

Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology through an Islamic Lens: A Tawhid-Based Reformulation of Objectivity and Knowledge

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Abstract: Standpoint epistemology, as articulated by Sandra Harding, challenges the claim of neutrality in modern science by situating knowledge within social relations of power. This framework emphasizes the epistemic significance of marginalized social positions as critical sites for revealing structural bias in knowledge production. Despite its extensive discussion within secular feminist theory and philosophy of science, standpoint epistemology has rarely been examined through Islamic epistemological frameworks. This study aims to critically examine Sandra Harding's standpoint epistemology through the perspective of Islamic epistemology grounded in the principle of *tawhid* (divine unity). The research employs qualitative conceptual analysis using philosophical-critical methods, examining Harding's major works in dialogue with the epistemological thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas to assess their underlying assumptions, limitations, and epistemic implications. This article makes a conceptual contribution by proposing a *tawhid*-based reformulation of knowledge that offers a theologically grounded alternative to relativistic epistemic frameworks while retaining the ethical and critical insights of feminist standpoint epistemology.

Keywords: Islamic Lens, Islamic Epistemology, Sandra Harding, Standpoint Epistemology, Tawhid.

Introduction

Modern science grounds epistemic legitimacy in claims of objectivity and value-neutrality. Objectivity is defined as methodological detachment of the knowing subject from the object of knowledge.¹ Sandra Harding challenges this assumption by arguing that androcentric

¹ Heather Douglas, "The Moral Responsibilities of Scientists," *Philosophy of Science* 71, no. 5 (2004): 678-89; Philip Kitcher, "The Division of Cognitive Labor," *Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 1 (1990): 5-22; Alan Chalmers, *What Is This Thing Called Science?*, 4th ed. (Hackett, 2013), 48; Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Zone Books, 2007), 25.

social arrangements structurally condition scientific knowledge.² Gender bias, on this view, is not a methodological anomaly but a systemic feature of scientific institutions.³ Standpoint epistemology⁴. Therefore, it advances the claim that marginalized social positions possess an epistemic advantage in identifying structural distortions in modern science.

Standpoint epistemology faces persistent problems of objectivity and relativism. Within Western philosophy of science, it is criticized for grounding epistemic authority in social location without securing a stable normative account of objectivity.⁵ When truth claims are indexed to a standpoint, their universal validity becomes indeterminate.⁶ From the perspective of Islamic epistemology, the problem is more fundamental: standpoint epistemology lacks a transcendent metaphysical ground.⁷ Without an ontological source of objectivity beyond social immanence, epistemic critique remains normatively unstable.⁸

Existing scholarship treats feminist standpoint epistemology and Islamic epistemology as separate theoretical projects. Feminist epistemology critiques modern science within secular frameworks⁹, while Islamic epistemology interrogates scientific knowledge through

² Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Cornell University Press, 1986); Sandra Harding, "Is Science Multicultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies," *Configurations* 2, no. 2 (1994): 301–30.

³ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 113; Londa Schiebinger, "Feminist History of Colonial Science," *Hypatia* 19, no. 1 (2004): 233–54.

⁴ Sandra Harding et al., "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," in *Feminist Epistemologies* (Routledge, 1993).

⁵ Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 157; Alvin Goldman, "Epistemic Relativism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005): 187–215; Helen E Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton University Press, 1990).

⁶ Paul Boghossian, "The Threat of Relativism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73, no. 3 (2006): 1–24.

⁷ Osman Bakar, "The Hierarchy of Knowledge in Islam," *Islamic Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1989): 87–102; S.M.N al-Attas, *Prolegomena to The Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of Fundamental Element of The Worldview of Islam* (ISTAC, 1995).

⁸ Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "Knowledge and the Nature of Man," *Islam & Science* 1, no. 1 (2003): 1–22; Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam* (Islamic Texts Society, 1998), 69.

⁹ Seyla Benhabib, "Feminism and Postmodernism," in *Feminist Contentions* (Routledge, 1995); Elizabeth Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

the metaphysical principle of *tawhid*.¹⁰ No sustained analysis evaluates standpoint epistemology from an Islamic epistemological perspective, particularly regarding objectivity and relativism.¹¹ This article addresses that gap through a critical–constructive theoretical intervention.

A critical dialogue between Sandra Harding and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is epistemologically warranted. Harding provides an immanent critique of modern scientific objectivity, while al-Attas articulates a metaphysically grounded epistemology.¹² This article positions their dialogue as the basis for reformulating objectivity beyond positivist neutrality and social relativism. Its contribution lies in a *tawhid*-based conceptual reconstruction of knowledge that preserves critical insight while restoring epistemic grounding.

