

**ASPECTS OF THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES IN THE  
HUMANITIES**

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## ON THEORY AND METHOD IN ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

A.A. Oladosu\*, M.A. Noibi\* and K.A. Omofoyewa\*

*...texts become invalid in the absence of contexts for which they are 'texted'.*

—Afis A. Oladosu (2015)

### Introduction

Probably more than ever before, the need has become urgent and important for humanities scholars and young researchers, not only to devise new ways and methods to carry out their studies, but also to ensure that the latter speak to the 'moment' and assuage the thirst for the 'new' in knowledge production in our academy. The choice of an appropriate methodology and the relevance of a given research to currents and streams in the age of globalization has thus become, of recent, the touchstone for stellar scholarship and intellectualism. This chapter, therefore, explores the problematic research in Arabic and Islamic Studies and offers practical suggestions on theories and methods that young researchers in the field could deploy into their works. It provides a quick overview of Arabic and Islamic Studies as autonomous but equally interdisciplinary fields, interrogates the notion of research in the humanities and does a brief review of what is usually referred to as methodology in the academy. In conclusion, the chapter proposes the *al-Bābiyyah* theory for possible adoption by researchers in the field of Arabic and Islamic studies.

### Arabic and Islamic Studies: Discipline in Interdisciplinarity

Arabic and Islamic studies are traditionally interdisciplinary fields of research which originally owe their relevance and pertinence to

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the service they both render to the religion of Islam. Whereas research in Arabic Studies is generally targeted at knowledge production in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing particularly in such specific fields as grammar (syntax, morphology) and literature, (prose, poetry and drama) (Ibrahim 1969: 50). Research in Islamic Studies focuses on knowledge production in fields closely related to Islam, these include *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence), *Tafsir* (Exegesis), Hadith (Prophetic Tradition), *Sirah* (Prophetic History), *Tawhid* (Theology) and *Akhlaq* (Ethics) (Ibrahim 1968: 341). The combination of the twin fields of Arabic and Islamic studies, therefore, fosters interdisciplinarity. In other words, in academic centres across the world, the affinity between Arabic as a language and Islam as a religion is already a given. It is partly the recognition of this close link between the language and the religion that accentuates the collocation of Arabic and Islamic studies into one autonomous discipline in the University of Ibadan.

Further years of experience in teaching and research in the academia have shown that in order to have a measure of competence in Islamic studies, researchers in the field need to acquire some level of proficiency in Arabic. They should be able to access original sources on Islam most of which are written in Arabic. It is equally true that the potentials for the acquisition of greater competence and excellence in research in the field of Arabic tend to be higher when researchers in the field are exposed to some sources which, though originally written in Arabic are on Islamic themes and subjects. These arguments, among others, make the combination of Arabic and Islamic studies in the same department a source of strength not weakness. But exactly what is meant by research?

### **Research in the Humanities**

Reference to the word *research* in the academia, is usually to a journey, a voyage of discovery (The Postgraduate School 2008). The word refers to a process of inquiry which involves a systematic collection, analysis, interpretation and documentation of data into a body of 'problem' or 'problems' of importance to

humanity with a view to gaining new knowledge of the said problem or problems or of finding solution or solutions to same (ibid). In gathering materials or data for and on a given *research*, we involve ourselves in a 'search', like the search of the Chef for certain basic ingredients that are necessary in order to prepare a meal. It must equally be borne in mind that the *search* that would become a *research* usually begins with the awareness of an intellectual gap waiting to be filled. Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian scholar and ideologue, in his magnum opus, *Wahy al-Qalam* (The Pen's Revelation), argues that all intellectual activity, be it the literary or academic, do not take place in a vacuum. Rather they impinge and are conceived in the womb of time to impact specific gaps in human life. He says:

The authentic transference of the realities of life into prose or poetry is (nothing) but its stylish expropriation from life and its presentation to the world in another style which is more complete, rigorous and beautiful, such that it establishes the specific meaning of things, and reveals the realities of life from beneath its intricate exterior – that is the (feature) of a complete aesthetic (scholarly) work – it discovers a gap and fills it; it chances upon a secret and reveals it; it searches for the shackled and sets it free; it gets hold of the unlimited and limits its; (all in the hope) of adding more meaning to life...(M. S al-Rāfī, 1970: 237)

