

A Quest For Islamic Paradigm: Towards The Production Of Islamic Knowledge

By: Khairulyadi, MHSc

Lecturer of Sociology Departement Faculty Social and Political Science
Syiah Kuala University Banda Aceh

Abstract

This paper examines the deficiency of western paradigm in potraying human nature and thus proposes that there is a need for paradigmatic shifting if islamic methodology and knowledge is desired. While western based paradigm is helpful in underlining socially tangible context of human life, it fails to undestand human in its very nature. Those paradigms see human as, and confined to a mere bodily mundane creature but denying human intangible side, that human too is a spritual being. As a result, and due to differing principal and idiological standpoint, western paradigm is deemed inappropriate to grasp a full view of human nature as oppose to that of Islamic Tawhidic paradigm that sees human, by nature, as a material and non-material being. Hence, the Islamic paradigm is considered as an only paradigm applicable to, and suits the need of Islamic methodology in order to be able to produce Islamic knowledge.

Key Words: *Paradigm, Islamic Knowledge*

Introduction

This paper assumes that to produce Islamic knowledge is possible if and only if there exists Islamic methodology based on Islamic paradigm. This further signifies two hypothetical standpoints of the paper. First,

that the existing and established paradigm, such as positivism and constructivisme is fundametally seen insufficient and therefore deemed irrelevant to produce Islamic knowledge. Second, that a paradigmatic shifting is needed, and is a prinsipal pre-requisite, for

Islamic knowledge to be possible. The paper purports to answer two questions: firstly, why does it need a new paradigm in order to produce Islamic knowledge? Second, what is the paradigm upon which the production of Islamic knowledge is built?

In order to provide answer to the first research question, the paper shall draw attention to the insufficiency of two western paradigms namely Positivism and Constructivism. While the former is seen as a closed paradigm, the latter is simply seen as a too open paradigm. The two fail to understand the complexity of human very nature. Both are reductionism since they reduce human from its soul and confine human as a mere bodily creature. Likewise, to answers the second question, the paper shall discuss Islamic paradigm which is at variance with the positivistic and constructivistic paradigm. It is

considered as an only appropriate paradigm on which Islamic knowledge are based. At the end, the paper shall propose some philosophical foundations of Islamic methodology derived from Islamic paradigm as methods to produce Islamic knowledge.

Paradigm: a Definitional Framework

Literally, a paradigm is a typical example or model to be replicated or followed (Gordon (ed.), 1998.). Kuhn (1970) .understands paradigm is universally recognized scientific achievements that provide model for problems and solutions. It is based on one or more past scientific achievements that some scientific community acknowledged as supplying the foundation for its practices. Since paradigm is an example or a model from which spring particular coherent traditions of

scientific research, it is therefore often called as Meta-theory. Meta theory is theory about theory, or kind of research that is meant to research rather than to findings (Moten, 1990). For this reason, paradigm is also defined as very basic meta-theoretical assumptions. Meta theory assumptions refer to those that relate to the questions of appropriateness, consistency, and comprehensiveness of the theories used to explain the what, the how, and the why a particular phenomena understudy (Ragab, 1993).

Within the context of this paper, paradigm is understood in its simplest terms which is a pattern or framework that gives organization and direction to a given area of scientific investigation (Holt and Turner, 1972). Or in Guba and Lincoln's words, a paradigm is a basic set of beliefs, a set of assumptions that

serve as a touchstone in guiding activities. (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) A paradigm is therefore a community's perspective on the world, its set of beliefs and commitments because a paradigm guides a particular community's selection of problems, evaluation of data and advocacy of theory (Holt and Turner, 1972). In line with this notion, Islamic divine teaching as a general and fundamental guiding light of Muslim society is considered as a paradigm in itself

Insufficiency of Western-Based Paradigms

This part attempts to show that western paradigmatic methodology is incomplete and therefore not applicable to produce Islamic knowledge. Ismail Raji Al Faruqi *in* Bagader (1983) argues that there are at least three major justifications to prove this

insufficiency. The first is the denial of relevance to a priori data. All the data to study reality are reduced to the data of natural sciences. It must be observable, measurable by the sense, and isolable from one another. Therefore, to discover the sufficient cause of phenomena is enough by merely basing on the senses' observation. This denial then leads to the second insufficiency namely the false sense of objectivity. The data is the only available object to understand reality. These data are immune to the nature and characters of the observer. The data will speak for themselves. The data must be freed from all personal biases and prejudgment while it is not fully possible. Consequently, the whole reality therefore subject to explanation of these data. The third is that the western paradigm is personalist in its nature. This implies that western paradigm separates the

humanities from the knowledge they produced. The concern and application of knowledge becomes utterly personal and individualistic.