Literature Review

Feminist standpoint epistemology challenges the ideal of value-neutral objectivity by arguing that scientific knowledge is shaped by social structures and power relations.¹³ Harding, Longino¹⁴, and Collins¹⁵ converge on the claim that positivist objectivity obscures structural biases, particularly gender bias embedded within scientific institutions, although they differ in their accounts of objectivity. Harding's concept of *strong objectivity* attributes epistemic advantage to marginalized social positions¹⁶; however, this reconstruction remains situated at the social-epistemic level. This literature successfully exposes bias in modern

¹⁰ Ziauddin Sardar, "Islamic Science," *Futures* 20, no. 6 (1988): 597–611; Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (ISTAC, 1993).

¹¹ Mohd Kamal Hassan, "The Integration of Knowledge," *Intellectual Discourse* 8, no. 1 (2000): 1–16; Hasok Chang, "Epistemic Iteration," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 35 (2004): 251–67.

¹² Adi Setia, "Islamic Science Reconsidered," *Islam & Science* 5, no. 2 (2007): 145–66; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Civilizational Renewal," *Islam & Civilisational Renewal* 2, no. 4 (2011): 1–15.

¹³ Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*

¹⁴ Helen Longino, "Subjects, Power, and Knowledge: Description and Prescription in Feminist Philosophy of Science," in *Alcoff and Potter 1993* (1993).

¹⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge, 1991).

¹⁶ Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is 'Strong Objectivity'?", in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (Routledge, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198751458.003.0016>; Milda Longgeita Pinem, "Gagasan Sandra Harding Tentang Strong Objectivity Dan Kontribusinya Bagi Metodologi Feminis," *Kafa'ah: Journal of Gender Studies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 3–9, <https://doi.org/10.15548/jk.v11i2.365>.

science but does not provide a stable normative or metaphysical grounding for objectivity.

Within Western philosophy of science, standpoint epistemology has been criticized for its tendency to relativize truth by indexing epistemic authority to social location. Haack¹⁷, Goldman¹⁸, and Boghossian¹⁹ argue that such an approach undermines the universality required for epistemic normativity. Yet these critiques remain confined to secular epistemic frameworks that restrict objectivity to human-centered social or cognitive practices. As a result, the debate clarifies the problem of relativism but does not move beyond the assumptions of secular epistemic immanence.

Islamic epistemology, particularly in the work of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas²⁰, offers a critique of modern science grounded in the principle of *tawhid*, which provides a metaphysical foundation integrating reason, experience, and revelation. Although this tradition has been mobilized to critique secular science, it has not been systematically employed to evaluate feminist standpoint epistemology. This article addresses this gap by advancing a critical constructive theoretical reformulation of standpoint epistemology, rather than a comparative analysis, grounding its ethical and critical insights in a non-relativistic *tawhid*-based epistemology.

Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative conceptual research design based on philosophical analysis. The analysis focuses on key theoretical texts²¹ by Sandra Harding on standpoint epistemology and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas on Islamic epistemology, particularly their treatments of objectivity, epistemic authority, and metaphysical grounding.²² These texts are examined as normative and conceptual main sources.

The study applies a philosophical-critical and constructive

¹⁷ Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays* (University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Goldman, "Epistemic Relativism."

¹⁹ Boghossian, "The Threat of Relativism."

²⁰ al-Attas, *Prolegomena to The Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of Fundamental Element of The Worldview of Islam*.

²¹ Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2004).

²² Rosemarie Rizzo Parse, *Qualitative Inquiry: The Path of Sciencing* (Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2001).

method.²³ It clarifies core concepts in standpoint epistemology, evaluates their internal limitations, especially the problem of epistemic relativism, and assesses the principle of *tawhid* as a non-relativistic foundation for objectivity.²⁴ Rather than offering a descriptive comparison, the methodology advances a critical-constructive theoretical reformulation that preserves the critical insights of standpoint epistemology while reconstructing its epistemic foundations within a *tawhid*-based framework.

Results and Discussions

This section examines the epistemological formulation of Sandra Harding's standpoint theory, offers a critical analysis of her standpoint epistemology, and develops a *tawhid*-based formulation of knowledge.

The Epistemological Formulation of Sandra Harding's Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint epistemology emerges from a broader critical tradition that questions the claim of value-neutral objectivity in modern science. Building on Marxist and Hegelian²⁵ insights regarding the relationship between social position and knowledge, feminist theorists extend this critique by interrogating how epistemic authority is shaped by gendered power relations²⁶. Within this framework, Sandra Harding formulates standpoint epistemology not merely as a sociological observation, but as a systematic epistemological intervention aimed at rethinking the foundations of objectivity itself²⁷.