Eric Weil (1970) engages the above from another perspective. According to him, the researcher in the humanities thrives mainly because he is involved in a never ending intellectual vocation. As soon as he discovers an idea, he immediately sidesteps same and proposes a new one; he tries to 'elicit new meanings from old works and looks for an understanding of greater depth and wider horizon'. He maintains a dialogue with his own cultural past, so that he can grasp what is the characteristic of his tradition as it lives in his present. The researcher's responsibility, Weil contends further, "is to understand this present by comprehending the presence of the past" (ibid). This is because humanistic studies are

constituted by a dialogue 'of the soul with itself' where, in line with Plato, 'nothing is ever definitive (Weil 1970: 250). Every new understanding changes the man who reached it; 'every result becomes a starting point because we are not the same as we were before (Sogolo 1981: 106).

That is not all there is to *research* in the humanities. This is partly because the vocation has great implications for the identity of the researcher. In other words, the humanistic discipline is especially a 'moral' one. It is one in which the researcher constitutes themselves and is in turn constituted as a subject with self-dignity. He is deemed to be a subject who appreciates mental achievement as an end in itself, not in a utilitarian way. He has the ability to discern logically distinct questions, he is imbued with the capacity to engage in critical reflection and exhibits such intellectual onions as would enable him recognise different forms of knowledge systems and situate the peculiarity of humanistic research within them.

It is pertinent to remember that research in the humanities is essentially different from that in the sciences. The architectonics of humanistic research feature studies in language including rhetoric, grammar and discourse analysis; it involves interpretation, appreciation and analyses of ideas, concepts and categories; it celebrates literary and artistic criticisms, the focus of which is the discovery of meanings and, in Abdul Qāhir al- Jurjānī's mode, the 'meaning of meaning' (Al-Jurjānī 1950: 30) of life in and outside literary texts. Humanistic research is equally *sui generis* for its almost exclusive inquiry into history and the historical and the quest for the unknown in the phenomena. It is that field of human endeavour which thrives on the premise that the knife is best fashioned against that which it is destined not to cut. Now, what are the necessary ingredients that must be seen in a good research work?

### **Ingredients of a Good Research Work**

No matter the field of interest or specialization, a good research work is usually a product of a well-thought out research design. Let us refer to this as a pathway or a compass which researchers



usually follow from the 'point of departure' to the 'point of arrival' i.e. from the beginning to the end. This includes the research topic, an abstract, an introduction or background, a statement of the problem, a review of literature, objectives of the research, the methodology, the scope of the proposed study, the significance of the proposed research work and a bibliography. Experience has shown that of all these elements, the most challenging and probably the most difficult have always been statement of problem and methodology.

### Statement of the Problem

The statement of the problem, otherwise referred to as research problem, is usually the core of all research works. It is that section in research where the researcher provides information on the particular intellectual problem he or she wants to solve or a gap the proposed research work intends to fill. The identified problem must speak to an important issue in the field; it should be practical or non-hypothetical, meaningful and testable (Greenfield 2002: 307). A research work with weak research problem usually leads to poor research output.

Furthermore, it is equally important that the research problem, which is known in Arabic either as *Ishkāliyat al-Baḥth* or *Mushkilat al-Baḥth*, is written in good prose and in a logical order. It may contain research questions. However, a subsection could be dedicated to the latter. In all instances, the goal of a properly written research problem is to enable the researcher to foreground the intellectual problem he or she desires to solve. It is from the latter that the contribution the researcher is going to make to existing knowledge becomes manifest.

