

Analyzing Islamic Theology through Orientalism: Implications for Pluralism and Modern Understanding

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Abstract: *Over the years, Orientalism has been a factor in the shaping of various Western portrayals of Islamic theology especially through philological and historical-critical methods that have not only produced a deeper understanding of Islamic theology among scholars but have also contributed to the epistemic reduction of it. In this context, the article looks at how the ambivalent effects, in the case of religious pluralism and modern Islamic theology, stem from this dual effect. It uses qualitative library research to examine Edward Said's critique of Orientalist representation, W. Montgomery Watt's historical reconstruction of early Islam, Talal Asad's critique of the secular categories, and Muslim responses as represented by Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid. From the results it can be seen that historical contextualization as an auxiliary method rather than an total explanation of revelation is most useful in revealing the meaning of events. Therefore, the article presents a critical/dialogical Islamic theology based on four operations: normative fidelity to the revelation, historical contextualization of revelation and its transmission, postcolonial vigilance to Western cultural assumptions, and, last, ethical-dialogical responsibility toward humanity and the created world. Within this framework, pluralism denotes divine sovereignty under which human beings, different in beliefs, cultures, and social structures, have, as the first of God's laws, the dignity and freedom to be themselves according to God's plan, not simply recognizing Islam without relativization as one among the many truth-claims.*

Keywords: Islamic Theology; Modernity; Orientalism; Postcolonialism; Religious Pluralism

Abstrak: *Orientalisme membentuk representasi Barat tentang teologi Islam melalui metode filologis dan historis-kritis yang menghasilkan sekaligus wawasan akademik dan reduksi epistemik. Artikel ini menilai ambivalensi tersebut dalam kaitannya dengan pluralisme agama dan teologi Islam modern. Melalui penelitian kepustakaan kualitatif, kajian menganalisis kritik Edward Said atas representasi Orientalis, rekonstruksi historis W. Montgomery Watt tentang Islam awal, kritik Talal Asad terhadap kategori sekuler, serta respons Muslim yang diwakili Harun Nasution dan Nurcholish Madjid. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kontekstualisasi historis produktif jika diperlakukan sebagai metode parsial, bukan penjelasan total atas wahyu. Artikel mengusulkan teologi Islam kritis-dialogis melalui empat operasi: kesetiaan normatif, kontekstualisasi historis, kewaspadaan pascakolonial, dan tanggung jawab etis-dialogis. Dalam*

kerangka ini, pluralisme berarti pengakuan, kebebasan, dan koeksistensi di bawah kedaulatan Tuhan, bukan relativisasi klaim kebenaran Islam.

Kata Kunci: Modernitas; Orientalisme; Pascakolonialisme; Pluralisme Agama; Teologi Islam

INTRODUCTION

Orientalism is not a monolithic doctrine that Western scholars use to depict the East but, a multi-layered Western discourse of knowledge, through which the Western academic establishment has depicted, categorized, and interpreted various Eastern societies. Orientalism's contribution to the sciences has included philology or the study of textual transmission, textual criticism, historical reconstruction, among other fields of study. Edward Said has further shown that at times such knowledge was tied up with systems of representation and the exercise of imperial power which made possible, the East as the object, its meaning however, determined elsewhere. Hence, a theological problem from Islamic perspective is: Orientalist studies might help uncover historical situations but may also treat religious texts, faith, and normativity as social conditions' outcomes.¹

Such an ambivalent outlook shows itself rather strongly when the subject comes to religious pluralism and modernity debates. For one, through the historical-critical approach of scholars, it becomes possible the religious environment of early Islamic times was pluralistic, and that the religion actually grew within and adapted to such settings; but a past with various religions does not per se imply that the religion of Islam is now theologically pluralistic. On the contrary, a purely defensive form of theology might very well safeguard doctrine limits but it probably still won't be able to confront the issues of religion freedom, tolerance, morality, and human rights in a multi-faith society. The task is not to choose between an external historical method and an internal normative commitment, but to clarify the authority and limits of each.