Before delving into the core of feminist standpoint theory, it is essential to trace the transitional critiques that preceded it, particularly the critique of Western rationality as inherently masculine. Thinkers such as Genevieve Lloyd, Sara Ruddick, Susan Bordo, and Evelyn Fox Keller have highlighted how Western intellectual traditions, including science, idealize a form of "masculine abstract rationality" knowledge

²³ Kenneth M Sayre, *Plato's Analytic Method*, 1969.

²⁴ D John et al., *Lyn Pykett, Reading Fin de Siecle Fictions* Steven Connor, Charles Dickens, n.d.

²⁵ J. T. Wood, "Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives," in *Critical Feminist Theories*, ed. L. A. Baxter and D. O. Braithwaite (Sage Publications Ltd, 2008); Sandra Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (Routledge, 2004), 1–16.

²⁶ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 56–57.

²⁷ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 111–12.

that dismisses emotion, contextual experience, and relationality as valid epistemic sources.²⁸ Empirical studies like *In a Different Voice* by Carol Gilligan and *Women's Ways of Knowing* by Mary Belenky et al. have argued that dominant conceptions of rationality are not neutral but shaped by masculinist and hierarchical social structures.²⁹

These critiques paved the way for the emergence of feminist standpoint theory, which not only called for the reform of science but also proposed a radical epistemological alternative. According to Sandra Harding, standpoint theory holds that knowledge is “socially situated,” and that women’s social positions within patriarchal systems can serve as epistemically valuable vantage points.³⁰ This position does not assume that all women share the same perspective, but rather asserts that gendered experiences in unjust social structures can generate more critical, accurate, and transformative insights than dominant viewpoints that claim neutrality.³¹

Pioneering figures such as Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, and Hilary Rose, alongside thinkers like Jane Flax, Alison Jaggar, and Harding herself, developed this theory³² by drawing on Marxist and Hegelian notions of the “proletarian standpoint”. Just as the working class is positioned to perceive distortions in the worldview of the ruling class, women, through their lived experiences in systems of oppression, can develop clearer understandings of social structures. Hartsock even insists that in systems of domination, “the vision available to the rulers will be partial and perverse.” Harding acknowledges that claiming conventional science is “distorted” is a serious charge.³³ However, she defends this position by demonstrating how gendered experiences can reveal epistemic possibilities that are otherwise obscured. The question is not whether women are unbiased, but why women’s lived experiences may reduce the epistemological distortions embedded in dominant

²⁸ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 118.

²⁹ Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Cornell University Press, 1986), 118.

³⁰ Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Cornell University Press, 1986), 118.

³¹ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 119.

³² S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 119.

³³ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 120.

systems.³⁴ This is because women, as an oppressed group, have fewer incentives to preserve the status quo and are more inclined to identify and resist structural injustices.³⁵

Feminist standpoint theory does not rely on biological intuition or gender essentialism. Rather, Harding emphasizes that women's experiences are socially and historically constructed.³⁶ Therefore, experience alone cannot serve as the foundation for knowledge; it must be analyzed, reflected upon, and theorized from the standpoint of women's lives. In this process, women are not passive objects of knowledge but active epistemic subjects.³⁷ From their marginal positions as outsiders to dominant institutions, they are capable of seeing differently and more critically.³⁸ The concept of the outsider or, more precisely, the outsider within, as developed by Patricia Hill Collins, helps explain how women, especially those marginalized by race or class, cultivate a "double consciousness."³⁹ As insiders who are never fully acknowledged by dominant systems, they observe tensions between official ideologies and lived realities.⁴⁰ Their perspective as subjects "on the other side" of patriarchal dominance enables critical insights unavailable to those at the epistemic center.⁴¹

Harding also notes that women often perceive dominant institutions as "mad" not because they are mistaken, but because they detect hidden irrationalities embedded in social structures. As captured in a slogan from 1970s feminism, "His resistance is the measure of your oppression," men's refusal to share domestic labor reveals a deeper epistemic bias within the structures of knowledge and power.⁴² As an

³⁴ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 120.

³⁵ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 120.

³⁶ Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Cornell University Press, 1986), 123.

³⁷ Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Cornell University Press, 1986), 123.

³⁸ Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*.

³⁹ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 125.

⁴⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*; see also Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (Pluto Press, 1982).

⁴¹ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 124.