Furthermore, western paradigm, in the the process of its development has absorbed the forces of time and space, projecting the western worldview that is, being instrisically materialistic, is based on immidiate gains than long term ethical utility. The standpoint of western paradigm was resulted and derived from western experiences. western thinkers also have given no ample attention to other experiences and and theoritcal framework. (Farooqi, 1994).

It is not an exaggeration to argue that by western paradigm, it may lead to the intellectual advancement in the sense that knowledge is produced only for

the sake of knowledge. It never goes beyond it, however. It falls short in maturing self and spiritual development. This is to say, by basing merely on sensory data, it produces an imbalanced growth between the mind and the soul and fragmentation of the self and knowledge. Western theoretical construct and paradigms also failed to comprehend, appreciate the ethos of nonwestern, third world society of particular. It has its distinct values, norms, ethos and worldview which is hardly applicable to non western socio-cultural environment. Fail to notice this will bear consequence on, and result in, a contradiction and distorted view of social realities. (Farooqui, 1994)

To complicate the discussion, the attention now shall be paid to see in particular the insufficiency of western paradigms by focusing on

two paradigms namely Positivism and Constructivism.

Positivistic Paradigm

Positivism is a rationalistic and empiricist philosophy. The underlying assumptions of positivism are that the social reality can be studied and analyzed in the same way as the natural world. Thus, the ways proposed to study the world reality is a method which is value free according to which the explanations of causal nature can be provided.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1991), the basic system of positivism is rooted the belief that there exists a reality that is governed by absolute natural laws. The thing to be done is to discover what is the true reality and how is it working by using the sensory data. The ultimate aim of science therefore is to predict

and control natural phenomena. it implies a generalization that problems, situations, circumstances are replaceable since they are treated as timeless and context-less.

Lincoln and Guba (1991), further summarize five underlying assumptions upon which positivism rests, as follows:

- An ontological assumption of a single, tangible reality that can be broken apart into splices capable of being studied independently: the whole simply the sum of its parts.
- An epistemology assumption about the possibility of separation of the observer from the observed, the knower from the known.
- As assumption of the temporal and contextual independence of

observations, so that what is true at one time and place may under appropriate circumstances such as sample also be true at another time and place.

- An assumption of linear causality: there are no effects without causes and no causes without effects.
- An axiology assumption of value freedom that is that the methodology guarantees that the result of an inquiry are essentially free from the influence of any value system.

In the light of these assumptions, we may see some shortcoming of this positivistic paradigm . it prevents from being open paradigm. For the data is given a too much room to determine reality. It ignores the psychological and social

influences on certain data. This is to say that, the positivistic paradigm imposes limitations on the researchers to merely pay attention to the data alone. It has nothing to do with personal biases and religious values since the data are the only source for getting to know reality as it is. In positivistic methods, all variables are controlled consciously. There is no place for interaction between the researchers and the participant. Consequently, this prevents the positivistic paradigm and all related research methods from being open. Therefore, there will be no transformation for human since transformation is hindered within the rigidity of its methods. Transformation is prevented consciously and scientifically by statistical and manipulation data (Lincoln and Guba, 1991). Bagader, (1989) furthermore, views that this paradigm thwarts the efforts to understand humanity and to

improve human condition). In nutshell, the more detached the researchers are from the data collected, the better off she or he is since interaction with the data might affects the results (Zahra, 2011)

Constructivistic Paradigm

Constructivism is considered as a less rigid paradigm. It has the potential for bringing more rooms for transformations and may pave the way to understand the complexity of social reality.

Guba and Lincoln (1991) identify four basic assumptions of the constructive paradigm, those are as follows:

- An ontological assumption of multiple, constructed and holistic reality: reality exists in the form of multiple mental constructions.
- An epistemological assumption about the

knower and the known as interactive and inseparable

- An assumption of temporal and context dependence: only time and context bound, working hypotheses and ideographic statements are possible
- As assumption of causality and that all entities are in state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects

From the above point, we can clearly see that this paradigm is at conflict against positivistic paradigm. According to this paradigm, reality is relative. It exists in the form of multiple mental constructions, which is socially and experientially constructed. Their forms and contents are dependent on the persons who hold them. For this

reason, perceptions of reality are liable to change during the process of the study.

