

Islamization of knowledge: Views of AbdulHamid AbuSulayman

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Abstract: AbdulHamid AbuSulayman wields an enormous influence on modern Islamic thinking. He held many positions in Islamic organisations world over. As a Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia, he laid solid foundation for the realization of Islamization of knowledge. Based upon personal familiarity with the author and indeed upon his numerous writings, this study analyzes AbuSulayman’s views on Islamization of knowledge which has not received scholarly attention it deserves. The study found that AbuSulayman was an activist as well as a theorist. He was a contemporary of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and helped develop the *Workplan* for Islamization of knowledge. Subsequently, he revised the plan and emphasized that while infusion of Islamic norms and values remain important, the major importance must be assigned to the development and reconstruction of the traditional Islamic methodology for the project of Islamization of knowledge to bear fruit.

Keywords: AbdulHamid AbuSulayman, Islamization of knowledge, Islamic methodology, Islamic thought, Ismail al-Faruqi.

Introduction

The book *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* was authored by Ismail al-Faruqi with assistance from several of his colleagues and was published in 1982. It goes unnoticed to many, however, that the book was thoroughly revised and expanded by AbdulHamid AbuSulayman and published in 1989. The revised edition incorporated “*some important modifications and additional concepts and ideas...*” The new edition offers greater understanding of the intellectual issues facing the Ummah and the Muslim scholars—not in the field of education but foremost in thought and methodology” (AbuSulayman, 1989: xv).

This article argues that the existing literature on Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) has failed to point out the departure of the IOK movement from a mere educational reform to the reform of the methodology of Islamic thought. The

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article explains the new movement from the perspective of AbuSulayman's understanding of IOK in order to put the discourse on IOK in its proper perspective.

AbdulHamid AbuSulayman: A brief profile

AbdulHamid AbuSulayman is one of the famous social thinkers and leaders of the Muslim ummah. AbuSulayman was born in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. He completed his bachelor (B.A, Commerce) and master (M.A, Political Science) degrees from University of Cairo in 1959 and 1963 respectively. In 1973, he earned his PhD in International Relations from the University of Pennsylvania, USA. AbuSulayman began his professional career as the Secretary of State Planning Committee, Saudi Arabia in 1963 which he left after two years. Thereafter, he joined and established various organizations and put his heart and soul in seeing these organizations prosper.

AbuSulayman was the Secretary General of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) for seven years (1973-79) and the Chairman of Department of Political Science at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, for two years (1982 -84). He is the founding member of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS, 1972), and its former President (1985-87). He also served as the Rector of the International Islamic University (IIUM) for ten years,(1989-1999) and succeeded in transforming a humble undergraduate university to a world class university on a new campus in Kuala Lumpur that is considered a landmark in functional modern Islamic architecture and scholarship. As a token of recognition, the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) conferred upon him the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

AbuSulayman is very much concerned about the current deplorable situation of Muslim ummah. He, therefore, emphasizes the recovery of what is termed the Qur'anic worldview. He contends that a close adherence to the principles of the Qur'an played a key role in galvanising the intensely God-conscious followers of Islam to achieve the successes that they once did. The rejuvenation of Islamic identity through this Qur'anic worldview is the key to a future healthy and viable development of Muslim societies. This message is contained in almost all of his numerous influential works including: *The Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Islamic Methodology and Thought* (1987); *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (1987); *Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity* (2003); *Revitalizing Higher Education in the Muslim World* (2007) as well as several books and papers in Arabic. AbuSulayman has also

delivered numerous papers and lectures and has been instrumental in organizing many international symposia, conferences and seminars.

Islamization of knowledge

For a clearer comprehension of Islamization of Knowledge, a thorough exploration into both the 1982 and 1989 editions of the *Workplan* is imperative. One of the most important reasons to initiate the Islamization of Knowledge movement is the realisation of the need to address the root cause of the decline of the Muslim *Ummah*. The 1982 edition of the *Workplan* identified the root cause of the decline as the educational dualism - traditional religious and modern Western education in the Muslim world. Al-Faruqi wanted to see the *Ummah* as the *Khayr al-Ummah* to lead mankind to the straight path (*Sirat al-Mustaqim*) of happiness, prosperity, and development. To achieve the goal of development of the *Ummah*, he argued for the integration of the two systems of education. For this purpose, al-Faruqi presented, as a strategy, his idea of Islamization of Knowledge and the Work Plan.