⁴² S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*,

epistemological project, standpoint theory emphasizes that the production of knowledge is deeply entangled with transformative political practice. Harding likens this process to a sculptor working with marble: the internal structure of the material (society) is only revealed through the act of shaping it.⁴³ In this analogy, feminist struggle, both political and intellectual, is a precondition for producing objective, undistorted knowledge.⁴⁴ In other words, genuine objectivity becomes possible only when knowledge begins from the lives of the oppressed, as their perspectives expose realities concealed by dominant viewpoints.

A Critical Analysis of Sandra Harding's Standpoint Epistemology

In Sandra Harding's feminist epistemology, the concept of epistemic privilege is closely tied to the idea of "strong objectivity," the view that genuine scientific objectivity must begin from the lived experiences of marginalized groups.⁴⁵ However, this theory has been met with two major criticisms. First, Harding's standpoint epistemology fails to provide clear epistemic justification standards that would allow one to evaluate why certain socially situated perspectives should be considered superior to others.⁴⁶ Second, the theory lacks sufficient empirical evidence.⁴⁷ These two objections are closely interrelated: without a clear set of criteria for evaluating the epistemic merit of different perspectives, it is equally unclear what kind of empirical support would be appropriate for the theory of epistemic privilege.⁴⁸

The first objection, raised by Louise Antony and Helen Longino,

126.

⁴³ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 126.

⁴⁴ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 127.

⁴⁵ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*.

⁴⁶ Helen Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton University Press, 1990); Helen Longino, "Feminist Epistemology," in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, ed. J. Greco and E. Sosa (Blackwell, 1999); Louise Antony, "Quine as Feminist: The Radical Import of Naturalized Epistemology," in *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. Louise Antony and C. Witt (Westview Press, 1993).

⁴⁷ Susan Hekman, "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 22, no. 2 (1997): 341-65; Cassandra Pinnick, "Feminist Epistemology: Implications for Philosophy of Science," *Philosophy of Science* 61, no. 4 (1994): 646-57; Cassandra Pinnick, "The Failed Feminist Challenge to 'fundamental Epistemology'," *Science & Education* 14, no. 1 (2005): 103-16.

⁴⁸ Wylie, "Why Standpoint Theory Matters: Feminist Standpoint Theory."

identifies an internal contradiction within standpoint epistemology. On the one hand, Harding asserts that certain social positions, particularly those of the oppressed, offer epistemically privileged standpoints. On the other hand, she also maintains that all knowledge is socially situated, meaning that no perspective is entirely neutral or objective.⁴⁹ This leads to what has been termed the "bias paradox": if all knowledge is partial and shaped by social location, then how can one legitimately claim that some perspectives are epistemically superior?⁵⁰ Longino argues that, for a standpoint epistemologist to defend the superiority of a given standpoint, they would need access to a non-perspectival, neutral vantage point, something the theory itself denies.⁵¹ Harding attempts to resolve this paradox by distinguishing between cultural relativism and epistemological relativism. She argues that strong objectivity entails a commitment to the historical, cultural, and social conditioning of beliefs, but does not imply that all perspectives are equally valid in epistemic terms.⁵² Nevertheless, this distinction remains insufficient, as Harding does not offer a concrete set of epistemic criteria to justify the rejection of epistemological relativism. Rather, she merely reiterates the need to abandon the ideal of a "view from nowhere."⁵³ Furthermore, she does not define the aim of science as the pursuit of truth; instead, she argues that science should move "away from falsehood" rather than toward absolute truth.⁵⁴

The second objection centers on the lack of empirical support for the theory of epistemic privilege. Cassandra Pinnick has argued that the thesis of epistemic privilege should be treated as a testable empirical hypothesis. However, she notes that the feminist literature has shown little effort to gather the kind of empirical data that could substantiate or falsify this claim. A decade after her initial critique in *Philosophy of Science*, Pinnick reaffirmed that no meaningful empirical evidence had been provided.⁵⁵ Susan Hekman echoes this concern, emphasizing the

⁴⁹ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*.

⁵⁰ Antony, "Quine as Feminist: The Radical Import of Naturalized Epistemology."

⁵¹ Antony, "Quine as Feminist: The Radical Import of Naturalized Epistemology."

⁵² Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*.

⁵³ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*.

⁵⁴ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*.

⁵⁵ Pinnick, "Feminist Epistemology: Implications for Philosophy of Science"; Pinnick, "The Failed Feminist Challenge to 'fundamental Epistemology'."

lack of empirical grounding in feminist standpoint theory. In *Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited*, Hekman further critiques the reliance on a presumed universal women's experience, arguing that this assumption overlooks the diverse and intersectional realities of women's lives.⁵⁶ She maintains that the notion of a unified standpoint undermines the goal of representing marginalized voices by imposing a monolithic framework on a heterogeneous group.

