

Historical Positivism and Axiological Criticism: A Critique of Qur'anic Reasoning on 20th-Century Indonesian Islamic Historiography

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Abstract:

The writing of Islamic history (historiography) in Indonesia throughout the 20th century has experienced very rapid methodological progress, but on the other hand, faces serious challenges related to the drought of axiological values. This article aims to conduct a critical analysis of the development of 20th-century Indonesian Islamic historiography using Qur'anic reasoning as an analytical tool. The method used is qualitative with an intellectual history approach and discourse analysis. The results of the study show that the transition from traditional historiography to the academic-scientific tradition, pioneered by figures such as Hoesein Djajadiningrat and Azyumardi Azra, has succeeded in placing the history of Islam in the archipelago in a competitive global scientific standard. However, the dominance of the positivist paradigm in these Muslim works tends to reduce religious phenomena to mere empirical variables separated from transcendental values. Axiological criticism based on Qur'anic reasoning offers a new orientation that views history not only as an objective reconstruction of the past, but also as an instrument of social transformation and a moral message (*'ibrah*) for the future (*li-ghad*). This article concludes with the need to synthesize the sophistication of modern methodology with the Islamic worldview to produce a historiography that is not only scientifically accurate but also spiritually meaningful and emancipatory for human civilization.

Keywords: Axiology; intellectual history; Islamic historiography; Positivism; Quranic reasoning.

INTRODUCTION

Historiography is a dynamic field of discourse. Historiography never proceeds smoothly without accompanying evaluation and criticism. Among the discursive practices of historiography is historical discontent, as history is often written with vested interests in mind. Historical works in various genres and fields are abundant, yet they are never free from demands for rewriting. Among historians, the demand to rewrite history has been a classic debate since the mid-20th century. Historians and social critics offer diverse reasons for this. History is written by those who win. The purpose of writing history is not to reminisce or mourn the dead but to inspire life (Dargie, 2009; Orwell, 1944). Dargie wrote in full, "history ought never to be confused with nostalgia. It's written not to revere the dead, but to inspire the living. It is part of our cultural bloodstream, the secret of who we are. And it tells us to let go of the past, even as we honor it; to lament what ought to be lamented; and to celebrate what should be celebrated." For (Holland & Karwa, 2015), rewriting is necessary because of the many biases in historical writing.

In this context, Holland wrote the controversial book "Islam: The Untold Story" (2012), which drew criticism from both extremist and moderate Muslims. One of his controversial statements questioned whether Islam was truly born in Saudi Arabia. More emphatically than Holland, (Santayana & Gouinlock, 2015) argued that because history is always written incorrectly, it must be rewritten. Mistakes in writing history are not only faced by the modern generation, but also six centuries before Santayana, (bin Khaldun & Abdurrahman, 2011) in his book *Mukaddimah* had already described fatal mistakes in history.

Prominent Muslim historians have extensively and in-depth discussed historical events. They collected them and wrote them in various books, then kept them carefully. However, people who have no right to interfere in history - consciously or unconsciously - have inserted gossip and false stories into these history books as a refreshing spice. This action was followed by those who came after them. Then they passed on the information to us as they had heard it (bin Khaldun & Abdurrahman, 2011).

While rewriting history is a demand in many societies and nations, a fundamental question remains: Why is history actually written? The answer to this question will vary depending on the perspective, ideology, and philosophy of history adopted. For families, it is to learn about their genealogies, especially extended families such as those of prominent figures, royal families, and sultanates; for local communities, it is to learn about local history; for nations and states, it is to preserve the greatness of their nation and people; and for those in power, it is to maintain their power. History is often written according to the preferences of those in power, or history by the victors, as George Orwell put it. For Muslim communities, however, answering this question must begin from an Islamic perspective, because Islam, more than just a religion, is an identity and a worldview.

