



***Turats* and the Reconstruction of Scientific Civilization in Progressive Muslim Perspective**

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Abstract

This paper examines the intellectual responses of the progressive variant of Muslim thought to various contemporary humanity's challenges based on its distinctive epistemological and interpretive approach, namely progressive *ijtihad*. This is library research based on analyzing the works of leading proponents of this progressive Muslim thought. It argues that progressive Muslim thought offers and develops a critical and progressive interpretation of Islam that respects and glorifies human values. With this epistemological and interpretive framework, progressive Muslim thought contributes significantly to the development and reconstruction of scientific civilization, which is transdisciplinary and capable of tackling various humanity's problems at both global and local levels.

Keywords *Turats, Scientific Civilization, Progressive Muslims*

INTRODUCTION

Today, religion, especially Islam as a divine religion that is used as a guide to the lives of its followers, is often considered negligent in ensuring the survival and dignity of humankind. This fact is supported by the phenomenon that world history has never been empty of accusations of religious "involvement" in wars and conflicts (Kimball, 2008, p. 115). By implication, religion is considered an ancient teaching and does not solve human problems (Mintarja, 2003: 206, Yusdani, 2015: 115). At the same time, the development and challenges of globalization equipped with sophisticated information technology produce new patterns in life and human relations that are different from the previous era. The impact of this significant change is the increasing gap between the Islamic world and the reality and dynamics of changing societies with all their complexity (Essack, 1997: 50, Mu'ammam, 2001: 349-350).

As the above phenomenon's impact for a long time, it seems that Islam as a divine religion is losing its vision and mission to answer humanity's problems. This reality has made certain contemporary Muslim scholars acutely aware of the need to re-read and be critical of the *turats* or intellectual heritage they have in order to respond to societal dynamics and changes. This paper examines some of the main intellectual responses of this progressive variant of Muslim thought to various societal changes and dynamics and its distinctive epistemological and interpretive approach, namely progressive *ijtihad* (Essack, 1997: 50, Mu'ammam, 2001: 349-350).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The symptoms of stagnant dynamics and developments of Islamic thought are realities and facts that are difficult to refute. From a sociological perspective, Islamic thought must move in tandem with the dynamics and changes of society. The methodological framework that creates opportunities to encourage the renewal of Islamic thought must be governed by the "sanctity" of the text interpreted by Muslims in the early and mid-Middle Ages. Therefore, it can be asserted that

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Islam still exists, but its methodological framework and epistemological foundation are outdated. This is why Islam stagnates, lacks responsiveness to reality, and needs to be changed and adjusted (Fadl, 2001, p. 171).

In this light, responses of Muslims to contemporary developments and dynamics have been dominated by retrospective, nostalgic, and backward projection in which the theoretical basis and tools of their knowledge always depend on the idealization of history. In addition, some Muslim scholars in the modern era are not very interested in talking about theology, philosophy, and worldview. As a result, this theoretical framework of epistemology produces static Islamic thinking without orientation and vision of civilization in the future. Efforts to reform Islamic reason in Islamic culture have recently been narrowed by the discourse and project of Islamization of science and miss the critical debate of methodological aspects of science in the perspective and level of theoretical tools of Islamic philosophy of knowledge in the realm of global civilization (Rahman, 1982, p. 153, Guessoum, 2011, pp. 116-131, Mestiry, 2014, pp. 19-20, Abdullah, 2019, p. 189).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is library research focused on progressive Muslim thinkers' ideas, perspectives and arguments with special reference to their epistemological and interpretive framework. Data were gathered and analyzed primarily through analyzing the writings of several leading progressive Muslim thinkers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Perspectives of progressive Islam can be examined on various fundamental issues, such as the application of jurisprudence, Islam and the democratic system, the position of women, interfaith relations, Islam and human rights, and the position of minority groups. Progressive Islamic thought on various humanitarian issues today contradicts other variants of Muslim thought. On this basis, the position and existence of this progressive variant of Islam are to reformulate alternative thinking in order to create a graceful community building, maintain humanist values and realize goodness for all members of society (Ilyas, 2018, p. 9). In this progressive variant of Islamic thinking, all humans and nations are equal, the rights of every group, both majority and minority, are respected and have an equal and fair position.

In this context, progressive Muslim thought offers important epistemological and methodological tools in re-reading Islamic *turats*, transforming and contextualizing it in today's life by taking a post-monodisciplinary approach, namely a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary or even cross-disciplinary model (Abubakar, 2016: 335-376, Abdullah, 2019: 196, Abdullah, 2021, pp. 135-145). Therefore, scientific insight in the re-reading and reconstructing of the Islamic *turats* needs to utilize a variety of sciences, such as natural science, technology, social science, humanities and others. Ebrahim Moosa, one of the leading proponents of progressive Muslim thought, characterizes his own thought and progressive Muslim thought in general as "a dialogical conversation taking place in a heterogeneous environment" of disciplines that takes inspiration from non-secular and non-Western contexts as well as from the widely understood tradition of knowledge as the Western humanities" (Moosa, 2005, p. 35). Moreover, Moosa repeatedly stressed the need for contemporary Muslims to constantly search for knowledge that would assist them in finding creative solutions and new possibilities to their problems (Moosa in Safi, 2007).