Moreover, Hekman challenges the idea that marginalized groups possess superior epistemic insight simply by virtue of their social location. She warns against the romanticization of the oppressed as inherently epistemically privileged, noting that such a view risks essentializing marginalized identities and oversimplifying the complex processes involved in knowledge production.⁵⁷ These critiques highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of epistemic privilege one that recognizes diversity within marginalized groups and acknowledges the limitations of social position as a basis for epistemic authority.

In response to these criticisms, Harding defends her theory in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* by articulating seven key claims to support epistemic privilege⁵⁸: (1) women's lives have been devalued as starting points for scientific inquiry; (2) women are "strangers" within the social order; (3) women's oppression reduces their interest in sustaining ignorance about societal structures; (4) through struggles for transformation, women gain access to hidden dimensions of social relations; (5) women's standpoints emerge from everyday life; (6) these standpoints arise from mediating ideological dualisms, such as nature versus culture; and (7) women researchers occupy the position of "outsiders within."

Yet, as Rollin (2006) argues, these claims remain unconvincing for two reasons. First, the generalization inherent in Harding's assertions undermines the credibility of her argument there are clear counterexamples, such as women whose lives have not been devalued or who are fully integrated into the social order. Second, even if these claims were narrowed in scope, it remains unclear how they substantiate the theory of epistemic privilege. Specifically, the notion of a socially

⁵⁶ Susan Hekman, "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 22, no. 2 (1997): 341–65.

⁵⁷ Susan Hekman, *The Material of Knowledge: Feminist Disclosures* (Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁵⁸ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*.

grounded perspective remains ambiguous: without a precise definition of what constitutes such a perspective and what alternatives it is being compared against, the epistemic superiority of marginalized standpoints cannot be empirically demonstrated. Thus, according to Rollin, Harding's defense remains inadequate due to overgeneralization and conceptual vagueness.⁵⁹ The theory of epistemic privilege, as currently formulated, lacks the empirical clarity and epistemic justification necessary to sustain its claims.

Despite its explicit rejection of essentialism, feminist standpoint theory has been critiqued for perpetuating a form of universalist essentialism.⁶⁰ By emphasizing women's material experiences as the starting point of epistemic inquiry, the theory risks implying that epistemic privilege is derived solely from gender.⁶¹ Although standpoint theory claims that a standpoint emerges only through critical reflection within specific political contexts, it often defaults to a singular feminist standpoint one that predominantly reflects the experiences of white, middle-class academic women.⁶² This renders the theory susceptible to exclusionary tendencies and blind to the complexities of women's experiences across race, class, geography, and culture.

While later developments within standpoint theory have sought to address this issue by acknowledging a plurality of standpoints, the tension remains unresolved.⁶³ The theory recognizes that women occupy intersecting social positions shaped by various structures of oppression. Scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Bell Hooks, for instance, have developed Black feminist standpoint theory to foreground the experiences of women of color, particularly within contexts of labor, racism, and gendered oppression.⁶⁴ Their work highlights the need to move beyond a monolithic feminist standpoint by addressing intra-gender power dynamics, including those reinforced by privileged

⁵⁹ Kristina Rolin, "The Bias Paradox in Feminist Standpoint Epistemology," *Episteme* 3, nos. 1–2 (2006): 125–36, <https://doi.org/10.3366/epi.2006.3.1-2.125>.

⁶⁰ Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*.

⁶¹ Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex, And Power: Toward Feminist Historical Materialism* (Northeastern University Press, 1985); Wylie, "Why Standpoint Theory Matters: Feminist Standpoint Theory."

⁶² Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*.

⁶³ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective."

⁶⁴ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*; see also Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*.

women.⁶⁵

Furthermore, theorists like Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva argue that collective feminist resistance is still possible despite internal diversity.⁶⁶ Drawing from their experiences in environmental and grassroots movements, they maintain that shared struggles can generate common insights and solidarities.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, a persistent epistemological dilemma remains: How can feminist standpoint theory accommodate diverse experiences without falling into essentialist generalizations or losing coherence through excessive fragmentation?