In Islam, the term 'worldview' or 'Islamic vision' is quite diverse in form, but in substance, the same. (Badawi, 2002) calls it *Islami nazariyāt*. According to him, *Islami Nazariyāt* is a view of life that begins with the concept of the oneness of God and has implications for all human activities in the world. Sayyid Qutb uses the term *al-Tasawwur al-Islamī* (Islamic vision), which is intended as a basic belief formed in the heart and mind of every Muslim that provides a specific picture of existence and what is behind it. Others call it *al-Mabda' al-Islamī* (Islamic principles); Syed Naquib al-Attas terms it *ru'yah al-Islām li al-wujūd* (Islamic view of existence). The similarity in meaning among these terms is that Islam holds its own view on everything. As a neutral concept, this perspective also applies to all schools of thought and religions. For example, the communist view (*al-Mabda' al-Shuyu'i*), or the western worldview, Christian worldview, Hindu worldview and so on or the universal view of life, including his historical views which are based on the authenticity of the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet.

Foucault further stated that historical studies must always be connected to the present (Mudhoffir, 2013). This is clear because the present is full of problems that can be solved by understanding its past. Thus, writing history is actually for the present, not for the past. The perspective must also be present because it meets the needs of the present. A question challenging Foucault's thinking tendencies was posed by Lechte: "If the present controls the attention and interests of historians, is there not a danger that the past will direct the present?" To a similar question, Foucault responded by addressing the dangers of history only being about the study of the past:

History will guide the present if the notion of cause dominates material matters, and if continuity dominates discontinuity, that is, at the level of practical expression. But then, the fact that the present is always a process of transformation means that the past must be constantly re-evaluated; writing the history of the past is to see something new, just as analysts see new events in one's biography in the context of psychoanalytic experience. The past, in principle, reveals new meaning in the context of new events. This would avoid the possibility of a simple causal relationship being revealed between the past and the present. The danger of historicism arises when it is realized that the past cannot be understood purely in its own context, therefore, history is always the history of the present (Lechte, 2007).

Entering the 20th century, the Indonesian historical stage began to witness several important works on Indonesian Islamic history written by Indonesians themselves. These studies primarily took the form of books resulting from extensive research or serious studies on Islamic history written in the scholarly tradition and scholarly works (theses and dissertations) with a scientific methodological approach, through guidance and examination to obtain an academic degree. In historical science, narrative history is written only fulfilling the 4W 1H aspects (what, when, where, who, and how) without the why. The why is an element of scientific writing that is written analytically and uses reading sources. One of the purposes of writing history is to explain "why" a historical event occurred.

Since the early 20th century, modern Indonesia has developed its own historiography. To cite some of the most important examples, the earliest is a Dutch-language dissertation completed at Leiden University in 1913 on the history of Banten entitled *Critische beschouwing van de Sadjarah Bantën. Bijdrage ter kenschetsing van de Javaansche Geschiedschrijving*. Under the guidance of Snouck Hurgronje, Hoesein's work was the first dissertation on Indonesia written by an Indonesian himself. After a long hiatus, it was not until 58 years later, in 1971, that another dissertation appeared on the Youth Movement in West Sumatra, at Cornell University in the United States (Abdullah, 1970; Djajadiningrat, 1983). Two years later, a dissertation on the history of the modern Indonesian movement in the early 20th century followed, written by (Noer, 1973). Then, in 1989, a dissertation on Muhammadiyah's political behavior during the colonial era was published by Gadjah Mada University, and subsequently published by (Alfian, 1989). These books were groundbreaking studies and were crucial in initiating the emergence and shaping of modern Indonesian Islamic historiography.

These 20th-century Indonesian Islamic history books and other similar books will be the objects of this research study, and their writing will be analyzed from an Islamic or Qur'anic perspective. What is the function, message, and primary purpose of writing history in Islam? Answering this axiological question, the Qur'anic verse clearly states that writing history in Islam is not for the past but for the present and the future. "O you who believe, fear Allah and look to your past (*tandhur ma qaddamat*) for your future (*li-ghad*)." (Ali, 2015)) *Li-ghad* contains the meaning of taking wisdom and lessons (*'ibrah*) for the future and not repeating mistakes that humans have made in the past. Thus, history in Islam has a spirit as a message, lesson, vision, transformation, and emancipation, all of which have one purpose: learning from mistakes to improve the future.