AbuSulayman, indeed, maintains this stand in the 1989 revised edition. However, differing with al-Faruqi, he argues that the root cause lies basically in the stagnant nature of Islamic thought and its methodology. AbuSulayman argues that the *Ummah* achieved unparalleled development in the past due to the particular methodology developed for Islamic thought which led the *Ummah* to play the role of leadership for mankind. According to AbuSulayman, central to the particular methodology was the proper reading of the fundamental texts of Islam - the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and their interpretation in time-space context. The method enabled the universal teachings of Islam to be clearly distinguished from their specific applications. AbuSulayman questions: why is the Muslim *Ummah* underdeveloped despite having the same fundamental texts of Islam?

AbuSulayman has argued that the methodology developed and applied by earlier scholars of Islam was neither reformed nor further developed during the subsequent centuries which has, in fact, caused stagnation in Islamic thought and resulted in the decline of the *Ummah*. The decline in methodology caused decline in Islamic thought and decline in Islamic thought caused the decline of the *Ummah*. He, therefore, argued in the revised edition of *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (1989) that Islamization of Knowledge has to be seen in this context of development of methodology, Islamic thought and the *Ummah* in the context of time and space. AbuSulayman maintains that the Islamic thought cannot be developed until and unless there is an assessment and reformulation of methodology of Islamic thought. Hence, he

argues that this whole process of change and reformulation of methodology and development of Islamic thought requires a change and reformulation of educational system in the Muslim world. This whole process of change and development in knowledge, methodology, and education is termed Islamization of Knowledge.

The link between Islamic thought, its methodology and IOK

A comparison of the two editions of the *General Principles and Work Plan* begs the questions such as: what are those important modifications and additional concepts and ideas presented in the second edition? And, what was the need to add these new concepts and ideas to the issue of Islamization of Knowledge? A careful study of these new ideas and concepts reveals the fact that the issue of Islamization of Knowledge, for AbuSulayman, is not an isolated educational or academic issue. Rather it is integral to another important issue which is the methodology of Islamic thought.

It appears that the conceptualisation was developed during his doctoral program on Islamic theory of International Relations which was published in 1987. In this study, AbuSulayman sets the debate in a broader perspective of Islamic thought. According to him, most of the classical as well as contemporary Muslim jurists and thinkers overlooked some important dimensions of Islamic methodology such as the empirical and time-space dimensions and their relation to the structure and application of classical Muslim methodology (AbySulayman, 1993: 87). Advocating the need for a fresh look into traditional Islamic methodology, he argues that the substance and the structure of social institutions always change according to time-space context. The substance and the structure of a given social institutions in a specific historical context and cultural setting reflect the need and the rationale of a specific society. With the progression of time and the change of space, the substance and structure of social institutions should also change. There are always some realities and practicalities which call for workable alternatives. Therefore, it is necessary to revise the methodological structure.

To AbuSulayman, much has been said about the content of Islamic thought and its relevance or irrelevance. What is lacking is the issue of methodology and the need for its reform and improvement due to time-space context. He believes that this issue has not been addressed properly. "This has led to the borrowing of foreign ideas, ideologies and institutions, all of which have apparently failed to revitalize Muslim thought" (AbuSulayman, 1993: 68). Therefore, there is an urgent need to revise the traditional methodology "with intellectual reform,

especially with the development of disciplined and systematic methodology for thought based on rational principles and approaches that incorporate Islamic objectives” (AbuSulayman, 1993: xiii).

Therefore, what is imperative is the reform of the traditional legalistic methodology in order to present an alternative Islamic paradigm of intellectual thought and practical solutions to the problems of the Muslim world. It is this realization that made Abu Sulayman to expand on al-Faruqi’s thought and included new methodological insights in the second edition of the *Work Plan*.

Methodology of Islamic thought

AbuSulayman has referred to the Islamic methodology as follows:

Classical Muslim methodology (*usul*) refers to the basic textual sources and methods used in producing Muslim attitudes in different spheres of life....These sources are the Qur’an, the Sunnah, *ijmā’*, and *ijtihād* (the use of human reason or ‘*aql*’ in the elaboration and interpretation of the *Shari’ah*). *Ijtihād* includes the fourth major source of Muslim thought, *qiyās* (analogy), along with other supplementary methods such as *istihsān* (juristic preference), *maslahah* or *masālih mursalah* (public interest), and ‘*urf*’ (customs of a particular society) (AbuSulayman, 1993: 65).

