamic worldview that implies human being as the vicegerent (*Khalifah*) of God in the terrestrial life with certain mission to be executed. Such a worldview represents the essential ontological root for the movements that shapes its aspiration and vision. This *Khalifah* typology, which works as a doctrine in the mind of the organization members will naturally produce ‘functioning individuals’ who dedicate themselves towards the delivery of the *Khalifah* duties in their life to attain *falah* (comprehensive salvation in both worldly and hereafter)²⁸.

Falah is derived from the root of *Fa-la-ha* and originally means, ‘to plough’²⁹. Plough implying going through a route with difficulty and eventually reaching to harvest, the word has been apparently adapted to have a general meaning of reaching safety and salvation after struggling for it. In the context of Islam, *Falah* means attaining triumph and prosperity in the worldly life and hereafter. This of course can be reached when God is pleased with his servant (although this pleasure is the result, to a great extent, of God’s own extreme mercy and forgiveness)³⁰.

The duties are exemplified by the implementation of the Islamic way of life in both micro and macro levels. The similar aim shared by most Islamic movements in explaining their approach to achieve *falah* is through their aspiration to establish a *Shariatic* community where Shari’ah law is to be implemented and the comprehensive Islamic system of politics, economy, social and education to be promulgated in the society life³¹. In achieving such a goal, all the individuals will actively be working and participating in the fields related to propagate or reform the current *status-cuo* to conform to their ideals³².

Such Tawhidic individuals will emerge as a ‘social capital’ for the nation. The functioning element of the individuals becomes workable within the sphere of ‘benevolent society’ within the organization magnitude, which comprises of the families and cells of the individuals mutually or collectively sharing their passion to achieve, which is the shared goal, underlined by the organization. In the same token, the benevolent society itself is the result of the intercommunicating and interrelated networking of the functioning individuals. Under the culture of *ihsan*, every single individual views the well-being of his life is not only by creating a ‘*falah*’ of his own, but also in cultivating the *falah* of others due to the Tawhidic reality worldview. This aspiration is articulated through the internal educational (*tarbiyyah*) or the indoctrination process system within the organizations and the outreach (*da’wah*) activities to the masses³³.

These individuals embrace the spirit of ‘*Syuhada*’ (the witness), which inspired from Al-Quran, (2:143):

“Thus, have We made of you an *Ummah* justly balanced (*ummatah wasatah*), that ye might be witnesses (*Syuhada*) over the nations, and the Apostle a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the Qiblah to which thou wast used, only to test those who followed the Apostle from those who would turn on their heels (From the Faith). Indeed it was (A change) momentous, except to those guided by God. And never would God Make your faith of no effect. For God is to all people, most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful.”

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

²⁹ Ibn Manzur, 1955. *Lisan al-‘Arab*, Dar Sadir, Beirut, , p. 2, vol. 547.

³⁰ Malik, M., 2011, p. 133.

³¹ El-Affendi, A., 2010. *Umma, State and Movement: Events That Shaped the Modern Debate* in Khaled Hroub, *Political Islam: Context versus Ideology*. SAQI.

³² Malik, M., 2011, pp. 237-8.

³³ *Op. Cit.*, pp. 237-8.

It was through this spirit that Allah has given to the Muslims the title of ‘*ummatan wasata*’ (justly balanced or moderate) to be the witness (*Syuhada*) to the human being.

In sum, the functioning individuals strive not only towards his own happiness through participations and self-determination, but also to assist others in attaining their total (*falah*) self-actualization. This collective mutual interdependent nature of the functioning individuals is the gist of the aforementioned typology. The ‘*Ihsani Social Capital*’ implies that the horizontal relation among the people or individuals is connected by the concept of *ukhuwwah* (universal solidarity), which is derived from the vertical Tawhidic worldview relation between the individuals and God. It is the quality of their interconnectedness with each other (horizontal) that determines the quality of their vertical relation in attaining *falah*³⁴.

The active functioning empowered individuals thus found their field to articulate their governance rights and responsibilities within the sphere of the ‘*Ihsani Social Capital*’ realm. The Tawhidic ontology, which acts as the imago mundi of the society framework of governance within the hearts of individuals, leads to the realization of their *amaanah* (trust), in preserving their rights and also to execute their obligations in a just and benevolent (‘*adl wa ihsan*’) means. Furthermore, the just and benevolent principal requires these individuals as part of the *syuhada* nation to live and pursue their life not only for their personal interest, but also act as agents of mercy to mankind and the environment. Furthermore, the universal solidarity (*ukhuwwah*) spirit within the members would be crystallized through the *takaafuful* (mutual cooperation), *tafaahum* (mutual respect) and social cohesion exercised by the society members in achieving the *Maqasid al-Shariah* in their life through the spirit of *Islah* (a state of constant endeavor towards comprehensive excellence (*ihsan*) within the frameworks of innovation, construction and reconstruction to attain *falah* according to *maqasid al-Shari’ah*)³⁵.

