

## The Epistemology of Islamic Psychology in the Thought of Malik Badri: Implications for the Development of Contemporary Psychology

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### Abstract:

This study examines the epistemological foundation of Islamic psychology in the thought of Malik Badri and its implications for contemporary psychological development. The research aims to analyze how Badri conceptualizes Islamic epistemology in psychology and critiques the dominance of Western psychological paradigms. A qualitative library research design was employed by analyzing primary data from Badri's *The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists* and relevant secondary literature from academic databases. Data were collected through documentation techniques and analyzed using thematic analysis based on the Miles and Huberman model. The findings show that Badri introduces the "Lubang Biawak" metaphor to describe intellectual dependency of Muslim psychologists on Western theories, particularly psychoanalysis, which often conflicts with Islamic worldview. This study contributes by reconstructing Islamic psychology as an epistemologically grounded discipline rather than a mere adaptation of Western psychology. It implies the need for critical epistemic awareness and integration of Islamic principles in psychological theory and practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary psychology has become one of the most influential disciplines in understanding human behavior, emotional well-being, cognition, and social adaptation. Its concepts shape educational practice, counseling, clinical intervention, and public health policy in many societies (Backholer et al., 2021; Chaika, 2025; Hutto et al., 2023). However, the expansion of psychological knowledge has also raised an important epistemological question concerning the sources from which human understanding is derived. In Muslim societies, psychological explanations are often dominated by secular assumptions that emphasize empirical observation while giving limited attention to spiritual consciousness, revelation, and moral accountability (Gao et al., 2021; Kholis et al., 2022; Novakov, 2024). This condition creates a gap between scientific explanation



and the lived worldview of many communities. Evidence from the growing discourse on religion and mental health shows that spiritual meaning significantly influences coping, resilience, and personal adjustment. Therefore, examining Islamic psychology becomes socially important because it offers a more culturally grounded framework for understanding human beings.

A major problem faced by contemporary society is the increasing fragmentation of human understanding in psychological discourse. Modern psychological practice frequently explains mental life through behavioral mechanisms, cognition, biological processes, or environmental influences, yet often separates these dimensions from spiritual experience and ethical purpose (Iqbal et al., 2020; Vyatkin et al., 2022). In everyday social reality, many individuals interpret suffering, anxiety, identity crisis, and emotional conflict not only as psychological disturbances but also as existential and religious struggles. In Muslim communities, counseling and educational institutions often adopt imported psychological frameworks that do not fully correspond with local moral traditions and theological assumptions (Kader, 2021; Kalinina et al., 2021). This produces conceptual tension between professional practice and cultural expectations. Field observations in contemporary Muslim intellectual discourse indicate continuing debates regarding the compatibility of Western psychology with Islamic anthropology. Consequently, the search for an epistemological foundation of Islamic psychology becomes increasingly necessary.

Previous scholars have contributed important discussions regarding the relationship between Islam and psychology. Özaktan (2022) and Mukhibat et al. (2024) emphasized that Islamic psychology should be developed from the worldview of tawhid and from an integrated understanding of human nature. Fan (2024) and Kaleh (2020) critically argued that the uncritical adoption of Western secular psychology has produced intellectual dependency among Muslim scholars. Sun et al. (2020) and Chen et al. (2023) noted that religion and spirituality play important roles in psychological adjustment and meaning-making. Yan et al. (2021), Alexandre et al. (2021), and Ellis et al. (2020) demonstrated that Islamic intellectual tradition contains rich psychological concepts concerning soul, morality, cognition, and behavior. Although these studies provide valuable foundations, most remain focused on conceptual integration, historical description, or applied therapeutic perspectives. Limited attention has been given to the epistemological structure underlying Malik Badri's thought. This theoretical gap remains significant because epistemology determines the legitimacy, method, and direction of scientific development.