Postmodern feminist critics deepen this challenge by arguing that the foundational categories of standpoint theory, such as “woman,” “feminism,” and “knowledge”, are themselves fluid and unstable.⁶⁸ If identity and experience are constantly shifting, grounding epistemic privilege in material experience becomes epistemologically problematic.⁶⁹ Feminist standpoint theorists respond by emphasizing the importance of material realities as the foundation for political struggle, warning that the complete relativization of experience risks undermining feminism’s capacity to challenge structural oppression.⁷⁰

Donna Haraway articulates this tension by noting that reducing the body to a site of social inscription risks erasing the material conditions of gendered oppression.⁷¹ She cautions against losing analytical grounding in the name of fluid identity. Ultimately, while feminist standpoint theory aspires to center marginalized experiences, it must continually negotiate the balance between honoring diversity and maintaining a cohesive, materially grounded epistemic framework. The

⁶⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Duke University Press, 2019); see also Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*; and also Hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*.

⁶⁶ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in The International Division of Labor*. (Zed Press, 1986); Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, *Ecofeminism* (Zed Books, 1993).

⁶⁷ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (Zed Book, 1989); see also Shiva and Mies, *Ecofeminism*.

⁶⁸ Linda Nicholson, *Feminism/Postmodernism* (Routledge, 1990).

⁶⁹ See also Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990).

⁷⁰ Hartsock, “Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism.”

⁷¹ Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (Routledge, 1997).

ongoing challenge is to retain analytical and political clarity without collapsing into either universalism or fragmentation.

Standpoint Epistemology and Tawhid-Based Knowledge Formulation

Standpoint epistemology is fundamentally different from the Islamic epistemology articulated by Al-Attas. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas's epistemology is deeply rooted in the concept of *tawḥīd* (Divine Unity) and the integration of reason (*ʿaql*), revelation (*wahy*), and spiritual experience.⁷² For al-Attas, knowledge cannot be divorced from the Divine dimension, nor can it be confined within a secular framework that recognizes only empirically verified and materially demonstrable knowledge.⁷³ True knowledge, in his view, originates from revelation, which is then processed by the human intellect within a proper spiritual and moral framework. His epistemology unites rational, intuitive, and spiritual dimensions into a holistic system of knowledge.

Al-Attas defines knowledge as “the arrival of meaning (*maʿnā*) in the soul, alongside the soul's arrival at meaning, resulting in will and desire.”⁷⁴ This meaning does not merely arise from physical objects but stems from Divine illumination (*ilhām*).⁷⁵ The soul (*nafs*) encompassing the intellect (*ʿaql*), heart (*qalb*), and spirit (*rūḥ*) is an active spiritual entity that receives and interprets meaning.⁷⁶ Knowledge, therefore, is a unity between the knower and the meaning, not merely a subject-object relationship. The term *maʿnā* itself comprises several layers: conceptual understanding (*mafḥūm*), essence (*māhiyyah*), reality (*ḥaqīqah*), and personal identity (*huwiyyah*). Al-Attas emphasizes that knowledge is the recognition of the proper place of a thing within the ontological order, which includes both the empirical world and the religious dimension with God as the apex of the hierarchy. Hence, any knowledge that disregards God cannot be considered true knowledge.⁷⁷

⁷² Elit Ave Hidayatullah and Syamsuddin Arif, “Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Exposition on the Concept of Ethics,” *Afkar* 24, no. 1 (2022): 409–46, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol24no1.12>.

⁷³ Sofian Hadi et al., “Mendudukan Kembali Makna Ilmu Dan Sains Dalam Islam,” *Tasyfiah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 4, no. 1 (2020), <http://dx.doi.org/10.21111/tasyfiah.v4i1.3963>.

⁷⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Tinjauan Ringkas Peri Ilmu Dan Pandangan Alam*, in *Himpunan Risalah* (Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2015), 13, 39.

⁷⁵ Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *Filsafat Dan Praktik Pendidikan Islam Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas*, ed. Hamid Fahmy Zakasyi (penerbit Universitas Malaya, 2003), 149.

⁷⁶ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), 156.

⁷⁷ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 121.

According to al-Attas, knowledge is acquired through stages of perception, abstraction, and intellection processes that are both rational and intuitive. It begins with sense perception via the external senses, followed by inner senses such as *al-ḥiss al-mushtarak* (common sense) and *al-khayāliyah* (imaginative faculty).⁷⁸ The *faculty estimativa* (*al-wahm*) forms judgments based on these perceptions, which are then stored in memory and processed by the imaginative faculty (*al-mutakhayyilah*), acting as a bridge between the animal soul and the rational soul.