Earlier studies have traced the colonial genealogy of Orientalism, distinguished classical from contemporary forms, and described its principal methods. Postcolonial scholarship has further shown that the production of knowledge about Islam is never detached from institutional location and relations of power. These contributions are important, but they often stop at exposing bias. Studies of modern Islamic theology, by contrast, frequently celebrate contextual interpretation without specifying which historical assumptions may be accepted, corrected, or rejected. The unresolved question concerns the procedure by which Islamic theology can engage external scholarship without surrendering its normative epistemology.^{2, 3}

This article addresses that gap through two questions. First, what do select Orientalist and post-Orientalist readings contribute to, and obscure within, the study of Islamic theology? Second, how can Islamic theology formulate a disciplined response to religious

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, trans. Asep Hikmah (Bandung: Pustaka, 1996).

² L. Koefoed and Michael Haldrup, "Orientalism," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (Elsevier, 2020), 19–24, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102295-5.10203-3>.

³ Badarussyamsi, "Islam di Mata Orientalisme Klasik dan Orientalisme Kontemporer," *Tajdid* 15, no. 1 (2016); Rizki Ulfahadi Reynaldi Adi Surya, "Pandangan Orientalis terhadap Sejarah Islam Awal," *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 4, no. 2 (2018).

plurality without collapsing pluralism into relativism? The article argues that historical analysis becomes theologically productive only when treated as a limited explanatory instrument, submitted to source criticism, postcolonial scrutiny, and evaluation from within the normative structure of Islamic belief.

Its principal contribution is a model of critical-dialogical Islamic theology. The model does not regard Orientalism as either wholly corrupt or epistemically neutral. It distinguishes methodological gains from ideological assumptions and organizes theological engagement through four operations: normative fidelity to revelation, historical contextualization, postcolonial vigilance, and ethical-dialogical responsibility. This framework is then applied to the problem of pluralism as a test case.

METHOD AND CORPUS

Orientalism, by Edward Said is a qualitative textbook study with conceptual-text analysis, besides using Muhammad at Mecca by W. Montgomery Watt and Formations of the Secular by Talal Asad. Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid will also be considered in the text because their works are among the examples of Muslim modern efforts to revive the rational and universal elements of Islamic thoughts. Orientalism (Edward Said) reveals how Orientalism represents and is institutionally grounded; Watt shows how historical reconstructions can and cannot be done; Asad is questioning the assumed universality of secular analytical categorization. Nasution and Madjid, in fact, stand for the efforts of modern Muslims to bring back the rational and universal sides of Islamic thoughts.⁴

The paper is analyzed through these four sequential layers: first, textual reconstruction helps to pinpoint each author's core message, the item under investigation, and methodological standpoints. Then, the second layer comprises of the contextual analysis, where these different views are placed in the framework of their intellectual as well as institutional environment. One of the ways postcolonial critiques approach a literary work or film is by asking if and how the characters from a minority group are the ones that are carrying out the norms of the minority culture or if it is mainly the dominant group who dictates the norms but with a touch of the minority group. The last layer consists of theological reconstruction which aims at figuring out which insights can be retained without, for instance, reducing the revelation to just a cause or a result of the society that reveals the phenomenon but, on the other hand, also without accepting the Western concepts as the only criteria of the universality.

The study distinguishes three meanings frequently conflated in discussions of pluralism: empirical plurality, civic pluralism, and theological pluralism. Empirical plurality refers to the fact of religious diversity; civic pluralism concerns equal protection, freedom, and peaceful coexistence; theological pluralism concerns the status of competing truth and salvation claims. The article defends civic pluralism and a dialogical

⁴ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953); Said, *Orientalism*; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam: Aliran-aliran, Sejarah, Analisa Perbandingan* (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press, 2018); Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Doktrin dan Peradaban*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Gramedia and Nurcholish Madjid Society, 2019).

theological horizon while preserving Islam's normative truth claims. Such a conceptual demarcation restricts the conclusion to a certain extent and makes it impossible for the Qur'anic acknowledgment of diversity to serve automatically as a proof of the equal truth of all teachings.