He argues that when the Muslim jurisprudence (*fiqh*) developed a methodology of its own to interpret and make deductions in line with the Shari’ah, the jurists, for example, included in it the *qiyas* (analogy) and *ijmā’* (consensus). The source material coupled with the methodology is called *usul* (sources and methods of Muslim jurisprudence). Some of the *usul* are: Sunnah, *ijmā’*, and *qiyas* (AbuSulayman, 1993: 2). According to him, the *usul* had included in its scope the whole life. He said: “*usul* takes the whole of human conduct as its field and is concerned with both the internal and the external affairs of the Muslim people. Classical Muslim methodology provides not only the research method for Muslim thought but also its source materials” (AbuSulayman, 1993: 63). But later on during subsequent centuries, the scope of Islamic methodology was confined to the study of *fiqh* alone. To clarify the role of *fiqh*, he elaborated the differences between *fiqh*, *usul al fiqh* and the *Shariah* saying:

The difference in meaning among *fiqh*, *usul al fiqh*, and the *Shariah* must be clarified. The Islamic *Shariah* is the Divine Will revealed to the Prophet pertaining to the conduct of human life in this world. *Usul al fiqh* is the science of deducing and extrapolating rules and injunctions from their sources in the data of revelation. *Fiqh* is the body of rules and

injunctions deduced from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* which contains the Divine Will as revealed to the Prophet (AbuSulayman, 1993: 5).

...*fiqh* should not be confused with sources of *fiqh* itself, that is, the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, which together constitute the *Shari'ah*. *Fiqh* represents the sum of jurisprudential interpretations, deductions, and opinions of the Muslim scholars, the 'ulama, and especially of those of the highest rank, the *mujtahidun*, who showed marked competence and independence of thought (AbuSulayman, 1993: 7).

The need for the improvement of the methodology of Islamic thought

In the beginning, scholars did provide systematic theorisation of methodology, but later on, it was not revised and improved. This is because:

[T]he sources and methods do not involve a systematic and comprehensive theorization. They merely constitute individual employment of the deductive method through the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* in order to handle specific issues and practices. This is the case because there already was a concrete social system, laid down by the Prophet, within which the jurists were satisfied to work (AbuSulayman, 1993: 9).

However, the time has changed and the context in which the traditional methodology was developed has changed as well. This requires the need for reforming the methodology but this "can never be achieved without reforming the educational system and the constitutional system, incorporating both Islamic goals and values with modern needs and functions" (AbuSulayman, 1993: 14-15). The most important point he emphasizes is that in the process of reform, the "Qur'an and the basic elements of the *Sunnah*" must "serve as the source and documentary materials, while works of *fiqh*, along with other works," should be taken "as secondary materials" (AbuSulayman, 1993: 18).

Secondly, one needs to realise that in the modern period, people work around the world "...armed with dynamic ideas and efficient methods based on an empirical and rational approach" (AbuSulayman, 1993: 56). However, Muslims demonstrate "the static and rigid...frame of mind which rested on textual deduction within the limits of the early Muslim model. Therefore, the Muslim's thinking had lost touch with reality, and they were incapable of regeneration and reorientation in the light of new developments and demands" (AbuSulayman, 1993: 56). Hence, according to AbuSulayman, the need is to think how can Muslims adapt themselves to new circumstances and make good use of new but alien ideas as well as classical ones. To him, to be relevant to our time means,

“Muslim intellectuals should fully realize that the problem of classical or traditional thought in modern times cannot be argued or understood in relation to any specific or detailed idea” (AbuSulayman, 1993: 61). The main contribution of AbuSulayman is that he elevated the problem “to the level of the methodology of generating ideas and solutions and the mechanism of classical Muslim thought in maintaining the social system” (AbuSulayman, 1993: 61). Accordingly, he said “the methodology consists of *usul*; and it is clear that Muslims have not re-examined these *usul* critically for the purpose of readjusting the Muslim approach and understanding of the modern world” (AbuSulayman, 1993: 61). He commented that the traditional methodology of Islamic thought lacks empirical and systematic approaches. The main approach of Islamic thought continues to be legalistic (AbuSulayman, 1993: 62). The consequence of this approach is that Muslim scholars fail to examine and re-examine their methodology. He said:

There are two additional shortcomings inherent in that methodology: the failure to gather empirical data and, concomitantly, the failure to employ a rigorously systematic approach... (AbuSulayman, 1993: 87).

From the very beginning of *usul*, we find Muslim jurists looking upon deduction from the texts of the Qur’an and the *Sunnah* as their mainstay, in acquiring and in maintaining the principles and particulars of the social system according to the *Shari’ah*, both in internal and external matters. They called this process *usul instinbat al fiqh* (principles for the deduction of legal rulings). In the physical sciences such as medicine, mathematics, and geography, however, Muslims drew on both text and reason. They were empirical and experimental, and applied both induction and deduction. Social sciences, such as political science, psychology, sociology, and social psychology were absent basically because of the absence of empiricism and the lack of the systematic induction and investigation of man, and his social nature and reality (AbuSulayman, 1993: 87).