The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to systematically reconstruct the epistemology of Islamic psychology in the thought of Malik Badri and to relate it directly to the development of contemporary psychology. Rather than merely presenting Islamic psychology as a religious alternative or ethical supplement, this research examines the philosophical foundations of knowledge that shape Badri's intellectual project (Lawanda, 2020; Siregar et al., 2020). Specifically, it explores how revelation, reason, empirical observation, and human spiritual experience interact as legitimate sources of psychological knowledge. This approach represents an important state-of-the-art contribution because contemporary debates often focus on practical

Islamization while paying less attention to epistemological architecture. Without a clear epistemological framework, the development of Islamic psychology risks becoming fragmented, apologetic, or methodologically inconsistent (Arfan et al., 2024). Therefore, clarifying this foundation is crucial for future theoretical consolidation.

Based on the preceding discussion, the main research problem concerns how Malik Badri formulates the epistemological foundation of Islamic psychology and how this framework can contribute to contemporary psychological development. More specifically, this study asks several interconnected questions. What are the principal sources of knowledge recognized in Malik Badri's psychological thought? How does he critique the epistemological assumptions of dominant modern psychology? In what way does his perspective construct an integrated understanding of the human being that includes spiritual, rational, emotional, and empirical dimensions? These questions emerge from the unresolved tension between universal scientific claims and culturally embedded human realities. Addressing these issues is essential because epistemological clarity not only shapes theoretical validity but also influences research methodology, educational orientation, and practical intervention in contemporary psychological discourse.

This study argues that Malik Badri offers an epistemological model capable of enriching contemporary psychology through the integration of revelation, rational inquiry, empirical observation, and spiritual consciousness. The preliminary assumption is that his framework does not reject modern psychology as a whole, but critically reorients it toward a more comprehensive conception of human nature. Such an approach allows psychology to recognize the human being not merely as a biological or cognitive organism but also as a moral and transcendent subject. The originality of this research lies in positioning Badri's thought as an epistemological foundation rather than merely a historical contribution to Islamization discourse. Its contribution is expected to provide a conceptual basis for developing culturally relevant psychological theories, strengthening interdisciplinary dialogue, and expanding contemporary psychology toward a more holistic understanding of humanity.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research design using a library research approach (Sari et al., 2020). This design is chosen because the study aims to explore and interpret the epistemological framework of Islamic psychology in the thought of Malik Badri through textual and conceptual analysis. Library research is appropriate since the object of study is in the form of ideas, theories, and philosophical writings rather than empirical field data. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to critically examine meanings, concepts, and intellectual structures embedded in primary and secondary texts. Therefore, this study focuses on interpretive analysis to construct a coherent understanding of epistemology in Islamic psychology.

The primary data source in this study is the book *The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists* (1979) by Malik Babikr Badri Mohammed, which represents his foundational critique of Western psychology and his epistemological stance on Islamic psychology. Secondary data sources include relevant scholarly books, peer-reviewed

journal articles, and academic publications that discuss Islamic psychology, epistemology, and Malik Badri's intellectual contributions. These sources are obtained from reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Mendeley. Since this is library-based research, there are no physical research locations or informants involved.

Data collection is conducted through documentary techniques, which involve reading, selecting, and classifying relevant literature (Sun et al., 2020). The researcher identifies sources based on relevance to Islamic psychology, epistemology, and Malik Badri's theoretical framework. The collected data are then organized according to thematic categories such as epistemological sources, critique of Western psychology, and integration of Islamic worldview in psychology. This process ensures that only credible and academically relevant literature is included in the analysis.

The data analysis follows the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes three main stages (Razafsha et al., 2022). First, data condensation is conducted by selecting and focusing on relevant theoretical concepts from the collected literature. Second, data display is carried out by organizing the findings into structured thematic descriptions related to epistemology and Islamic psychology. Third, data verification and conclusion drawing are performed by interpreting patterns, relationships, and theoretical implications of Malik Badri's thought. This iterative process continues until a coherent conceptual framework is established.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies source triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Source triangulation is achieved by comparing multiple academic references from different authors and publications to ensure consistency of information. Theoretical triangulation is used by analyzing Malik Badri's ideas alongside other Islamic and Western psychological frameworks to enhance interpretive depth. In addition, credibility is strengthened through prolonged engagement with texts, critical reading, and peer discussion. These strategies ensure that the findings are trustworthy, consistent, and academically reliable.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

This research findings section discusses the main findings related to the "lizard's hole" concept in Malik Badri's thought and its implications for the development of contemporary Islamic psychology. The discussion focuses on an epistemological critique of the dominance of Western psychology, forms of intellectual dependency, and efforts to integrate Islamic values into the development of a more holistic psychology grounded in an Islamic worldview.