Library research in this context is seen as an organized method of choosing, contrasting, and understanding text-based sources of evidence rather than merely representing a corpus of defined works. Therefore, the paper distinguishes major analytical texts from contextual scholarship and takes into consideration bibliographical authority, thematical suitability, and the nature of the connection between a referenced assertion and its reference source as clear criteria for text selection.⁵

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Orientalism as an Epistemic Formation

The scholarly value of Orientalism should be considered alongside its historical genesis. By means of philology and historical-critical scholarship, a wider public was gradually brought manuscripts, different languages, time periods, and social contexts. However, as Said maintains, these means of accessing the East also functioned as representations through which the West could legitimize its control and domination. The East was presented as being either unchanging, unreasonable, or a dependent entity. So, the main issue is not the historical investigation, per se, but rather that a merely partial mode of looking at things has been turned into a complete and exclusive account of an East that should have been left to its own story.⁶

Any theological text is entitled to be examined in terms of language, chronological development, transmission, and the surrounding society. These approaches explain the way a doctrine was presented and refuted. But they hardly make revelation true, or establish if God is active, or the validity of a particular community's claims. When an account of history only thinks of societal causes as the real causes, history turns into philosophy. To make it clearer, one has to understand how the historical account is explaining or not acknowledging ontologically certain things.

Talal Asad further supports this criticism by illustrating the fact that concepts like 'religion', the secular, etc., have specific historical origins. His finding is extremely significant for Islamic theology. If contemporary secular concepts become, without question, the standards of what is rational in religion, Muslim theology is obliged to defend itself through a system whose ideas came to be in another way. In doing a critical and dialogical research on the categories, the categories themselves become the subjects of study and the researchers of the concepts.⁷

⁵ Abdurrahman, "Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan dalam Pendidikan Islam," *Addabuna: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pemikiran* 3, no. 2 (2024).

⁶ Said, *Orientalism*.

⁷ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*.

Indonesian scholars have studied the concept of Orientalism and agreed that it is essentially characterized by competing historical motives and intellectual frameworks. Some scholars highlight its emergence coinciding with colonial expansion, missionary works, and debates of who had the right to represent Islam; on the other hand, others separate those histories from the academic activities of today and believe that literary analysis or historical research can bring clarity when the basic ideas underlying the field remain open to questioning. Such different evaluations justify the article's choice of not representing Orientalism as a unity of a conspiracy on the side of East or as a science that is devoid of bias.⁸

Of course, the caveat goes also to method. Philology will be able to detect textual variations, linguistic idiom, and the history of the diffusion of the text, phenomenology, by its nature, will describe how believers characterize religious experience. In neither case can one of them determine the truth of revelation independently. But their combined strength will show best when there is a clear definition of the limits of each approach and when the external view is compared with the language of the Muslim understanding of their theological commitment.⁹

Case Analysis I: W. Montgomery Watt and Historical Reconstruction

W. Montgomery Watt's *Muhammad at Mecca* provides us with an excellent example on the one hand, the potential, and the on the other hand, the constraints of reconstructing history from a scholarly perspective. He places the origin of Islam in the context of Meccan sociopolitical structures, economic transformation, tribe relationships, and the religious situation of the late antiquity period.

This methodology has also a bearing on theological study, as it challenges the possibility of a complete disengagement of the text from its time and place, and it demonstrates that what the Prophet delivered had its roots in moral as well as socio-cultural issues.¹⁰

One of the methodological advantages of the contextualist approach is the way it can make abstract ideas and principles visible in specific human contexts of history and culture. Thus, religious concepts like monotheism belief in one deity, the notion of accountability being answerable to others for ones deeds, solidarity sharing and