However, young researchers in the field should avoid the temptation to conflate research problem with the 'researcher's problems'. While the former is definite, the latter is indefinite; the first is intellectual, the second could be intellectual, existential or even medical. To give an illustration, the research problem of a work in Islamic Studies hypothetically titled *Effects of Street Trading on the Girl-Child in Rano* could be seen in the last sentence of the following sample:

Rano is unarguably very popular in Africa for its close affinity with Islam. However, the city has of recent achieved renown for the emergence of such socio-cultural problems as child-abuse, street trading, homosexuality and lesbianism. These have led to the assumption that Islam is responsible for the vices that are now evident in the city. *The need has therefore become urgent for the exploration of the impacts or otherwise of Islamic moral principles on life particularly in Muslim-dominated parts of Nigeria.*

One illustration in Arabic studies is very germane. Let us assume a research work titled *Functional Use of Arabic among Muslims in South-western parts of Nigeria 1960-2010* is being undertaken by you. The research problem of interest to this hypothetical topic could read:

Recently, concerns have been expressed by large sections of the Muslim populace over the performance and relevance of graduates of traditional Arabic schools in the six states of the Southwest geo-political zone to the progress of Islam in the region. On their part, some of the graduates have argued that the continued popularity of Arab-Islamic culture in the region is largely owed to their role as teachers and promoters of Arabic language and the religion of Islam. *There is therefore an acute lack of adequate and robust data on Arabic schools in South-western parts of Nigeria as well as on the prospects of Arabic-Islamic scholarship in the region.*

Aside research problem, a research work depends on a good methodology to achieve its objectives. A good methodology is like petrol to the engine of a car. In fact, no matter the tenor and the strength of the research problem, the methodology that the researcher deploys into carrying it out is extremely important. It is to this we now turn our attention.

### **Methodology – Thinking Theory, Pondering Method**

What is methodology? What is theoretical framework? Is the word 'method' a synonym for methodology? In this section, we desire not only to answer these questions but also shall endeavour to offer some suggestions on theories and methods that are applicable to the field of Arabic and Islamic studies. Let us begin with an interrogation of the notion of methodology.

Without prejudice to other suggestions in the field, the word methodology can be defined as a set of rules, practices and procedures—generally backed by tradition and approved by 'gatekeepers'—with which research works or intellectual endeavours are carried out in a discipline or field. Simply put, the term methodology references the strategy or strategies and the ways in which a particular research is to be undertaken (Howell 2013). It is like the tool box that could be deployed either in the construction or repair of a machine or equipment. As is the case in Western intellectual history, the subject matter of methodology has also been of concern to Arab-Muslim philosophers. For example, Ibn Sina considers it to be a synonym for logic, the latter being "a tool permeating all sciences... and the basis upon which the unknown can be known through the manipulation of the latter in order to arrive at the former" (Al-Jurjānī 1959: 30). In practical terms, however, reference to the word methodology calls attention to the necessity for the researcher to have a clear perception of the data he or she proposes to use in the course of the research, how the latter would be harnessed or gathered and why a particular technique or analysis is reified in exclusion of others.

Now two separate but necessarily symbiotic elements have been hinted at above. These are theory or theoretical framework and method. In other words, reference to the word methodology is usually to these two elements. Whereas the first element, theory, references, in line with Ibn Sina, the intellectual 'tool' or 'instrument' a researcher deploys into his research, the second calls attention to the practical tools that he deploys in the course of the research. Put differently, the first, the theory, is a statement or set of statements which seems or seem to be true and valid due to its acceptance by scholars—those we have referred to above as

'gatekeepers'—in a particular field, but which may yet be invalidated in the future. The second, the method, refers to the practical steps and processes meant to be followed by a researcher in line with the former in order to solve an intellectual question or resolve a scholarly problem. Thus, the first, that is the theoretical framework sources its validation from the forebears, from previous works in the field, the latter, the method, derives strength from the creative intervention of the researcher and his readiness to follow through the patterns and contours of the practical aspects of the research without glossing over any detail. Here, the similitude between food/human nutritionist and the chef is probably relevant.

In other words, it is our proposition that the development of existing epistemologies on food has largely been dependent not on the ordinary food sellers in the backwaters of our towns and villages or on the chefs in those popular restaurants in our cities. Rather, it is scholars in the field of human nutrition whose task it has been to develop, codify and disseminate new ideas for subsequent use by other practitioners in the field. Human nutritionists have had to study chemical components of each ingredient and theorize the best ways and approaches by which humanity could derive maximum benefits from their consumption. Local traditions and orature across cultures and civilizations equally exhibit a plenum and a treasure store of knowledge on nutritional values and practices. Now in taking a decision on the meal to prepare, the chef, located as he is in his kitchen (library/laboratory) would most likely put into consideration some of those existing assumptions and theories, be it the written, (the scholarly) or the unwritten (traditional) on food items as well as their potentials for human welfare. It is equally arguable that these assumptions and theories would circumscribe his choice of 'the ingredients' to use and the practical steps to follow in preparing a sumptuous meal. Years of experience in the kitchen may eventually function to strengthen the capacity of the chef such that he would and could then begin to theorize and propose new approaches to the preparation of meals for his 'successors' in the field.