For this distinctive approach to Islamic tradition, some also identify progressive Muslim thought as critical traditionalism. This approach is distinguished by his insistence on engaging with tradition critically, to "constantly investigate and interrogate" productively and constructively" (Moosa, 2007, p. 118). In this context, a progressive intellectual posture involves critically

interrogating the bases of tradition, namely text, practice, and history, by asking questions about inherited knowledge of tradition. Moosa (2007, p. 241) describes critical traditionalist scholars as those who "lean towards this ethical orientation", those who "view" the juridical tradition as work-in-progress", those who "call for criticism" of past [Muslim] thinkers", and those who "historize and adopt contemporary knowledge and experience as part of the tradition". Critical traditionalists are those who "engage in new ethics and laws" interpretations of traditions embodied by dialogical engagement between the traditional Islamic religious sciences and the modern social sciences and humanities. According to Moosa, what distinguishes the progressive Muslim approach to tradition from other versions "is its concern for the coexistence of Muslims and the transcendent and historical dimensions of religious tradition". As a "critical" adjective in "critical traditionalism", Moosa put forward the view that contemporary Muslims need to engage in poiesis, i.e., the attempt of critical, creative thinking to engage with tradition.

In the view of progressive Muslim scholars, all the provisions of the previous Islamic jurisprudence of a traditional nature, including those that were not accommodating for justice, goodness, and beauty in the field of family law and other fields of human life, must be abandoned and progressive *ijtihad* methods subsequently used. In this way, Islam and Sharia law can live and survive on the world stage and provide answers to today's contemporary global and national problems. On this basis, progressive *ijtihad* is clearly a framework of progressive Islam. Such a framework does not intend to create a new religion or doctrine. However, it attempts to reinterpret traditional religious foundations to adapt to modern life and provide answers to the various humanitarian problems facing contemporary Muslims.

As a variant of contemporary Islamic thought, Progressive Islam departs from such deep academic anxiety. In this respect, the existence of progressive Islamic thought is needed to address the humanitarian problems of the contemporary era at three levels; (1) the local level, such as the preservation and development of local wisdom owned by various ethnicities, and others; (2) at the national level such as the need to make important contributions to strengthen the nation-state system, constitution, democratic system, law enforcement, and so forth; (3) at the international/global level such as contributing to various UN and other humanitarian documents, such as human rights, gender, climate change, Sustainable Development Goals, protection of minorities, and many other pressing issues.

According to this progressive variant of Islamic thought, Muslim scholars can contribute to addressing the three levels of contemporary humanitarian problems by re-reading and revitalizing (*ihya*) the *turats* inherited by Muslims by dialoguing them academically and critically with various scientific civilizations (*hadarah al-ilm*) that thrive today. In the view of progressive Muslims, to develop a creative reading of *turats* and contributive to solving humanity's complex problems, Muslims require scientific theoretical tools that are open to the sources of theoretical tools of contemporary scientific civilization (*hadarah al-ilm*), such as social sciences, humanities sciences, both intra-doctrinal reform and extra-doctrinal reform with all its derivations.

Progressive Islamic thought thus emerges to formulate a set of Islamic approaches that can be used as a primary reference to realize a just society that is humanist in a broad sense, respects human dignity and creates peace for everyone. Therefore, progressive Islam can be understood as an attempt to reinterpret Islam that can provide answers to contemporary society. The ultimate aim of this progressive orientation of Islamic thought is to bring the fundamental values of Islam into the life and order of modern society that is equal, just, and free from all kinds of injustice and discrimination.

CONCLUSIONS

The discussion of some of the arguments of progressive Muslim thought shows that this

variant of Islamic thought was born to strengthen the basic principles of Islam, which can be the basic guidelines of Islamic thought in the dynamics and demands of humanity in this modern era. In addition, it also provides solutions to these dynamics departing from a re-reading of the Islamic heritage itself. Progressive Islamic thought is based on the basic concept by putting forward the concept of "context-based *ijtihad* (progressive *ijtihadist*)" based on distinctive fundamental values. The distinctive values in question include universal values needed to guide human life and to answer the humanitarian problems of this modern era, such as democracy, human rights, gender, climate change, and others. Progressive Muslim thought thus offers and develops an interpretation of Islam that respects and glorifies human values. This kind of epistemological and methodological framework greatly contributes to the development and reconstruction of scientific civilization, which is transdisciplinary in nature. Such Islamic ideas can produce Muslim scholars who can answer and solve contemporary problems at various levels and dimensions.

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