⁸ Nursuhadah Zuhaidi Hakim Zainal, "Sejarah Perkembangan Tata Bahasa Arab di Dunia Barat oleh Orientalis pada Kurun 16M–19M," *Al-Abqari: Journal of Islamic Social Sciences and Humanities* 24, no. 2 (2020); Abdul Rahim, "Sejarah Perkembangan Orientalisme," *HUNafa: Jurnal Studi Islamika* 7, no. 2 (2010): 179–92; Syukri Al Fauzi Harlis Yurnalis, "Studi Orientalis terhadap Islam: Dorongan dan Tujuan," *Jurnal Al-Aqidah* 11, no. 1 (2019): 63–75, <https://doi.org/10.15548/ja.v11i1.909>; Azhar Nurachman and Kasori Mughaid, "Studi Orientalisme Menurut Sejarah dan Tujuan Gerakannya," *AHKAM* 2, no. 4 (2023): 866–78, <https://doi.org/10.58578/ahkam.v2i4.2310>; Akh. Minhaji, *Kontroversi Orientalisme dalam Studi Islam (Makna, Latar Belakang, Teori dan Metodologi)* (Bening Pustaka, n.d.); Barza Setiawan and Mahmud Muhsinin, "Studi Kritis tentang Orientalisme" 2, no. 2 (2016); Giacomo Maria Arrigo, "Critique of Orientalist Reason: Edward Said and the Dialectic of Enlightenment," *The Square*, April 26, 2021; and Sameh Asker, "Orientalism as an Epistemological Necessity for Enlightenment," *AlMuslih*, January 27, 2024.

⁹ Mohammad Thoriq Fauzi Mahmud, "Pendekatan Filologis dalam Studi Islam," *TAMADDUN* 8, no. 2 (2023); and Afif Syaiful Mahmudin, "Pendekatan Fenomenologis dalam Kajian Islam," *At-Tajdid* 5, no. 1 (2021).

¹⁰ Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*.

supporting others, and rejection of injustice become more understandable in the framework of a certain historical setting.

Islamic religious thought is particularly well-suited to profit from this kind of reinterpretation if we take one of its foundational premises the nature of revelation (Wahid) more seriously. For, the content of the revelation was not just a set of commandments or laws, written on paper, delivered to an isolated prophet, but it was in and through the language that it revealed itself, as a series of historical events and community experiences rather than as something outside of human history.

This problem comes up when revelation is so fully interpreted by its social setting that nothing of its divine aspect remains. History will tell us a lot of different things maybe even when a message was rejected, what was the opposition pattern, or the general reception of it in a particular society. However, it alone cannot tell whether or not revelation has played a role.

In other words, theological interpretation of the biblical text is happy with Watt's contextual questions as long as the answer doesn't say that the truth of the prophecy is merely the social function. It is the critical-dialogical mode that is the judge and that decision is made with selectivity: history is used but the metaphysics part requires separate reasoning.

Case Analysis II: Said, Asad, and the Politics of Representation

What Said has brought to the table is not, first and foremost, a fresh insight into Islam through a new exegesis of *t awḥīd* or *kalām*, rather, it is a challenge to the way Islam is officially presented. Using his book, he probes into the issue of representation, 'who speak, the place and the manner, the conceptual binaries and the political ramifications.'¹¹

Asad expands on the topic by challenging secularism's assertion that it offers an impartial setting for public affairs. From a theological view, this implies that pluralism cannot be merely understood according to one importing a secular theory and subsequently evaluating an Islamic worldview based on it. Rather, Islamic theology must study a historical sequence of the notions employed while also reflecting upon its own biases and historical constraints. It follows that postcolonial critique is not a justification for apologetics; it is rather a science of symmetric examination.

Said and Asad's main takeaways can be understood as follows: that criticism from outside is not something we should automatically get rid of just because of the background of the critic, neither should be blindly believed and adopted purely because the person criticizing is well-known academically. Its validity lies primarily in the soundness of its evidence, openness about its starting assumptions, and, most importantly perhaps, its capacity to acknowledge and understand Muslims as having subjectivities with meanings that they interpret. Muslims, of course, should never be excluded from this rule, they can cite their own internal authenticity and legitimacy as a defense, yet, at the

¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*.

same time, they still have the duty to present reasoning, be it by way of arguments or replies to pieces of historical evidence.