This similitude of the chef, ingredients, the kitchen, and the theories which foreground his vocation appears to be relevant to

the subject of methodology in the humanities and indeed all fields of intellectual endeavour. Thus, the researcher could be seen as the chef, the kitchen as the field of research, the ingredients in the kitchen as the basic instruments of research be it observation, survey, interviews (structured and unstructured), and questionnaire or focus group discussions, all of which are usually hinged or premised on specific theories gleaned by the researcher from existing studies in the field.

Our argument thus far is this: There is a subtle difference between the categories of theory and method. Again, let us attempt to cast this in clearer terms with the following analogy. Let us refer to the researcher in the humanities as a traveller on a journey to, for example, the 'wonderland' - the shore of knowledge, where all arrivals signify a departure for yet another journey. Usually, the researcher has the choice to embark upon the journey by taking at least three different pathways. He is at liberty to travel using the camel, a motor vehicle or even an airplane. Each of these options is like the choice a customer makes in the supermarket - it comes with a price tags. Now the theoretical framework here finds expression in the assumption that a journey to the 'wonderland' by air should last not more than one hour while that on the camel could take a whole year. The process the traveller would follow, however, either in transiting from the theoretical to the practical is the method. The theoretical choice he or she makes, just like the choice the traveller makes in reference to the means of transportation to the wonderland, would determine the practical steps he would take in achieving his objective and ultimately the success or failure of his research at the end of the day.

As it is in other fields of human endeavour, no methodology is fool-proof; no theoretical framework can perform wonders all by itself. All research works rise and fall by the degree of competence brought to bear on them by the researcher. Thus, a theory in itself is invalid in the absence of conscious choices and actions that the researcher is under obligation to make and take in relation to the method and processes of carrying out a particular research. In other words, graduate students must bear it in mind that the knife, no matter how sharp it is, cannot by itself cut any object.

Now let us attempt to bring the above analyses closer home by asking a simple question—what theory or theories and method or

methods are most suitable to research in Arabic and Islamic Studies? It would be trite to say that a particular theory or method is most suitable to research either in Arabic or Islamic Studies to the exclusion of others. This is because in our opinion there is a science to humanistic research the same way there is an art to the scientific endeavour. Thus, there is an uncanny intersection of disciplines in the humanities which allows for intra- and interdisciplinary theoretical convergences. Thus, it would be good for you to bear in mind that the theoretical parameters used in carrying out a research into, for example, Afemai, Yoruba or Igbo dialect/language could very well be useful for similar research efforts in the study of patterns and perspectives to the acquisition of Arabic language skills as a second language among, for example, the Yoruba. A theory deployed to study the psychology of the worshipper in an Holy Ghost Convention could be extrapolated in the research into the psychology of, for example, the worshipper in a NASFAT Friday Night Vigil in the city of Osogbo. What we are trying to establish here is that just like others, research in Arabic and Islamic studies is interdisciplinary in nature; it fits in well into the general plenum of humanistic disciplines such that the theoretical tools made use of in one could be tried in others with similar orientation.

Based on the above arguments, kindly bear this in mind that while we want to suggest some theoretical approaches to you for possible deployment into your research, such cannot be exhaustive and holistic. This is partly because, in addition to the arguments canvassed above, the research horizon in Arabic and Islamic Studies is the panoramic world. It is equally in recognition of the fact that the two disciplines straddle a whole lot of interests and research areas including language, rhetoric, gender, textual or literary criticism, philosophy, law and jurisprudence such that an entry in an edited volume like this cannot pretend to show fidelity or felicity to all of them. Here is a short list of theoretical tools you can deploy into your research work in Arabic.