Why is this message so explicitly stated in the Quran? Because the fundamental human tendency is to forget and not learn from history and its mistakes. This negligence causes humans to always repeat their mistakes, not taking wisdom and lessons for future change and progress. This is the axiology of history in Islam as an absolute part of the philosophy of science. The main message and purpose of writing, exploring, and studying history in Islam, is more than just a scientific study, but rather a moral message because, fundamentally, Islam as a religion, is a guide (*hudan li an-nas*) or divine message for a better human life and one that is maintained in truth.

In implementing history for a better future, Muthahhari explains three interrelated types of history. First, traditional history (narrative history), second, scientific history and third, philosophical history. Traditional history concerns knowledge about events and human conditions in the past in relation to present conditions. Scientific history is knowledge about the laws that govern human life in the past obtained through thinking and studying past events. The axiology of Islamic history as a Qur'anic rationale will be applied in this research study to analyze and evaluate works on Indonesian Islamic history written by Muslim historians throughout the 20th century. Have works on Islamic history written by Indonesian Muslims, whether specialized books on Islamic history or doctoral dissertations, met the criteria for this Islamic axiology? This study will trace works written since the early 20th century, limited to academic works on Islamic history and the results of dissertation research studies.

The exploration will begin with Husein Djajadiningrat's History of Banten, the first history dissertation written by an Indonesian at Leiden University. From there, it will continue to the second initial dissertation, The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900 – 1942 written by (Noer, 1973). Then, Taufik Abdullah's work, The Kaum Tua and Kaum Muda in Sumatra; Kuntowijoyo's work, Social Change in Madura; Azyumardi Azra's monumental work The Transmission of Ulama in the Middle East and Southeast Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century; Jajat Burhanuddin, Ulama and Power; and Yudi Latif, Intelligenstia and Power in the Early 20th Century. Other books are Finding Civilization: Archaeology and Islam in Indonesia by Hasan Muarif Ambary; Archaeology of Islam in the Indonesian Archipelago and Muslim Cities in Indonesia by Uka Tjandrasmita and so on written by Jajat Burhanuddin, Ahmad Mansur Suryanegara and others.

All works studied were limited to those written by Indonesian Muslim historians. This decision was based on the consideration that it is natural that works on Indonesian Islamic history by foreign historians, also known as Indonesianists, do not apply Islamic axiological values due to their non-Muslim status. Therefore, the abundant works by J.C. van Leur, Wertheim, Snouck Hurgronje, Denys Lombard, Henri Chambert-Loir, M.C. Ricklefs, Martin van Bruinessen, Karel Steenbrink, Clifford Geertz, Robert Jay, Anthony Reid, Robert Hefner, and others were not included in this dissertation study. Why? Because of their relationship to their status as Muslims writing history. Or because writing history is an application or manifestation of a Muslim's religiosity in terms of knowledge.

The ethical-moral requirement is that an Islamic historian, or the writer of history, for a Muslim, must be an expression and actualization of his or her Muslim identity. The demands of Islamic values must be reflected in the individual's perspective. Therefore, writing history must be done from or using an Islamic perspective. The question is, have Muslim historians written history using an Islamic perspective as a religion believed to be true?

If the answer is no, then Muslim historians can be assumed to be "not representing their Muslim identity" in their historical writing, or that their works do not reflect their religiosity or Islam. In other words, they do not represent the Islamic worldview in their scientific or scholarly traditions. As a choice, choosing the preferred or most reasonable methodology, namely the scientific method, as a scholarly tradition that has become a convention of modern science, is not a problem. However, if writing history does not convey a religious perspective, then history is merely a career separate from one's religion or merely an intellectual tradition that does not represent one's religious perspective.