Because of this relativity, this paradigm thus rejects the notion of an objective reality and holds a subjective position instead. It takes the position that the researchers' goals is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge rather than to see reality as it is since the knower and the known are integrated part within the process of inquiry. In short, this signifies that to understand a concept simply means to make sense of the world, to understand it.

Furthermore, constructivism paradigm is a holistic approach. For its aim is to understand phenomena as whole. It looks for the unifying nature of particular settings. This holistic approach implies that the whole is merely as a complex system. It also implies

that a description and understanding of a person's social environment or an organization's political context is essential for overall understanding of what is observed. Thus, it paves the way to a greater attention to settings, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context. What to be done is to seek the essence of the life of the participant, to sum up and to find a central unifying principle. In nutshell, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1991), Constructivist researcher sets out to understand the situation and describe it, making no attempt to manipulate, control or eliminate situational variables or any development as it occurs, but accepting the complexity of changing situation.

Islamic paradigm

Now the discussion shall be directed to the characteristics of Islamic paradigm and how it differs with those two western

paradigms. It has been noted that positivistic in its stance is objective, based on a priori data, and individualistic. At the same time, it has also been clear that this paradigm seems to be sort of closed paradigm since it is too much relying on the data rather than the inter-play between the data and the observers and its social circumstances. Here I would like to sum up another viewpoint on its insufficiency to bring about good to human as far as human nature as material and non-material creature is concerned and to see as to why it is inappropriate to be acceptable to produce Islamic knowledge.

To begin with, Positivistic has created fragmented knowledge through its secular and one-dimensional epistemology stance. What is not tangible and visible for them is not worth researching and studying. It simply does not exist unless it could be proved

otherwise through the sensory data. As far as there are no sensory data available to prove it, it would remain the same and cannot be a subject matter of study. It is simply beyond the reality. Thus, this paradigm is actually divided and fragmented the sacred that lies inside human, and it remains invisible, from the profound- the secular that visible outside. The rational is that they have to be practical and worldly. For this reason, positivist paradigm is actually at loss by fragmenting between the inner and the outer based on assumption that human is embodied two different deives; body and soul. Therefore, the more they feel fragmented the more the feel pain of separation with their inner selves (Zahra, 2011).

Furthermore, dissatisfaction with positivism prepares the grounds for the emergence of

constructivistic paradigm. As aforementioned, this paradigm based on the interplay between researchers and participants. It is associated with subjectivity rather than with objectivity. Reality according to constructivist is subjective and socially constructed. That is to say, constructive believe that the nature of reality is relative, and therefore there is no objective reality out there: nothing is absolute: everything is relative. On the other hand, positivists see as objective and exists somewhere outside the research. Consequently, knowledge is associated with pure objectivity and absolutism.

This principle of subjectivity and objectivity is actually one among others principles that distinguishes constructivists from positivists. However, from Islamic point of view, both are sort of reductionism, though

constructivism reduces the scope of fragmentation and allowing for more humanistic methods of inquiry at the worldly level only. Even so, constructivism, to some extents, is seen more appropriate to be used to know reality since it allows different contexts and perspectives to be used. Because it is through this paradigm that issues related to the heart and the soul started to be acceptable, because the main assumption of constructivist is that the nature of reality is relative (Zahra, 2011). Some researchers have taken that to mean everything goes (Feyerabend, 1991). Then, constructivist is opening the room for more new paradigm to be in between that may lead to studies of spirituality if used in the right context (Zahra, 2011). But still, it is not sufficient to be used to produce Islamic knowledge for in Islam the truth is fixed and rigid in the sense that it is acceptable for all times and places. The

reality is fixed, what is remaining is the ways to arrive at those realities.

Having arrived at his point, the paper shall now turn the discussion on the Islamic paradigm that provides foundations for the methods to produce Islamic knowledge. To begin the discussion, in order to know the Islamic paradigm it is important to understand first the nature of human. In Islam human are *Khilafah*. *Khilafah* is a principle that man is the vicegerent of Allah on earth. God has place the universe at man's disposal. For this reason, Islam considers human as both the players as well as the recipients, the producer and not as merely a customer of knowledge. Human is therefore given the honor and favor, the huge amount of ability and potentiality for the purpose of humanizing the earth and improving life. Allah says:

We have honored the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of our creation” (Al Israa: 70).