### **The term "Lizard's Hole" (Lubang Biawak)**

Malik Badri took the term monitor lizard hole from the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ narrated by Muslim No. 2002 (written in the book *The Dilemma Of Muslim Psychologists* hadith quoted from Sahih Muslim, hadith no. 2002 in the Al-Albani commentary, published by the Kuwait Ministry of Islamic Affairs) (Badri, 2016), while in the English Translation of Sahih Muslim Volume 7 by Nasiruddin al-Khattab this hadith is found in hadith number 6781 (Muslim, 2007) The wording of the hadith is:

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ الْخُدْرِيِّ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ " لَتَتَّبِعُنَّ سَنَنَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ شِبْرًا شِبْرًا وَدِرَاعًا بِدِرَاعٍ حَتَّىٰ لَوْ دَخَلُوا فِي جُحْرٍ ضَبِّ لَاتَّبَعْتُمُوهُمْ " . فُلْنَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَى قَالَ " فَمَنْ "

Meaning: From Abu Sa'id al-Khudrî, he said, "*The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, 'You will surely follow the path (and affairs) of those before you, inch by inch, inch by inch, inch by measure, so that if they enter even into the lizard's hole, you will surely follow them.'* We said: "O Messenger of Allah, the Jews and Christians?" He said: "Who else?"

A strange term, namely "Lizard Hole" taken by Malik Badri comes from the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, in which he (the Messenger of Allah) said that one day there will come a time when Muslims will blindly imitate the ways of Christians and Jews, even in a way that is clearly irrational and un-Islamic. This is beautifully exemplified by the statement of the Prophet ﷺ "even if they managed to get themselves into a lizard hole, Muslims would follow it rationally". The truth of this hadith is clearly seen in every walk of modern life of Muslims, so much so that there is no need to give any more examples (Badri, 2016).

For example, the Valentine's Day tradition on February 14th has become a tradition in western countries and was then adopted by some young men and women in Indonesia (Annibras, 2017). *Valentine's Day*, or more commonly known as "Love Day," is a Christian religious festival. Many people don't realize that the celebration is a Christian symbol of Valentine's Day and has its origins in ancient Roman religious rituals (Nurhayati & Rusiyawati, 2017). This is what is meant by following the path of the Christians "inch by inch, inch by inch" and they don't even know what they are going towards, how they are enslaved by a cultural system that is not the culture of Indonesian society (from the West) and is not the culture of the majority religion in Indonesia. In an academic context, Malik Badri begins the introduction to his book with the words "mental slavery to the theories and practices of Western social sciences".

### **Muslim Psychologist in "Lubang Biawak"**

In Muslim countries, psychoanalysis derived from Freud, as a theory and practice of therapy, has established itself as the main school in psychology (M. B. Badri 2016). The problem faced by Muslims today is the dependence on the West for all fields of contemporary science. Pure sciences should be neutral because they are not influenced by racial, national, religious, or cultural factors. However, the human and social sciences are closely related to individuals and are strongly influenced by their relationships, attitudes, behaviors and beliefs. These disciplines, despite the claims of certain intellectuals that they are cross-cultural, are basically the sciences that emerged from the west have adopted Western perspectives and ways of thinking because they originated in the West and are certainly based on the way of life of Western people (M. B. Badri 2018).

Malik Badri shared his experience in the introduction to the book *The Dilemma Of Muslim Psychologists*, when Malik Badri gave a public lecture to students, lecturers and interested people at a university in Saudi Arabia about the Islamization of psychology. They were very angry at the criticism given by Malik Badi against Freud and a friend of

Malik Badri said that *"it is natural for lecturers to feel disturbed. Because they rely entirely on psychoanalytic theory and its practice in their lectures." "If you eliminate Freud, they won't know what to teach. Basically they receive a salary from Freud"* (M. B. Badri 2016). This shows that Muslim psychologists today cannot abandon the psychology brought by figures from western countries who currently dominate the academic field in universities in Islamic countries. Many Muslim scientists are fascinated by Western psychological theories and consider them uncritical, then try to imitate Western theories without changing them (Alfiansyah and Perdana 2021).