If Islam is not a Muslim's scientific perspective, then logically, he or she uses a different perspective, not one derived from Islam. The scientific tradition that has become hegemonic in modernity is positivism. A philosophical school of thought or scientific tradition that considers truth to be only invisible or external, visible, and that truth is measured only by empirical matters. Furthermore, positivism, which has become the foundation of modern civilization and has been highly influential in the scientific tradition, views science solely as science, as an academic tradition separate from moral values. Morality is subjective and a private matter, while rationality and empiricism are everything and the measure in determining the validity of scientific truth.

Due to its strong influence and hegemony, it is inevitable that historical studies among Muslim communities have long been influenced by this positivist tradition, which in many ways does not represent the Islamic scientific perspective. Therefore, examining the extent to which Muslim historians have been influenced by positivism, or how positivism has strongly influenced the thinking of Muslim thinkers, intellectuals, and historians in their historical works, is an interesting research area to study, especially in the 20th century as the period of the emergence of the modern era in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research focuses on 20th-century Indonesian Islamic historiography by critically analysing the works of Muslim historians in Indonesia, using the Qur'anic perspective on history as an evaluative framework. The research material objects include a variety of works, ranging from pioneering dissertations (Djajadiningrat, 1983) to contemporary works such as (Burhani, 2018) and A (Suryanegara, 2017). This research uses a descriptive-analytical method with an integral or multidisciplinary approach, a trend in the study of social and intellectual history pioneered by (Kartodirdjo, 1982). The integral approach is used to accurately understand historical events across multiple dimensions, recognising that historical phenomena are not caused by a single factor but by a combination of historical, sociological, economic, political, and cultural factors.

As a historiographical study, the method of intellectual history is applied in depth. In accordance with Brinton's thinking, this research identifies "facts" regarding who the author was, when it was written, and in what form the work was published (Indriyanto, 2009). Furthermore, the task of intellectual history encompasses three main aspects: discussing major influential ideas, mapping the historical context in which they emerged, and analyzing the influence of these ideas on society through the integration of text, context, and intertext (Kuntowijoyo, 2005). According to Brinton, another form of intellectual history research is considered more difficult, namely one that focuses more on providing and procuring rather than analyzing and synthesizing facts. This type, Brinton said, is related to what is called the "cartography of ideas." The cartography of ideas is the grouping of ideas based on their clusters. This is more suitable for the study of the history of schools of thought. Then there is also intellectual history about the relationship between what someone says and what they do. All of this is related to "any data left behind by the activities of human minds. Collection and sorting of data in the form of writings from Western and Middle Eastern scholars since the 1970s, both primary and secondary sources that are relevant to the phenomenon of shifts in Indonesian Islamic thought.

Conducting internal criticism through content analysis methods on the ideas found, including confirming and confronting (cross-checking) between poles of thought. Interpreting thought trends and then reconstructing them academically by compiling fragments of facts and artifacts of ideas scattered in the ocean of discourse (Foucault, 2002). This research employs not only a diachronic (historical) but also a synchronic (sociological) approach to explain the relationships among intellectual actors (ulama and intellectuals), political structures, and global social processes. This is important to understand their roles as "elite groups," "intellectuals," or "strategic groups."

In addition, postmodern and critical theory perspectives are used to analyze discourse. According to O'Donnell (O'Donnell, 1993), thinking and writing activities are shaped by power structures. The analysis in this study will trace the influence of Western and Eastern hegemony and the relationship between interests (ideology) and knowledge, or between discourse and power (Habermas & Fultner, 2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mapping the Historiography of Indonesian Islam in the 20th Century

The keyword for historiography is the process of reconstructing the past in the form of historical writing. The most fundamental aspect of this study is examination and analysis, thus becoming the principles on the methodology of historical study. However, it is worth distinguishing it from Kerlinger's statement that historiography is synonymous with historical method. Historiography is not only about historical method, but also examines the work of historians in constructing the history they write. It is not limited to historical truth, but rather history with dynamics. Early Islamic historiography examined the dynamics of historical writing related to the methods, sources, and themes of the history they wrote. Historiography focuses on the history produced in relation to historical method, how historians reconstruct events, and how to classify the historical imagination they construct.