**(1) *Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm***

One of the earliest theoretical styles to emerge in Arabic language and Arabic socio-linguistic studies is that of Shaykh Abdul Qahir al-Jurjānī's theory of *Nazm* in which he argues that the main function of discourse is "the expression of human knowledge and the revelation and communication of the hidden. Consequently the noblest type of discourse is that in which this function is most clearly fulfilled" (Deeb 1979: 26). He argues further that words by themselves cannot fulfil this function, "for words do not make sense until they are constructed in a certain way, and arranged and harmonized in one pattern rather than another" (ibid, 27) It is instructive to note that part of what Western scholars later came to designate as discourse analysis derive from this initial works of al-Jurjānī. It is equally his argument that literary excellence should be judged from the quality of the structure of the meaning expressed and its pleasing effect on the mind and soul of the reader (or listener) rather than from its verbal aspects. Thus, the theory of *Nazm* is applicable to research works in Arabic rhetoric, linguistics, literary criticism and prosody among others.

**(2) *Transformational Generative Theory of Languages***

This theory is propounded by the American scholar Noam Chomsky. It attempts to account for the constructions of a language by linguistic transformations and phrase structures. It is also known as transformational-generative grammar or T-G or TGG. TG interlaces with other linguistic postulations of Chomsky including the one which says that languages are made up of a single substance, some of it are shared and others are changeable and the researcher's role is to discover what he designates as the changeable from the unchangeable. In order to do this, he contends further, the researcher must pay attention to three types of language faculties: the Core Whole, the Apparent Whole and the Regulatory Whole (Chomsky 1957). It should be interesting to discover the intersection between this theory and the ones belonging to early Arab theoreticians and linguists and the extent to which these could be applied to research works in Arabic language.

### (3) *Ibn Qutaybah's Poetics*

Ibn Qutaybah proposes four different intellectual-critical tools for poetics. According to him, the tools include poems whose structure and meaning are beautiful, poems whose meaning is beautiful but are deficient in structure, poems whose structure are beautiful but are deficient in meaning and poems whose meaning and structure are weak and unworthy of the attention of critics (A. Ibn Qutaybah, n.d 30). Like the works of al-Jurjani, young researchers in the field would find, among many others, the works of Ibn Salam (d. 231/845) equally very useful in this direction. They provide copious theoretical tools on such disparate and interlocking fields of research Arabic featuring grammar, philology, and literary criticism. In reference to Islamic Studies, young researchers in the field also have a plenum of theoretical approaches to deploy into their research. These include:

#### (a) *The Weight of the Word*

Kenneth Cragg's theory of 'the weight of the word' appears to be fundamental and foundational to Quranic hermeneutics. This theory forms part of his general discussion of the extremely engaging studies on the Quran (Cragg 1971) and how Islam is embodied in the Quran. The theory could be useful in Quranic exegesis and should also become handy particularly when it is deployed together with other sources in Arabic. Any research work which concerns itself with how geographical setting, culture and traditions enter into the Qur'an's metaphors and shape its message or the nexus between life and times of the Prophet Muhammad and the 'event of the Quran' would find Cragg's theoretical postures very useful.

#### (b) *Aṣabiyyah*

Research works in Islamic history, sociology, politics and even economics would benefit a great deal from the contributions of Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 c.e). His theory of Aṣabiyyah (Ibn Khaldun 1967), functionally translated into social cohesion, group solidarity, or even tribalism attempts to lay foundations and account for the interplay of forces in the evolution of human societies. Ibn Khaldun's theoretical postulations has been referred



to as foundational for contemporary Western theories including those propounded by such thinkers and philosophers as Augustus Comte or even Jurgen Habermas.

(c) *Postmodernism*

The theoretical scales offered by thinkers who are affiliated to the postmodern stream could be useful for a wide range of studies in Islam not to talk of Arabic literary criticism. The theory is circumscribed by an attitude of skepticism or distrust of grand narratives and ideologies. The postmodern thought casts doubt on the existence of objective reality and absolute truths and on such other notions and concepts as rationality and progress (Ihab 1987). The theory finds relevance in diverse fields of research including religion, literary criticism, gender and philosophy among others.