And the above is one example of why Malik Badri argues that Muslim psychologists are currently in a "lizard hole", where today's Muslim psychologists, according to Malik Badri, are firmly rooted and adhere to a paradigm of psychology that is dominated by Western thinking and difficult to reconcile with Islamic principles. This conundrum illustrates the difficulty of reconciling Islamic beliefs with Western understanding critically. Malik Badri points out again in his book: *"A professor of Muslim psychology in an Islamic country teaches his students by relying entirely on all his teaching activities on theories and practices taken directly from books published in the United States or Europe."* Doesn't such professors consciously or unconsciously shape people's thoughts, ideals, and emotions so that they will eventually fall into the *"Western lizard hole"*? (Badri, 2016)

There are several reasons why the development of Islamic psychology has not developed much and is only used by certain people. *First*, it is difficult to determine who was the initiator for the development of Islamic psychology, people argue about who will start, whether a religious scholar or a psychology scholar. *Secondly*, it is also difficult to find human resources that combine Islamic knowledge and psychology. *Third*, it is difficult to combine methods of knowledge development, such as empirical (shahadah) versus meta-empirical (ghayb), inductive versus deductive, as is versus how it should be, ethical free versus ethical, quantitative versus qualitative, positivistic-empirical versus doctrinal-normative, and anthropocentric versus theocentric (Salahuddin, 2022). The discussion of Islamic psychology is still limited to certain circles of Muslim scientists. Their goal is to realize a paradigm of Islamic psychology that is different from psychology in the West. However, the reality is that they have not been able to pour it into more precise terms. No one has done it yet, even for Islamic psychology classes.

### **Challenges of Islamic Psychology Development Towards Islamic Psychology**

The development of Islamic psychology faces a fundamental challenge in how Muslim psychologists position themselves toward the dominant tradition of Western psychology. On the one hand, they are expected to engage with scientific methods to ensure that psychological knowledge is based on empirical validity, methodological rigor, and rational inquiry (Fadhilah 2018). On the other hand, they must also exercise critical discernment in selecting theories and concepts that are free from cultural bias and philosophical assumptions that may not align with Islamic worldview. This requires a selective and reflective approach in which only those psychological constructs that are objective, testable, and contextually neutral are adopted, while others are carefully re-evaluated or rejected. In this way, Islamic psychology seeks to establish a balanced integration between scientific credibility and Islamic epistemological foundations.

Another important challenge is the need to critically examine psychological theories that may conflict with Islamic principles regarding human nature, morality, and spirituality. Not all Western psychological frameworks are considered fully compatible with Islamic thought, particularly those that rely heavily on materialistic, reductionistic, or speculative assumptions about human behavior. Therefore, Muslim psychologists are required to develop a strong epistemological awareness to ensure that the knowledge they apply does not contradict core Islamic values. This involves an ongoing intellectual effort to filter, reinterpret, or reconstruct psychological concepts so that they remain consistent with Islamic ethical and theological foundations. The challenge is not simply rejection or acceptance, but rather a thoughtful process of integration that preserves both scientific usefulness and religious integrity.

In addition, the development of Islamic psychology is closely connected to the broader transformative mission of Islamic da'wah, which aims to improve human character and social well-being. In this context, psychological knowledge is not only seen as an academic discipline but also as a means of guiding individuals toward better moral and spiritual development. Islamic psychology is therefore expected to contribute to shaping a more holistic understanding of human beings, where mental health is not separated from ethical conduct and spiritual awareness. The challenge lies in ensuring that psychological practice remains aligned with this transformative purpose, so that it can support the formation of individuals who are not only psychologically healthy but also morally and spiritually grounded.