Orientalist portrayal has, therefore, found its way to the digital media too. Researches indicate that digitally platformed visual materials, online film stories, and machine-learning generated religious content can still, to quite a large extent, revive and perpetuate old divisions and dichotomizations without presenting them in the format familiar from the early philology works. Thus, this further proves the case for studying not only those who write and what they write but also that which media and institutional setup are used to show Islam to the modern audiences.¹²

Internal Plurality of Kalām and Modern Muslim Responses

Islamic theology can take up critical debate through its own internal resources since the traditional Islamic Kalām did not become a monolithic unit at all. Different theologians such as Ash'arites, Maturids, and Mu'tazlites were divided regarding to the role of reason and revelation, the nature of divine power and human capacity for independent choice, and what constitutes morally good or bad as a result of reasoning.

This variety of thought reveals that a commitment to norms does not prevent the use of a variety of methods, while at the same time, it warns against portraying Islamic theology as a set of dogmatic teachings that are not subject to debate and the effects of a historical context.¹³

Contemporary Muslim scholars have deliberately revived this heterogeneity. Harun Nasution drew particular attention to logical trends in the past of kalām which he viewed as the means to refute fatalism and human power. While Nurcholish Madjid was more of a liberal in his views than a strict theologian. Nurcholish Madjid presented an explanation of the inclusivity of Islam where the belief in tawḥīd was not at the expense of the recognition of social plurality and modern civic values.

In their writings which mainly reflected their own understanding there was, however, no trace of merely copying the Western influence. Rather what we see is that a few of these Muslim thinkers at the same time had a certain Western education and a deep understanding of Islam which enabled them to take part as equals in a global discourse which encompassed different approaches: historical criticism and reconstruction, reformism, internal and external.^{14, 15}

This difference is important. One can say that the effect was direct or mediated through the other party. When one person acknowledges that his/her work was inspired

¹² Payal Nagpal, "Digital Orientalism: Investigating Evangelical Adoption Content on YouTube through a Post-Colonial Lens," *Computers and Composition* 72 (2024): 102853, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2024.102853>.

¹³ Yogi Sulaeman Al-Misri, "Teologi Asy-ariyah: Sejarah dan Pemikirannya," *EL-ADABI: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 1 (2023): 25–44; Arif Nunu Burhanuddin, "Aliran dan Pemikiran Kalam Maturidiyah," *PERSPEKTIF: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Ilmu Bahasa* 1, no. 4 (2023); Akmal Syah Dede Khairani, *Sejarah Perkembangan Aliran Muktazilah* (n.p., n.d.).

¹⁴ Madjid, *Islam Doktrin dan Peradaban*.

¹⁵ Nasution, *Teologi Islam*.

by another's ideas or even that the former was in fact an improvement on the latter, this shows direct or at least mediated influence which is a type of intellectual property transfer.

However, when one party has no knowledge of the other party, the former's idea might be similar, the latter having developed it independently, and the only overlapping part being the problem that was posed, their respective backgrounds will have guided them in quite different ways. As a result, the paper refrains from suggesting that Fazlur Rahman's double movement approach was a by-product of Orientalism. A more appropriate way would be to place it as a product of interaction with the development of scholarly historical discourse while still acknowledging that it has a rooting in an Islamic moral hermeneutic.¹⁶

Modern surveys of Islamic theology explain and clarify the internal resources of this relationship. Theology deals with the reflection on God, revelation, human accountability, and the life of faith; and thus, present-day Muslim scholars not only restore the classical dichotomy between reason and textual evidence but, at the same time, they do not discard kalām entirely. Indonesian studies of rational and traditional currents, modern theological renewal, and the cultural articulation of Islam illustrate that contextualization can occur from within Islamic intellectual history. The example of Walisongo, for instance, shows that theological fidelity and cultural translation need not be treated as mutually exclusive.¹⁷

Religious Pluralism: Recognition without Relativism

Theological discussion must begin by distinguishing plurality from pluralism. The existence of multiple religions is an empirical fact. Civic pluralism is a normative arrangement that protects freedom, equal citizenship, and peaceful coexistence. Theological pluralism raises a different question: whether divergent religious claims are equally true or salvifically equivalent. Confusion among these levels produces unnecessary polarization.