(d) *Reformation*

Contemporary research works on the intersection between Islamic law, Jurisprudence, modernist, indeed postmodernist streams and philosophies would benefit from the foundational theoretical postulations of Muhammad Omar-Farooq (Farooq 2011). Ṭaha Jabir al-Alwani's theoretical formulations on Islamic reformation and his insightful perspectives on the Islamic conception of the State in relation to the majority-minority questions are highly indispensable for deployment to research works in the field (Al-Alwani 2003 and 2006).

(e) *Al-Bābiyyah Theory*

This theory is derived in the main from the constellations of readings of cultural practices in Eastern and Western academy. It is equally grounded in the Quranic intellectual, spatio-temporal vision of the world. It proposes three critical elements. These include 'Ālamiyyah (Worldliness), Ibdā'īyyah (Creativity) and Insāniyyah (Humanity). The Ālamiyyah content of the *Al-Bābiyyah* theory calls attention to the worldliness of the "text and the critic" (Said 1983). But here it is proposed that we go beyond the latter to argue that a text represents an effort on the part of the author to *wrest* the world from itself; to attain immortality. In other words, the principle considers a text or a research work as a stone thrown into

a pond (the world) which disappears but creates ripples (meanings, readings and, indeed, 'misreadings') at the surface of the stream. This is because texts are created by their authors so that they may, in turn, create the world, a new world beyond the reaches of the author. This principle also views a text as an "adventure" by the author into the unknown.

Taking into the realm of Islam Studies, the *Alamiyyah* principle in *Al-Bābiyyah* theoretical framework finds amplification in the Quran. "Say", thus was Muhammad commanded, "if the ocean were ink with which to write the words of my Lord, the ocean would surely be consumed before the words of my Lord are finished, even if we brought similar quantity of ink to replenish it." (Quran 18:110). Seizing upon this Quranic warrant, the *Al-Bābiyyah* theoretical framework gains strength through its construction of the intellectual vocation as a never ending enterprise and one in which, like the 'words of my Lord' is circumscribed by the never-ending discovery of research problems and an equally inexhaustible propositions of solutions to same. Put differently, *Al-Bābiyyah* theory privileges the reading of the 'ocean' and 'words of my Lord' in the Quranic excerpt as metaphor and allegories respectively; the first as metaphor for the vastness of intellectual problems that researchers have contemplated and will indeed continue to contemplate, while the second as an allegory for the sheer plenitude of solution that would always be available to humanity for the former.

Taken into the realm of practice, a researcher in the field of humanities, particularly that of Islamic Studies and one who desires to reify the *Al-Bābiyyah* method in his research works would begin by recognizing the impossibility of delimiting the field to the traditional remit in which texts and only texts are objects of study. Rather as far as he is concerned, texts become invalid in the absence of contexts for which they are 'texted'. Reference to context here is holistic; it is to all spaces of human existence no matter its racial, geographical or religious contents. Thus, whenever he embarks on a research, the researcher who desires to deploy the *Al-Bābiyyah* theoretical framework becomes like the proverbial diver in an ocean in search of emeralds. He knows that like the ocean, his object of pursuit, should have no

closure. In other words, research work becomes like a circle the centre of which is everywhere, the circumference of which is nowhere.

Having the above principle as its groundment, the *Ibdā'iyah* principle within the *Al-Bābiyyah* theoretical framework however posits that creative instinct is innate to humanity; to be born is to be imbued with the credo for creativity. Thus, knowledge or literary production, reception and interpretation of texts recognize neither race nor religion. To talk of literary criticism, this principle posits that creativity manifests itself, in fact, operates at two levels—that of the poem or prose writer and that of the critic. The first (the writer) endeavours to re-“create” the world in the text in order that the former might appear in the cognition of humanity; in order to make humanity see itself; in order to enable humanity “know” what it thought it already knows; in order to encode the world with, in al-Jurjani’s word, “meaning” (al-Jurjani, 31). The second (the critic), on the other hand, treats the text which already has “meaning” like the “pearl in a shell: it does not emerge unless you crack open the shell and extract it” (ibid). The critic does this not with the intention to deprive the text of its “received” meaning, but in order to chance upon, again in al-Jurjani’s phraseology, “the meaning of the meaning” – “Ma’anā al-Ma’anā” (ibid) of the text. In other words, *al-ibdā'iyah* principle relates to texts with “meaning”, in the Barthesian manner, like “storeys” (Barthes 1975: 21). The first “storey” belongs to the masses; the uninitiated, while the second belongs to the intellectual, “the people of knowledge”.