The rational soul possesses two key faculties⁷⁹: the practical intellect, which governs action, and the theoretical intellect (*‘aql al-nazarī*), which is capable of intuitive and creative understanding. Intellection is a process of abstraction from concrete forms to universal meanings achieved through both intuition and reflection. Al-Attas identifies four developmental stages of the intellect: (1) Material intellect (pure potentiality); (2) Dispositional intellect (active potential); (3) Acquired intellect (reflective and rational); (4) Actual intellect (fully realized and autonomous).⁸⁰ The *intellectus agens* (active intellect) actualizes the potential of the material intellect. Al-Attas associates this active intellect with the *Rūḥ al-Qudus* (Holy Spirit), as a manifestation of Divine guidance.

For al-Attas, intuition is not merely the grasp of empirical facts or rational truths; it is a direct cognition of Divine reality, what he calls existential intuition. Knowledge is thus a spiritual process by which the soul aligns itself with truth and the Divine order.⁸¹ Contrary to Western epistemologies that often separate reason from experience, Islamic epistemology, according to al-Attas, unifies both within a framework that also embraces revelation and spiritual values. Knowledge is not value-neutral; it is shaped by the ethical and spiritual condition of the knower.⁸² Therefore, Islam rejects relativism and skepticism, affirming

⁷⁸ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Worldview Islam Dan Kapitalisme Barat," *Tsaqafah* 9, no. 1 (2013): 15, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v9i1.36>.

⁷⁹ Mohammad Muslih, *Filsafat Ilmu Kajian Atas Asumsi Dasar, Paradigma Dan Kerangka Teori Ilmu Pengethaun* (LESFI, 2016).

⁸⁰ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 120.

⁸¹ Rifqi Muntaqo and Siswanto, "Theological Approach in Islamic Studies," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 179–92.

⁸² Edi Kurniawan et al., "Recent Studies on the Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah of Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī: A Systematic Literature Review," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v10i1.11282>; Makmur Haji Harun, "The Concept of Arabic Absorption Patterns in Indonesian and Malay Language," *AJIS:*

instead that knowledge must be directed toward the recognition of God's existence and majesty.

Sandra Harding's standpoint epistemology and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's Islamic epistemology offer two distinct frameworks for understanding the nature, source, and purpose of knowledge.⁸³ While Harding emphasizes the epistemic value of marginalized experiences in constructing more inclusive and objective knowledge, al-Attas anchors his epistemology in divine revelation and the spiritual dimension of human cognition.⁸⁴ The contrast between the two highlights a fundamental divergence between immanent and transcendent approaches to epistemology.

Harding argues that traditional knowledge systems, constructed predominantly from the perspectives of dominant societal groups, are limited and often distorted. Her concept of *strong objectivity* proposes that including marginalized standpoints, particularly those of women, can yield more accurate and inclusive forms of knowledge.⁸⁵ In this view, knowledge is inherently situated and shaped by lived experience, especially by those who are directly affected by systems of oppression and inequality.⁸⁶ For Harding, this grounding in experience enables a more truthful representation of social realities.

However, from al-Attas's Islamic perspective, such an approach, though socially valuable, remains epistemologically incomplete. Al-Attas contends that knowledge cannot be reduced to human experience alone, especially when detached from divine revelation.⁸⁷ True knowledge (*'ilm*) is a holistic integration of reason, intuition, and spiritual experience, ultimately oriented toward recognizing the reality of God and the purpose of human existence.⁸⁸ Thus, while Harding emphasizes

Academic Journal of Islamic Studies 4, no. 2 (2019): 151–80, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v4i2.968>; Mabruroh Mabruroh and Rosyidatul Khoiriyah, "Islamization of Malay Language and Its Role in the Development of Islam in Malaya," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2019): 13–28, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v4i1.770>.

⁸³ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 119–20.

⁸⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education In Islam* (ISTAC (International Institute of Islam Thought and Civilization), 1980), 11.

⁸⁵ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 148.

⁸⁶ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 154.

⁸⁷ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education In Islam*, 14.

⁸⁸ Busra Febriyarni et al., "Development of the Islamic Religious Education

inclusivity, al-Attas emphasizes transcendence.

A central critique from the Islamic epistemological framework is directed at Harding's notion of *strong objectivity*. Al-Attas would argue that this idea, despite its progressive intent, is still confined within a secular, human-centered worldview that lacks metaphysical grounding. For him, revelation (wahy) is the supreme source of truth, guiding the intellect beyond the limits of empirical observation and personal experience. Without divine reference, knowledge remains partial and vulnerable to relativism⁸⁹.