Semantically, the term *iġġġ* is derived from the root word ‘*Sa La Ha*’, which means ‘good’ or righteous and antonym to the term ‘*Fa Sa Da*’ (mischief or destruction)³⁶. However, in its contemporary denotation, the term ‘*iġġġ*’ is associated closely with the word ‘*tajdġġ*’ (reform) and *taghyġġ* (change in its positive meaning)³⁷. Due to its original meaning of piety and good, *iġġġ* represents the permanent behaviour of moving towards betterment and perfection. *iġġġ* could be defined as “a state of constant endeavour towards comprehensive excellence (*iġġġn*) within the frameworks of innovation, construction and reconstruction to attain *falah* according to *maqġġġid al-Sharġġġah*”³⁸.

Appropriately, a continuous process of *tarbiyyah* and *ta’dib* (education and virtuous impartment process) as part of the *Syuhada* characteristics must be prevalent within the benevolent society, the nature and the magnitude of which will determine the magnitude and the quality of the *ihsani* social capital and therefore, the nature of the good governance in a dynamic and integrated manner with causal relationship³⁹. This process can only constantly and naturally be done in the very basic branch of society, the family institution. Islamic moral and teachings place enormous emphasis on family value. Strong family institutions with Islamic values will ensure the social networking among the society members that help to establish the *ihsani* social capital⁴⁰. Substantially, within the framework of social capital, a society is being pushed to be substantially autonomous to self-determine its way forward, where the society would be actively involved in the centre along with the state.

³⁴ Malik, M., 2011. *Op. Cit.*, p. 269.

³⁵ Ibn Manzur, 1955. *Lisan al-‘Arab*, Dar Sadir, Beirut, , p. 3, vol. 335.

³⁶ Malik, M., 2011. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 269.

³⁷ Al-Zamili, Zuhayr Muhammad, 2009. *Manhajiyat al-Islaah fi al-Islaam* (Islamic Method of Reform). Amman: Daar al-ġġġam. pp. 335-7.

³⁸ Malik, M., 2011. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 237-8.

³⁹ Malik, M., 2011, *Op. Cit.*, p. 270.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

In comparing the benefits of the contemporary notion of social capital in education, social stability, lower crime rate, well-being of society, socioeconomic growth, health and others⁴¹, the *ihsani* social capital through its benevolent society would bring the well-being (*Maqasid al-Shari'ah*) of the community through its inclusive way. In the same manner, at the macro level, it will lead to the maximization of the economic well-being of individuals along with the promotion of social well-being and human life without neglecting the promotion of environmental sustainability.

Meanwhile, at the micro level, the interrelated elements of *tawhidic* worldview cultivate the norms of self-determination, including respect for life, self-respect, justice and equity, mutual respect, caring, sharing and integrity. Nevertheless, all these are derived together with the *telos* aim to be achieved and fuelled by the inner satisfaction of delivering the job of *Khalifah* (vicegerent) in this worldly life. On the other hand, achieving development and bringing harmony and stability to the community are among those 'righteous' deeds and part of the duty of the '*khalifah*'. Muslims as the '*Syuhada*' should have an active role in such field since it is part of what to be considered their accomplishment of the mission as the '*khalifah*'⁴².

Conclusion

In conclusion, social capital mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures. Social capital also prepares the stages for people to have their contribution towards the country development. The active participation of the people in social capital means in some ways contributing to the implementation of the active role of civil society. As for Muslims, the fully utilisation of this new sphere should be viewed from their ontological conviction.

The social networking that based on ontological awareness proposed in this paper is hoped to accumulate and create the *ihsani* culture in helping the participants to achieve *falah*. Appropriately, active and effective institutions, which are naturally the result of functioning individuals and benevolent society, will determine the nature of *Khalifah* typology *vis-à-vis* the *ihsani* culture, which in turn will continuously regenerate the effectiveness of the individual's role. The integrated and comprehensive interdependent functioning of *ihsani* culture aiming to achieve the *falah* will increase the achievement of ideal governance and *vice versa*. The role of *ihsani* culture is akin to the role of 'manners' in maintaining democracy in America as coined by de Tocqueville⁴³. Manners in this subject has been defined as "the sum of moral and intellectual dispositions of men in society" to be the most important influence in maintaining American political institutions-more important than laws of physical circumstances. Thus, the proposed model is a dynamic model in which the system creates checks and balances to respond to the change in the *ihsani* social capital with the objective of keeping it at the maximum level possible.

This functioning element will indicate the real benchmark of social capital from Islamic ontological-based epistemology rather than the evaluation of mere institution or economic growth. In the same vein, the feasibility of such a social system within this paradigm is possible, with the effort and the continuous projections in forming the *Khalifah* milieu in the life of every individual, of functioning within the realm of benevolent society, and the system that enables it through its institutions. While the element of *ihsan* as an ontological-inspired motivation for Muslim individuals will motivate towards the cultivation of pro-active role of civil society with the spirit of 'individual empowerment'. Furthermore, with the holistic articulation *ihsan*, the aforementioned *Ihsani* social capital which aiming the well-being of the society could be attained.

⁴¹ Putnam, R., 2002. *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*. Oxford University Press.

⁴² Malik, M., 2011. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 266 & 274.

⁴³ De Tocqueville, Alexis, 2005. *Selections from Democracy in America*. The Collector's Library of Essential Thinkers. pp. 348-53.