The *Insāniyyah* principle of *Al-Bābiyyah* theory underscores the *humanum*, the essentially human, as a critical element in the production, reception and the criticism of research works and of texts written by writers regardless of their geographical location, social status or position. This is hinged on the assumption that texts not only speak to/about the writer/author but also the reader; they connect with existential realities of human life. Thus, the principle posits that research and literary-critical works should be weighed against its contribution to the realization of humanity’s quest for an ideal. This appears to be at play in Najib Mahfuz and Wole Soyinka’s works which comes under the uncanny title “The Road” (Oladosu 2000). In these and other similar texts, referentiality of African literature stems not from literature as the Russian

Formalists and the members of American “New Criticism” (Bazi 2006: 26) would argue but from social life and movement of history.

Having had some insights into theories that could be deployed into research in Arabic and Islamic Studies, we should now turn our attention to method. Again, our approach shall be that of provision of clues that young researchers in the field could follow, not that of aggregating, the totality of research instruments that are usable.

### **Pondering Method in Methodology**

Our discussions above clarifies that, unlike theory, the word method refers to the practical steps that the researcher would take in carrying out his or her research and the instruments he would deploy to achieve his goal. Two issues, among others, are important here—data gathering and data analysis. In Arabic and Islamic Studies, the two most applicable data gathering methods are the historical/ethnographic method and the descriptive research design. These two methods are explained below.

#### ***(i) Historical/Ethnographic Method***

The historical/ethnographic method involves the gathering, collation and organization of data into primary and secondary domains in order to predict the future direction or flows in specific area or areas of research in the humanities. The inferences which are drawn from the data collected by the researcher are further subjected to evaluation through internal and external validity tests in order to ensure the authenticity of information.

#### ***(ii) Descriptive Survey Design***

The descriptive survey design involves a careful study of a given situation or event in the real world. Here the researcher carefully observes the situation on ground without manipulating or influencing in any way the outcome of the observation (Akinboye and Akinboye 1998: 39-40). One critical tool often made use of in this type of research is observation and direct interaction with participants and respondents. These may include any or a combination with justification, of the following research instruments:

**Questionnaire,**

In-depth interview (IDI), Key-Informant interview (KII), Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Participatory Observation (PO) and Non-Participatory Observation (NPO) (Jegede 2006: 114).

In Arabic and Islamic studies, research works which deal with the social and the existential often utilize the survey design. This could be true of studies on the operation of Islamic microfinance banking system and that which explores conflicts among Muslims in a particular area. The hypothetical research work made use of above which concerns "Functional Use of Arabic Language in Southwest Nigeria" would require in-depth interviews and participant observations with respondents in the six south western states of Nigeria.

**Analysis of Data**

No matter the method or research instrument used, be it the historical/ethnographic or descriptive survey design, it is important that analysis of data from the primary and secondary domains and from the qualitative and quantitative sources is done with precision as much as possible. It must be borne in mind that the choice of the instrument to be used for a particular research and the consequent analysis of data gathered through them is usually a function of the theoretical framework whose choice had been foregrounded at the beginning of the research.

**Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to give useful insights into and answer pertinent questions on issues of importance to research in the field of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Aside from impinging Arabic and Islamic scholarship onto the general but highly engaging landscape of the humanities, it has offered humble perspectives on and discussed major elements of research that are generally acceptable in postgraduate works. These are what are generally known as research problem and methodology.

Furthermore, in recognition of the necessity for our institution to expand the frontiers of knowledge, the paper proposed Al-

Bābiyyah theoretical framework. It is a theory that sources its origin from the intersection of 'Western' and 'Eastern' cultures and could be applied to research in Arabic and Islamic studies, broadly defined. Overall, our goal in this paper has been to present what we refer to as the 'credo' of humanistic research to young researchers in the field in a way that would aid their competence and widen their horizon. A proper understanding of what is meant by research problem and of how theory interfaces and interlaces with method to become methodology is therefore probably the very first principle that must be internalized by researchers whose desire is the production of research works that would enjoy the patronage of faculty and be acceptable to the academia.

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