Although Harding's standpoint theory draws attention to valuable insights gained through marginalized experiences.⁹⁰ It overlooks the necessity of moral and spiritual calibration. In Islamic thought, the knowing subject must be purified and ethically aligned to access higher truths.⁹¹ Women's and other marginalized groups' experiences are certainly meaningful, but their epistemic authority is validated only when interpreted through the framework of divine guidance and objective moral order⁹².

This difference becomes especially stark when examining the respective roles of experience and revelation. Harding elevates lived experience as the primary source of epistemic insight⁹³. Al-Attas, while acknowledging the significance of human experience, insists that it must be subordinate to revelation to yield authentic knowledge. Revelation serves not only as an informational source but as a spiritual light that enables the intellect to discern ultimate realities⁹⁴. Whereas Harding's framework remains largely socio-political in its orientation, al-Attas proposes a comprehensive system that spans rational, empirical, and spiritual domains. He distinguishes between levels of intellect ranging from the potential intellect to the fully actualized intellect, which receives illumination through the *rūḥ al-qudus* (Holy Spirit). This structure integrates metaphysical dimensions that are absent in secular

Curriculum at PTU as Strengthening Multicultural Islam," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 250–63, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v9i1.7871>.

⁸⁹ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education In Islam*, 18.

⁹⁰ Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Cornell University Press, 1986), 178.

⁹¹ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education In Islam*, 15.

⁹² Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education In Islam*, 16.

⁹³ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 158.

⁹⁴ S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 158.

feminist epistemologies ⁹⁵.

The contrast extends to their respective views on subjectivity and objectivity. Harding seeks to enrich objectivity by including multiple subjectivities⁹⁶. Her method is a strategic reversal of traditional epistemology: rather than eliminating bias, she embraces diverse perspectives to arrive at more truthful knowledge⁹⁷. Al-Attas, by contrast, grounds objectivity in the metaphysical reality of God. In his view, objectivity is not the product of social multiplicity but the alignment of human cognition with divine order. Knowledge must be judged not merely by inclusivity, but by its correspondence to eternal truths⁹⁸.

In the final analysis, the juxtaposition between Harding and al-Attas reveals two fundamentally different epistemological commitments. Harding represents a bottom-up, socially situated epistemology that centers on justice, inclusion, and historical context ⁹⁹. Al-Attas offers a top-down, theocentric epistemology that emphasizes divine revelation, spiritual purification, and metaphysical clarity ¹⁰⁰. While Harding's standpoint theory contributes to social critique and amplifies the voices of the oppressed, it remains bound by a secular humanism that lacks transcendental grounding¹⁰¹. Al-Attas, meanwhile, provides an integrated vision of knowledge that reconciles the rational, empirical, and spiritual elements of human understanding. His epistemology seeks not just to describe reality, but to align the knower with a divine telos ¹⁰². In this way, Islamic epistemology does not reject human experience, but it relativizes it in light of higher truths revealed by God.

As discussed above, it is evident that the dialogue between standpoint epistemology and Islamic epistemology opens important questions about how knowledge is constructed, validated, and oriented. While both frameworks challenge dominant paradigms in their own ways, only the latter offers a comprehensive, spiritually anchored pathway to objective truth. The challenge for contemporary

⁹⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (ISTAC, 1993), 95.

⁹⁶ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 87.

⁹⁷ Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, 94.

⁹⁸ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 105.

⁹⁹ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 107.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education In Islam*.

¹⁰¹ Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education In Islam*, 18.

¹⁰² Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 120.

epistemology, then, lies in integrating the critical insights of social standpoints with the transcendent dimensions of revelation and metaphysical order.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Sandra Harding's standpoint epistemology provides a significant internal critique of value-neutral objectivity by exposing the role of power and social location in knowledge production. However, the analysis shows that the concept of strong objectivity remains epistemically incomplete, as it grounds epistemic authority in socially situated standpoints without a stable metaphysical or universal normative foundation, leaving the problem of epistemic relativism unresolved.

From an Islamic epistemological perspective, the principle of tawhid offers a non-relativistic grounding for objectivity by situating knowledge within a unified metaphysical order that integrates reason, experience, and revelation. This framework preserves the critical sensitivity to power emphasized by standpoint epistemology while providing a transcendent basis for epistemic normativity.

The central contribution of this article is a critical-constructive reformulation of standpoint epistemology through tawhid. Rather than functioning as a comparative exercise, this study advances a theoretical intervention that strengthens feminist epistemology by supplying the metaphysical grounding necessary to avoid both positivist neutrality and epistemic relativism. This reformulation positions Islamic epistemology as a viable conceptual resource in contemporary debates on objectivity within philosophy of science.

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