The Qur'anic principles of human diversity and non-compulsion provide strong foundations for civic pluralism and dialogical responsibility. Q. 49:13 presents human difference as a condition for mutual recognition, while Q. 2:256 rejects coercion in matters of faith. These verses support dignity, freedom, and coexistence. They do not, without further argument, abolish Islam's distinctive claims concerning revelation, prophecy, and truth.¹⁸

¹⁶ Léon Buskens and Annemarie van Sandwijk, eds., *Islamic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Transformations and Continuities* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zxsk97>.

¹⁷ Ahmad Hanafi, *Pengantar Teologi Islam* (Jakarta: PT Pustaka Al-Husna Baru, 2003); Henni Marlinah, *Pemikiran Islam Rasional dan Islam Tradisional di Indonesia* (Tangerang: Pustaka Pedia, 2018); Nasihun Amin, *Pemikiran Teologi Islam Modern* (Lawwana, 2021); Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam: Aliran-aliran, Sejarah dan Perkembangannya* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1986); and Muhammad Ibnu Aminim, Galuh Maria, and Suhermanto Ja'far, "Theology and Culture: Walisongo's Strategy of Islamic Enculturation in Java," *Aqlania* 16, no. 1 (2025): 73–98, <https://doi.org/10.32678/aqlania.v16i1.26>.

¹⁸ Ratoni, "Pluralisme Agama dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an," *QALAM: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.57210/qlm.v5i2.334>; Fabrizio Mandreoli, "Inductive-Theological Notes on Religious Pluralism in a Passage of the Abu Dhabi Declaration," *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and*

Contemporary theological debate therefore requires a position that is neither exclusivist in civic life nor relativist in doctrine. The article describes pluralism as a theological setting of respectful living together under God's reign, where God allows man's varied expressions, man keeps himself personally responsible for his beliefs, and religion has to be practiced in a way that respects one another and without physical or emotional harm.

Orientalist historiographical contributions help in revealing the fact that Muslim communities have been continually negotiating religious diversity through specific contexts. However, their weakness is the over temptation to present pluralism as primarily a reaction to modern social pressure. Muslim internal sources indicate that matters of difference, recognition, justice, and freedom are also theological questions of norms. The dialogue between tradition and criticism approach, that is, presenting historical facts and normative arguments in discussion, not one over another:

Besides, Indonesian debates also show how pluralism needs to be backed with conceptual discipline. In fact, it is very common for public debates to oscillate between tolerance, civic coexistence, and theological pluralism without realizing their different claims. Arguments put forward in the Holy Book to support non-coercion and mutual recognition might well serve as a foundation for civic responsibility but they definitely do not lead us to accept that all beliefs have equal validity just by default.

Led by research on how religious values are passed over in education, it is very clear that we can actually cultivate mutual coexistence via social means. At the same time, Muslim scholars from within have criticized pluralistic interpretations of Ibn 'Arabī and thus one has to be careful while using a Sufi's metaphysics as a straightforward proof of doctrinal relativism. All in all, this article regards a pluralistic society as one that is characterized by being respectful of one another at the same time being conscious that we still serve our God together with no one getting to eliminate one's confession or identity from a place of power.¹⁹

A Critical-Dialogical Islamic Theology

From the analysis arises a four-part model on the way to interact with Orientalist thinking and modern academic scholarship. This model is not a middle-ground solution that divides authority equally among all discourses. It is an ordered series of critical actions through which claims are evaluated.

Transformation in Contemporary Society 8, no. 2 (2022): 435–65, <https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-bja10050>.

¹⁹ M. Abdillah, "Pluralisme dan Toleransi," in *Pluralitas Agama: Kerukunan dalam Keragaman* (Kompas, 2001); Asep Setiawan, "Pluralisme Agama dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an: Studi Kritis terhadap Pemikiran Abdul Moqsiith Ghazali" (PhD diss., UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2011); Danny Cohen-Zada and Todd Elder, "Religious Pluralism and the Transmission of Religious Values through Education," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 150 (2018): 325–49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2018.01.015>; and Kholid Karomi, "Penolakan Ibn Arabi terhadap Pluralisme Agama," *Kalimah* 12, no. 1 (2014).