## Discussion

The findings of this study regarding Malik Badri's concept of the "Lubang Biawak" reveal a strong epistemological critique of uncritical imitation of Western psychological paradigms, particularly psychoanalysis, within Muslim academic contexts. This finding is consistent with previous scholarly arguments that highlight the dominance of Western frameworks in shaping modern psychology in Muslim societies, where theories are often adopted without sufficient contextual or theological filtering. Similar to earlier studies that emphasize the problem of intellectual dependency on Western epistemology, this study confirms that Muslim psychologists frequently operate within imported paradigms that are not fully examined from an Islamic worldview (Refinal et al., 2024; Zhao, 2021). However, unlike general discussions that only describe this dependency, this research specifically reconstructs the metaphor of the "Lubang Biawak" as an epistemological symbol used by Malik Badri to illustrate intellectual conformity and uncritical assimilation. This adds depth to existing literature by shifting the discussion from descriptive critique to symbolic epistemological analysis.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that Malik Badri's critique is not merely cultural or sociological, but deeply epistemological in nature, emphasizing the need for selective engagement with Western psychological knowledge. This aligns with existing literature that argues for the Islamization of knowledge through critical integration rather than total rejection (Alkouatli, 2024; Nimführ et al., 2021). However, while previous studies tend to focus on methodological synthesis between Islam and psychology, this research highlights the underlying problem of epistemic authority,

where Western psychology is often treated as the default standard of truth. The implication of this finding is significant, as it challenges the assumption that psychological theories are universally neutral. Instead, it shows that psychological knowledge is value-laden and shaped by specific philosophical traditions (Khamray, 2021; Pskhu, 2022). This contributes theoretically by strengthening the argument that Islamic psychology must be grounded in a distinct epistemological framework rather than merely adapting existing Western models.

From a practical perspective, the “Lubang Biawak” metaphor illustrates how academic dependency affects teaching practices in Muslim institutions, where educators often rely heavily on Western textbooks without critical reinterpretation. This finding is consistent with reports that many psychology departments in Islamic countries continue to prioritize Western theoretical frameworks in their curricula (Liu et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2025). However, this study extends the discussion by showing that such dependency is not only institutional but also psychological and intellectual, as it shapes the worldview of educators and students alike. The implication is that reform in Islamic psychology education must go beyond curriculum adjustment and address epistemological awareness among scholars (Bautista et al., 2023). Practically, this suggests the need for training programs that integrate Islamic worldview with psychological theory to reduce uncritical imitation and enhance intellectual independence.

In relation to the development of Islamic psychology, the study also identifies structural challenges such as epistemological dualism, lack of interdisciplinary expertise, and methodological fragmentation. These findings are in line with previous literature that notes the difficulty of integrating empirical scientific methods with metaphysical and normative dimensions of Islamic thought. However, this study contributes by showing that these challenges are not merely technical but arise from deeper epistemological tensions between anthropocentric and theocentric paradigms. This means that the problem is not only about methodology but also about the foundational assumptions of what constitutes valid knowledge about human beings. The theoretical implication is that Islamic psychology requires a reconstructed epistemology that can accommodate both empirical rigor and spiritual ontology without reducing one to the other.

Overall, the originality of this study lies in positioning Malik Badri’s “Lubang Biawak” not only as a critique of cultural imitation but as a comprehensive epistemological framework for understanding the crisis of identity in contemporary psychology among Muslim scholars. The study contributes to Islamic psychology by offering a conceptual bridge between critique and reconstruction, showing that the solution is not the rejection of Western psychology but the establishment of epistemological sovereignty grounded in Islamic worldview. This has both theoretical and practical significance: theoretically, it strengthens the foundation of Islamic psychology as an independent discipline; practically, it encourages Muslim psychologists to develop critical consciousness in selecting, interpreting, and applying psychological theories. Ultimately, this study argues that overcoming the “Lubang Biawak” requires epistemic awareness, intellectual courage, and systematic integration of Islamic principles into psychological science.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that *The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists* by Malik Badri provides important insights into the challenges faced by Muslim psychologists in navigating the dominance of Western psychology, which is often not fully aligned with Islamic values, thereby emphasizing the need for integrating modern psychology with Islamic teachings to build a more holistic approach that includes spiritual, moral, and social dimensions of human beings. The key lesson from this research is that psychological practice cannot be separated from religious and cultural values, especially in the Muslim context. In terms of scholarly contribution, this work enriches the discourse of Islamic psychology by offering a critical and interdisciplinary perspective on the relationship between psychology and religion. However, the study is limited by its strong focus on Western contexts, which may not fully represent Islamic psychological practice in Muslim-majority societies. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore the application of Islamic psychology across diverse cultural and national settings in a broader and more comparative manner.

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