In another verse there is plainly asserted that man was created to operate as the vicegerent, the trust keeper and the co-worker of God on the earth. Allah says:

*“He it is who created for you all that is on the earth.” (Al-Baqarah:29).
“And it is He who has made generations after generations, replacing each other on the earth.” (Al-An’am:165) “O you believe, betray not Allah and His messenger, nor betray knowingly your Amanat, things entrusted to you, and all the duties which Allah has ordained for you.” (Al-Anfal:27).*

As *khalifah*, human is not merely seen as a material being. Rather,

they are a combination of material, observable, empirical aspects enriched with spiritual, non-empirical aspects namely soul. It is manifested in such a way that it is an integrated, indivisible unity. Therefore, all human activities must be understood as a concomitant of the dynamic interplay between these two entities. To understand human by only focusing one aspect and neglecting the other is simply a reduction. Humanity cannot be understood when it is reduced to just one of these two components.

Furthermore, another important point, which is of important to note down here, is the concept of *tawhid*. *Tawhid* is a principle of Oneness of God. In Islam, it is a starting point of the concepts of unity in all aspects of life, which means that it has to be subservience to the oneness of God. (al-Faruqi, 1982). The *tawhid*

worldview is considered as a landscape on which all human activities have to be based. It provides a unitary worldview of universe. It views realities as coherent whole, which cannot be understood in isolation (Farooqui, 2002).

Having explained this peculiarity character of human, and the worldview of *tawhid*, it is now plausible to proceed the discussion to see some basic principles of Islamic paradigm of methodology. Based on the above two landscapes, I would like to draw four main characteristics of Islamic paradigm in methodological study, as follows:

1. It is a holistic paradigm.

It is noted above that human is a material and non-material being. For this, there will always be an interaction between

these two aspects. Referred to Al-Quran, the interaction between the two has been happening since the earliest time before human beings were brought into the world. There was an agreement made between human's souls and their creator to proclaim that He is their One and Only Lord, their Sustainer. This event in fact signifies that the spiritual relationship between humanity and God has been established since the first day of humanity. Allah says:

“When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam—from their loins— their descendants, and made testify concerning themselves saying: Am I not our Lord (Who cherishes and sustains you?) the said Yea! We do testify. (This) Lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: we were never mindful, or lest ye should say: our fathers before us may have taken false gods, but we are their descendants after them wilt Thou destroy us because of the

deeds of men who were futile. (Al-Quran 7: 172-173)

Afterwards, Individuals human beings are then born and brought up in human environments. Two possibilities then would come up they may either keep spirituality (*fitrah*) unbroken or become forgetful of their God and His covenant and thus go astray. Nevertheless, for the good of human, God sends messengers with books containing prescriptions as to how to return, to remember the original covenant.

At this point, it is clear that Islam assigns a very high position to spiritual factors in determining human activities. Thus, we may conclude that in Islam there can be no knowledge of human activities and behavior that excludes the spiritual aspects of human beings. It is for this reason that Islam transcends the

dichotomy between mind and body, as well as between inner and outer, between spiritual and profane dimension. Both are an integrated entity, which cannot be understood in isolation. As a result, there would be no dichotomy whatsoever between the inner and the outer because the two (the inner world of mind and soul, the outer world of matter) give rise to each other.

2. The Islamic paradigm is religious and rational.

It is both divine and realistic. What relates these conceptual two frameworks is divinity and humanity. These two aspects are intertwined. The divine, the spiritual, the religious, the eternal, the constant, the absolute and the ideal on one side, and the human, the material, the rational, the temporary, the mutable, the relative and the actual at the other side are two entity from the same

coin. Both are intimately interwoven in the construction of Islamic knowledge. These two are working together to create one conclusion. While the divine to provide ground for spiritual level, the humanity, the reason, is to provide ground for material level. Although they are working at different levels, they are working toward one ultimate goal. To understand the two in isolation will damage the unity, harmony and coherence of the Islamic *tawhidic* paradigm.

3. The principle of the unity of truth.

This principle holds that truth is a modality of God and is inseparable from Him. The existence of reality is simply coming from God. Therefore, God is its creator and ultimate cause. Its meaning and its values are at the same time derived from God will which is its ends and ultimate purpose. Its actuality has

no meaning other than its fulfillment or non-fulfillment of this value. By this, thus reality has to be studied within the context of the fulfillment or not fulfillment of values, within the modality of value-realization or value violation. This signifies that outside that modality, reality is nothing at all. As consequence, it is worthless to seek to establish knowledge of human reality without acknowledging what that reality ought to be. Any investigation of human reality must therefore lead to this the notion of “ought to be” since truth is one and belongs to God.