In addition to examining the historical methods used by previous historians, historiography also examines the sources of information held by previous historians, how they obtained it, the paths by which historians arrived at it, and the classification of sources as factual or fictional. Historiography also explores the thematic aspects used in previous history, why historians tended to favor certain themes and sometimes neglected other important ones, and whether there were any influencing factors behind this. This is what is meant by extrinsic elements of history. The same applies to Islamic historiography. Several aspects of the method require explanation. Theoretically, Islamic historiography has been studied, for example, by Franz Rosenthal in **A History of Muslim Historiography**. This book helps trace the creativity of Muslim scholars in writing Islamic history. Discussions regarding historiography are inseparable from discussions about the concepts and historical thinking that historians write about. (Rosenthal, 1908) wrote this:

Writing about the writing of history by any particular group or in any particular period means only one thing: To show the development which the concept of history underwent in the thinking and in the scholarly approach of the historians of that particular group or period, and to describe the origin, growth, or decline of the forms of literacy expression which were used for the presentation of historical material.

According to Rosenthal, historical writing is inseparable from observing the development of historical concepts, both in thought and in periodic approaches that encompass growth, progress, and decline. He also mentioned the cross-influence of Islamic historiography on the outside world. Rosenthal's contribution was the division of classical Islamic historiographical methods into three forms: khabar (khabar history), chronological sequences (the annalistic form), and thematic (lesser forms of historical periodization).

Mapping the development of Islamic historical writing in Indonesia over the 20th century reveals a significant shift from traditional apologetic narratives to critical academic constructions. This broad discussion can be categorized into several important phases: The Leiden Critical Tradition and the Emergence of Native Historians (Pioneering Phase) In the early 20th century, the standard of historical writing was strongly influenced by the Dutch orientalist tradition. The culmination of this phase was the work of Hoesein Djajadiningrat (1913/1983), *Critische beschouwing van de Sadjarah Banten*. This dissertation is considered a historical milestone because it was the first time an Indonesian applied rigorous philological and source criticism methods to traditional texts. Djajadiningrat no longer simply accepted the contents of the babad, but rather analyzed them rationally. Although still under Snouck Hurgronje's guidance, this work paved the way for the desacralization of traditional Islamic historical texts in Indonesia.

Modernist Movement and National Consciousness (1940s - 1970s)

After independence, historiography shifted to the search for identity. During this phase, works emerged depicting the role of Islam in social and political change. (Noer, 1973) in his book, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942*, provides a very clear map of how Islamic reform ideas from the Middle East transformed into a political and educational force in Indonesia. At the same time, Taufik Abdullah (1970) brought a historical-sociological perspective to examine the conflict and harmony between adat and sharia in Minangkabau. This phase was marked by the wider use of primary sources, including documents from movement organizations, which were previously often overlooked by colonial historians. The Multidimensional and Structural Approach (1980s - Late 20th Century) was the maturity phase.

Entering the 1980s, Indonesian Islamic historiography reached a point of methodological maturity. The influence of Sartono Kartodirdjo with his "Social Science Approach" began to penetrate deeply into the works of Muslim historians. History was no longer seen solely as major political events, but as a complex social process.

Alfian's work (Alfian, 1989) on the political behavior of Muhammadiyah during the colonial era exemplifies how analysis of political behavior was integrated into historical narratives. Ultimately, historians such as Azyumardi Azra (Azra, 1994) through his study of the network of ulama (Islamic scholars), successfully refuted the long-held thesis that Islam in the archipelago was "peripheral" Islam. Azra demonstrated a strong intellectual integration between the ulama of the archipelago and centers of scholarship in the Middle East in the 17th and 18th centuries. This approach is referred to as global history or the history of broader networks and is no longer parochial. From Figures to Structures (Shifting Objects and Themes). Thematically, this mapping demonstrates a shift in focus. The early century focused on textual criticism and local historiography (Banten, Aceh, Java). The mid-century focused on biographies of Islamic figures and movement organizations (Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, Sarekat Islam). The late century focused on intellectual history, social history, Islamic archaeology (Hasan Muarif Ambary and Uka Tjandrasasmita), and the role of women in Islamic history.

