



A Different Reviewing of Islamic Social Sciences: The Field of Concepts

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 08 October 2024 Received in revised form: 10 December 2024 Accepted: 15 December 2024 Published online: 21 December 2024</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Concepts, Fields of science, Ijtihad, Islamic social sciences, Western social sciences.</i></p> <p>Cite this article: Hosseinzadeh Yazdi, M. (2024). A Different Reviewing of Islamic Social Sciences: The Field of Concepts. <i>Journal of Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers</i>, 14(4): 41-61. https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2025.386651.1750</p>	<p>What we call science encompasses various contexts. The distinction between Islamic and Western social sciences shows itself in various contexts of science. To fully comprehend these differences, it is essential to systematically examine all scientific contexts, as neglecting any area can hinder the recognition of these distinctions and obstruct alternative frameworks for scientific development. In the realm of social sciences, at least 12 contexts can be identified through reflection and induction: description, discovery, justification (methodology), hypothesis acceptance, understanding, explanation, prediction, object of study, application, normativity, and concepts. This article focuses specifically on the conceptual context to explore the differences between Islamic and Western social sciences in this domain. The findings suggest that the divergence in conceptual approaches stems from foundational differences in worldview. Concepts serve as lenses through which the world is understood, and each scientific tradition organizes its theories and representations of reality based on these conceptual frameworks. In Islamic social sciences, concepts are not reconstructed; rather, they are imbued with intrinsic value rooted in Islamic Thought. Understanding these concepts in contrast to their Western counterparts necessitates Ijtihad (independent reasoning), as the process involves uncovering meanings that align with Islamic principles.</p>



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1. Introduction

Advocates of Islamic social sciences often define their discipline in contrast to Western social sciences, highlighting numerous differences between the two. Understanding these differences requires a comprehensive exploration of the various dimensions of science. For researchers aspiring to develop alternative scientific paradigms, reflecting on these dimensions is essential. Through reflection and induction, at least 12 dimensions of science can be identified: description, discovery, justification (methodology), hypothesis acceptance, understanding, explanation, prediction, object of study, application, normativity and concepts. However, it is important to note that while these dimensions can be distinguished analytically, they are deeply interwoven in practice, influencing and being influenced by one another.

This study focuses on the conceptual dimension of science. Concepts serve as the foundational building blocks of theories. A concept is an idea expressed through symbols or words. In natural sciences, concepts are often represented symbolically (e.g., formulas), whereas in social sciences, they are primarily articulated through language. Each scientific discipline has its own unique set of concepts. This paper examines whether there are conceptual differences between Islamic and Western social sciences and, if so, what those differences entail.

2. Methodology

The term "science" carries multiple meanings—ranging from a broad definition encompassing all forms of knowledge (both intuitive and acquired) to a narrower definition confined to empirical disciplines. In this study, "science" refers specifically to academic fields and disciplines such as psychology, economics, and sociology. The analysis focuses on two aspects of concepts: 1. Concepts used to describe the objects of social sciences: This aspect is not the focus of this study as the differences between Islamic and Western social sciences in this regard are relatively clear. 2. Concepts constructed within the discipline itself: These are the theoretical constructs developed by scholars (e.g., sociological concepts). The second aspect forms the core of this research. It is plausible that different societies produce distinct concepts; however, a unified scientific framework may use shared concepts to represent this diversity. Risjord explains that scientific concepts differ from everyday concepts: while everyday concepts are used by individuals within a society (e.g., "family"), scientific concepts (e.g., "atom" or "inflation") are constructed to explain phenomena. Empiricist approaches view the relationship between technical language in science and everyday language as analogous to the relationship between theory and observation. (Risjord, 2014:34).

3. Findings

If we accept the epistemological naturalist perspective on concept formation in social sciences while rejecting positivist views, it becomes evident that concepts are inherently theory-laden—or more precisely, paradigm-laden—when foundational principles and worldviews differ. This study does not rely solely on the positions of thinkers like Popper or Kuhn but assumes that social science concepts derive their content from external influences such as theories, paradigms, or worldviews.

For example: If we acknowledge that theories influence concept formation but deny that foundational worldviews play a role—and further assume that theories in Islamic and Western social sciences are nearly identical—it would be illogical to claim significant conceptual differences between them.

Conversely, interpretivist approaches suggest that many categories in social sciences are not discovered but constructed. Root explains that if methods for collecting and analyzing anthropological or sociological data

were different—or nonexistent—the categories used to describe people (e.g., roles, ideologies) would also differ.

With interpretivism or acceptance of theoretical diversity, an Islamic social scientist might ask: What concepts does Islam use to approach society? How does it categorize the social world? What relationships does it emphasize? Since Islamic social sciences operate within distinct epistemological foundations rooted in Islamic teachings (e.g., Qur'an and Hadith), their conceptual frameworks differ fundamentally from those in Western traditions.

For instance, while terms like "family" or "marriage" may appear similar across traditions due to linguistic overlap, their meanings diverge significantly. In Islam, these terms reflect relationships grounded in divine principles rather than mere contractual arrangements.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore conceptual differences between Islamic and Western social sciences. It found that scientific concepts are not directly observable but derive their meaning from underlying theories or paradigms. Two broad perspectives exist regarding conceptual formation in social sciences:

1. Epistemological naturalism, which equates social science concepts with those in natural sciences;
2. Interpretivism, which emphasizes the constructed nature of social science categories.

If we accept interpretivism or acknowledge the influence of paradigms on concept formation, significant differences between Islamic and Western social sciences become apparent. Concepts within Islamic social sciences are shaped by Islamic values, principles, and worldviews—providing a unique framework for understanding and organizing society. For example: Concepts derived from Qur'anic teachings offer an alternative lens for categorizing societal phenomena. Certain Western constructs may lack legitimacy within an Islamic framework due to their incompatibility with Islamic epistemology.

Ultimately, Islamic social scientists possess a rich repository of authentic concepts that enable them to interpret social realities through an Islamic lens while maintaining coherence with their foundational worldview.

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