4. The Principle of Ummatism

This is the principle of universality of Islamic knowledge. (Al-faruqi, bagader) The entire universe has been created by Allah SWT. His glory and mercy permeates all manifestations of reality. Nothing moves and

develops out of God's knowledge. The laws of Allah govern this universe. It is an ordered universe. All its pieces are finely tuned to the ultimate reality. And it is a purposeful universe with an underlying moral intent therein. That is why He exhorts man to study, probe and investigate each segment of reality to discern His Signs. In His mercy, he has made the vast treasure of energy and resource lying there accessible to human being and beneficial to his needs. Al-Quran says: *Allah is creator of All things and he is the Guardian and disposer of all affairs.* (az-Zumar,39:6). Due to this Islam does not entertain the ideas of personal values, which is not defined within *ummic* terms. Knowledge must bring about good to the ummah and the pupation of the world.

A Methodology Based on Islamic Paradigm.

Having discussed on the issue on the Islamic paradigm, the paper now shall turn the discussion as to what is the nature of Islamic methodology. Derived from the above Islamic paradigm, here are some general characters of Islamic methods to produce Islamic knowledge should have.

- It has to turn the manifestation of reality as a purposeful universe designed with a moral intent. This manifestation has to be manifested to bring about transformation towards good, towards positive change to all humankind. At the same time, it has to draw all these positive changes at all levels -the personal, the social and spiritual and unite them into one coherent whole.

- The method has to be an attempt to link together the parts of reality into the whole. It should seek the pieces of reality into the total design. The assumption is that the individual is merely parts of the cosmic order; therefore, individuals' truth is a reflection of the cosmic truth. In fact, it subserves the intent and design of creator. Since the truth is just one, then the reality must be united as one, too. Hence, an event alone is meaningless unless it is linked to the whole. By doing so, it can reduce the fragmentation of knowledge from the individual self, society and therefore can eventually produce Islamic holistic knowledge which aims at transforming individuality and society.
- It is a mission to seek to find a way to the truth, not merely an acquisition of knowledge process. In other words, it assigns a purpose to the acquisition of knowledge to seek the reality, to recognize Allah and promote the good to humanity. Therefore, it should not be directed to be harmful to the social and moral fabric of the humanity.
- It must be able to transcend the soul, bringing them to the knowledge of the unity of the natural, human and the divine principle under the realization of the unity of God's knowledge. By this, it can eventually transcend the material to the spiritual level.

Conclusions

Western based paradigm is helpful in underlining socially tangible context of the complexity of human life, but fails to understand human in its very nature, that human are seen as, and confined to a bodily socially tangible mundane creature but denying human intangible side, that human too is a spritual being. While the positivistic paradigm is a closed paradigm, whereby transformation is prevented consciously, constructivist paradigm are considered too open a in that because they understand reality as relative in the sense it depends on its contexts.

As a result, and due to differing principal and idiological standpoint, western paradigm is deemed inaproprite to grasp a full view of human nature as oppose to that of islamic tawhidic paradigm that sees human, by nature, as a material and non-

material being. Hence, the Islamic paradigm is considered as an only paradigm applicable to, and suits the need of Islamic methodology in order to be able to produce Islamic knowledge.

References

AL-FARUQI, I. R. *Al-Taubid, its Implication for Thought and Life*. Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 1982.

-----, "Islamizing the Social Sciences" In *Islam and Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Abubaker A. Bagader. Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1983.

AL-ZEERA, ZAHRA, *Wholeness and Holiness in Education: An Islamic Perspective*. Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2001.

BAGADER. ABUBAKER A., (Ed). *Islam and Sociological Perspectives*. Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1983.

FAROOQUI, JAMIL, *Towards an Islamic Sociology*. Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2002.

- , Ethnocentric Trends in Sociology: A Critical Review.” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Science*. (11:2), 1994.
- FEYERABEND, P. K., *Three Dialogues on Knowledge*, Cambridge : Basic Blackwell, 1991.
- GUBA, EGON, G., & LINCOLN, YVONNA, S., *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989.
- , “., *Effective Evaluation*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 1991
- HOLT,T., AND TURNER, J. E. *The Methodological Comperative Research*. New York: Free Press. 1972.
- KUHN, THOMAS, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- MARSHAL, GORDON (ed), *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. New York : Oxford University Press, 1998.
- MOTEN A. R., *Contemporary Political Analysis*. Mimeo: Department of Political Science, Bayero university, 1999.
- RAGAB, IBRAHIM, A., Islamic Perspective on Theory Building in The Social Sciences.” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Science*. (10:1), 1993.