AbuSulayman further argues that due to “the failure of the *Mu’tazilah* movement to deal properly with the question of reason [*‘aql*] and revelation [*wahy*] in an Islamic context..., they were unable to establish permanent basis for the evolution of a rational philosophy in Islam” (AbuSulayman, 1993: 89). This brought about the demise of empiricism and systematic investigation in the field of Islamic social studies.

This attitude is reflected in the traditional, orthodox educational system in which the text was emphasized, and not much attention was paid to developing any systematic rational knowledge pertaining to law and

social structure. This attitude, which does not really conform to the Qur'anic attitude concerning the humanly comprehensible (*shahadah*), was easily accepted by those who lived in practical isolation from the mainstream of society and its constantly changing situations, or who were either literalist, or interested in maintaining the status quo. The result was a lack of proper input and feedback into Muslim social studies and decision-making processes, and the absence of even the concept of organized social sciences (AbuSulayman, 1993: 88).

Due to above-mentioned reasons, a formalistic approach was developed “rather than a dynamic Islamic empirical” method.

Finally, he asserts that the lack of rigorous application of empirical method through both deduction and induction and also other methods of scientific research in the field of social sciences and other branches of knowledge resulted in grave errors and misunderstandings in the contemporary Islamic methodology (AbuSulayman, 1993: 89). In this modern period, Muslim intellectuals became either confused or follow the methods of the West without any critical examination. They assumed these methods are free from error because they were presented as “scientific.” According to AbuSulayman (1993: 89):

It is mainly under the influence of Western challenges, discoveries, and scientific methodology that Muslims have hastily reinterpreted their texts in the face of new realities. Nevertheless, they have failed to establish serious integrated studies and systematic research in the areas of law and the social sciences... At present the Muslim system of education still lacks originality in this direction and is only a poor imitation of an alien educational system.

So AbuSulayman argues for the realisation of and quick action on the reformulation of Islamic methodology of Islamic thought. The new Islamic methodology must be based on comprehensive systematisation along with the application of induction and deduction reflecting on the underlying universal values of Islamic worldviews and the empirical realities on the ground.

Muslim thinkers of the present have to achieve a clear, workable, and abstract framework of the Islamic social system, of the social sciences, and of their relationship to the external world (AbuSulayman, 1993: 93).

Contemporary Muslim thinkers and scholars should realize that ad hoc and causal reflections on the issues of Muslim social life and system are no longer enough. They have to create Islamic social and human

sciences, to systemize the goals and methods of their studies of Islamic life, to concern themselves in their studies with the facts of social life and with its nature and interactions as much as with Islamic texts and regulations, and to create and develop comprehensive inductive and deductive Islamic methodology (AbuSulayman, 1993: 94).

AbuSulayman on IOK

AbuSulayman views IOK along the line of the above mentioned approach to Islamic thought and methodology. He observes that in spite of all the negative implications of modern educational system, Muslim leaders and educationists still take interest in developing educational institutions in the Muslim world on modern Western lines, and feel proud that through these educational activities they would be able to contribute towards the educational progress of Muslims. But the approach has been causing and influencing Muslim students to become secular. He observes:

The teachers in Muslim universities do not possess the vision of Islam and, therefore, are not driven by its cause, is certainly the greatest calamity of Muslim education. Throughout the Muslim world, students enter the university equipped...with the little knowledge of Islam they acquired at home or in elementary or secondary school. Obviously, this constitutes no "vision" and no "cause". Ideologically,...student enters as a blank sheet...Obviously, he has no...vision....If he does not graduate a confirmed atheist, secularist, or communist, his view of Islam has receded to a realm of personal, subjective, and sentimental attachment to family and people (AbuSulayman, 1989: 8).

Need for the integration of the two educational systems

Like al-Faruqi and other Muslim scholars, AbuSulayman has also asserted the need for ending the dual educational system in the Muslim world and producing an integrated one. A number of issues must be considered to that end. Firstly, in a unified educational system, Islam must be the motivating and guiding force. Secondly, the knowledge of the Shari'ah must be made available to all members of the Ummah. Everybody must have a viable mastery of the sciences of the Shariah since it constitutes the norm or method of Islamic existence. Thirdly, the knowledge of Islam and of its civilisation should not be confined to the expert few. The vision of Islam, for him, is not meant for, nor needed by, the specialists alone. It is for all humans and is designed to elevate all those who possess it to a

higher level of existence. Fourth, Islam should be seen as the comprehensive way of life; the vision of which must be relevant to every human activity and to everyday endeavor irrespective of fields whether physical, social, economic, political, cultural or spiritual.