Operation	Primary Question	Function	Failure Prevented
Normative fidelity	Does the interpretation respect the authority and conceptual grammar of revelation?	Preserves the internal identity of Islamic theology.	Reduction of theology to external categories.
Historical contextualization	What linguistic, social, and political conditions shaped the text and its reception?	Prevents decontextualized and anachronistic readings.	Ahistorical apologetics.
Postcolonial vigilance	Whose categories, institutions, and power relations structure the analysis?	Exposes asymmetry, othering, and hidden universals.	Uncritical acceptance of academic authority.
Ethical-dialogical responsibility	How does the conclusion affect dignity, freedom, justice, and coexistence?	Connects truth claims with public moral responsibility.	Relativism on one side and coercive exclusivism on the other.

These four operations are interrelated and they complement each other. Commitment to the normative standpoint without any consideration of history, for instance, may result in the repetition of the same ideas in a defensive mode. If you contextualize historically the texts of the Scripture without the discipline of the normative standards of the Bible you could come out with a very reduced vision of the revelation. Also, post-colonial sensitivities or critical thinking can very quickly turn into a rejection of evidence by the use of that 'alibi for rejection.' Again Conversely, one might see a dialogue as a means of discussing ideas without the necessity of a solid doctrinal basis. Then theology would be dissolved into a common ethics of the people. However Hence it can be said that this system depends very much on these four functions being alive all the time in any of these ways of handling the Scripture.

When applied to pluralism, the model is able to come up with a clear conclusion. Revealing sets out the fundamental ethical outlook; recounting the experiences of Muslim communities with diversity shows the historical aspect; postcolonial critique checks for hidden biases in modern ideas; and moral accountability insists on liberty, fairness, and peaceful living without force. As an outcome, it is something that is neither an all-encompassing theology which sees difference as a danger, nor a conciliatory theology that gives up its own claims in favor of those of different beliefs.

Critical-dialogical theology also contrasts with those initiatives which, in order to combat Western knowledge production, mainly put forward a full-scale program of Islamization. The latter does indeed highlight knowledge independence in epistemic matters and also the normative direction of knowing, but here the model works by the

detailed evaluation of each individual statement: a methodology may be kept, an ideological premise discarded, and an argumentative conclusion rewritten. Thus the partial strategy hopes to avoid relying on categories borrowed from abroad on one side, and on the other hand being too quick to eliminate evidence based on its intellectual origin.²⁰

CONCLUSION

Orientalism has an ambivalent place in the study of Islamic theology. The philological and historical-critical methods of this science have made it possible to bring the language, the chronology, the social environment, and even the development of exegesis into light. Its drawback is apparent, especially in those cases where such a method constitutes a comprehensive framework that turns revelation into history or considers only western secular categories of understanding as applicable.

The case studies show that Watt's historical reconstruction contributes to contextual understanding without being a reliable way of deciding whether revelation is true or not. Both Said and Asad reveal that what seems like neutral representation has its own politics and genealogy. Nasution and Madjid, on the other hand, show in which ways Muslim thinkers can participate in modern reason while being faithful to Islamic intellectual commitments. It is clear from these kinds of debates that there is a dialogue of mutual critique as well as methodological fusion that should not be seen as one-directional influence of Orientalist thinking.

This article mainly puts forward the idea of normative fidelity, historical contextualization, postcolonial vigilance, and ethical-dialogical responsibility to define critical-dialogical Islamic theology. To show support for religion pluralism, civic pluralism, freedom, and mutual recognition the model does not need the Islamic truth claims to be relativized. The conclusion leaves it as a thought, the paper says, future studies can try the framework more accurately by closely comparing Orientalist texts, Muslim theological responses, and lived practices of interreligious citizenship..

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²⁰ Rizatu Hasanah Fauza Masyhudi, "Konsep Islamisasi Ilmu Pengetahuan: Studi Kritis terhadap Pemikiran Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi dan Syad Naquib Al-Attas," *KHIDMAT: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Ilmu Sosial* 2, no. 2 (2024).

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