An Islamic vision cultivated in only one department or faculty would be a truncated [shortened] vision of Islam. It must be the guiding, determining, and first principle of every discipline, of every pursuit and of every human action (AbuSulayman, 1989: 17).

What is needed, therefore, is an educational system in which the curriculum of every department is based upon Islamic values, principles and objectives. Furthermore, a four year course on the principles of Islam as the essence of Islamic thought and civilization must be introduced as part of the “basic” or “core” program for all students, regardless of their field of specialization or profession (AbuSulayman, 1989: 17-18).

Scope of islamization

In the initial stage of the development of the concept of IOK, it was contended that it should address first the problems of social sciences. Hence, there emerged a misunderstanding that IOK is relevant to social sciences alone. However, AbuSulayman emphasizes that Islamization of Knowledge is equally relevant to all disciplines because it is necessary to recast all modern disciplines of knowledge from Islamic perspective.

To recast knowledge in the mold of Islam relates to the Islamic vision. It is necessary to Islamize knowledge, i.e., to redefine and re-order the data, to rethink the reasoning and relate the data to reevaluate the conclusions, to re-project the goals and to do so in such a way as to make the disciplines enrich the vision and serve the cause of Islam (AbuSulayman, 1989: 17-18).

Islamization of Knowledge is thus explained in different ways. Firstly, it represents a type of knowledge based upon revealed norms and ideals of the divine message. Secondly, it is related to all that is true, valuable, and precious in the legacy of the Ummah and the thought-content of its scholars and thinkers over the centuries. Thirdly, Islamization is a way and method to formulate a methodological, scientific, mental approach to the study of humanities, social sciences and applied sciences based on the values of Islam (AbuSulayman, 1989: 85).

IOK as the top priority of the Ummah

AbuSulayman considers the reformulation of modern knowledge, education, Islamic thought and methodology as the top priority agenda of the Muslim Ummah. But why? He explains:

There can be no doubt that the intellectual and methodological decline of the *Ummah* is the core of its malaise. The educational system is the breeding ground of the disease. Schools and colleges generate and perpetuate that self-estrangement from Islam, from its legacy, and from its style. The educational system is the laboratory where Muslim youth are kneaded and cut, where their consciousness is molded into a caricature of the West. Here, the Muslim's link with his past is severed; his natural curiosity to learn the legacy of his father's is stymied. Here, his willingness to touch base with his heritage and to spring toward creative representation of Islam is blunted with the doubts and the deviation the educational system has injected into every recess of his consciousness (AbuSulayman, 1989: 5).

Due to this, Islamization of Knowledge should be considered as first priority for the Muslim Ummah. He says:

The 'Islamization of Knowledge' is of fundamental importance and occupies foremost priority in actualizing 'Islamization'....Therefore, the 'Islamization of Knowledge' cannot be neglected nor can its priority be overlooked or buried beneath heavy pressures of political, economic, and military problems of the *Ummah* (AbuSulayman, 1989: 84).

But then the question is: who is responsible for Islamization? The religious scholars? The social scientists? The legal experts? A specialist group of scholars? The answer to all these questions is that the responsibility falls on the shoulder of the Ummah as a collective entity. As every Muslim individual bears the responsibility of a *Khalifah* (vicegerent), everyone is thus responsible to carry out Islamization in his own field and discipline. In this way, the individual responsibility turns into a collective duty. The double task of the Muslim experts and intellectual is that they must master the Islamic and Western sciences at a time.

Conclusion

Islamization of Knowledge has been a major intellectual movement to reorient the Muslim Ummah towards Islamic knowledge and heritage. However, scholars have

maintained different views about the core of Islamization. Islamil Raji al-Faruqi and AbdulHamid AbuSulayman are the top two pioneers in the field. This article has analyzed the views of AbuSulayman on Islamization of Knowledge based on the major book on the issue entitled *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* which was first published in 1982 and subsequently edited and expanded by AbuSulayman in 1989. In contrast to al-Faruqi's view of Islamization as infusing Islamic norms, values and explanations into the modern knowledge in order to address the problem of educational dualism in the Muslim world, AbuSulayman maintains that IOK must go beyond that and concentrate first and foremost on developing and reconstructing the traditional Islamic methodology of creating and inferring knowledge based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. The process must be comprehensive with a blend of traditional heritage and modern rational empirical sciences. In this, the very objective of the production of knowledge is universal in line with the *Tawhidic* ideals. Development of disciplinary knowledge in the form of textbooks remains part and parcel of Islamization, but to do that Muslim scholars have to master both Islamic and modern sciences.

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