Following this pioneering phase, Indonesian Islamic historiography entered a long lull due to political turmoil and the struggle for independence. It wasn't until the 1970s that a new wave of historians trained at leading world universities emerged, bringing a more nationalistic yet methodological spirit to historical writing. Deliar Noer, through his in-depth study of the Islamic modernist movement in Indonesia, successfully mapped the ideological transformation of Muslims in responding to the challenges of colonialism. During the same period, Taufik Abdullah contributed a historical sociological perspective that viewed the dynamics of Islam not as a rigid entity, but as a social force continually interacting with local customs and power structures. Works from the mid-century began to abandon the single-narrative approach and move toward more multidimensional analysis.

Entering the end of the 20th century, specifically in the 1980s and 1990s, Indonesian Islamic historiography experienced an extraordinary academic explosion both quantitatively and qualitatively. The policy of sending IAIN intellectuals to centers of learning in the West resulted in dozens of dissertations covering a variety of specific themes, ranging from intellectual history, Islamic archeology, to social history. Azyumardi Azra became one of the pinnacles of this achievement through his studies that proved the existence of a cosmopolitan network of Indonesian scholars, simultaneously disproving the assumption that Islam in Indonesia was merely a fringe phenomenon. At this time, Indonesian Islamic history was no longer written as a series of political events alone, but had become an established discipline with a sophisticated integration of social science methodology. However, this highly positivistic methodological establishment then gave rise to new challenges regarding the extent to which the transcendental values of the Qur'an still have a place in every stroke of the pen of these historians.

Overall, this mapping confirms that 20th-century Indonesian Muslim historians successfully "wrested" the authority to write their own history from Western Orientalists. However, the challenge that arises—and is the core of this research—is whether, in adopting sophisticated Western methodologies, Islamic axiological values (such as the vision of li-ghad) are maintained or reduced to mere empirical data. The following table also presents the Distribution of Dissertations on 20th-Century Islamic History.

Table 1. The Spread of 20th Century Intellectual History

Period	Estimated Quantity & Characteristics	Primary Study Location
1900 - 1950	Very Limited (< 5 major works). Focus on philology and local history by a single pioneer.	Leiden University (Netherlands).
1950 - 1980	Slow Growth (10-20 works). Dissertations on sociology-history and Islamic political movements began to appear.	Cornell, Yale (US), Leiden, McGill (Canada).
1980 - 2000	Academic Explosion (> 50 works). The emergence of IAIN (now UIN) and massive scholarship to the West gave rise to specializations in intellectual history, networks of scholars, and archaeology.	Leiden, ANU (Australia), SOAS (England), Cairo (Egypt), IAIN Jakarta/Yogyakarta.

Source: Processed by the researchers, 2026

The Hegemony of Positivism in the Works of Muslim Historians

The dominance of positivism in 20th-century Indonesian Islamic historiography was an inevitable consequence of adopting modern scientific methodology derived from Western intellectual traditions. As it developed, many Indonesian Muslim historians became trapped in a stream of strict objectivism, where historical truth was recognized only to the extent that it could be verified through empirical evidence and tangible data. As Habermas and Fultner (Habermas & Fultner, 2003), explain, the influence of this school of thought gradually

created a distance between the believing subjects of researchers and their religious objects. This hegemony was clearly visible in the trend of Islamic history dissertations produced by Western university alumni from the 1970s to the 1990s. Data show that sociological-historical and structuralist approaches became the primary "mecca," where religious phenomena were often reduced to mere social, economic, or political variables in order to meet international standards of academic objectivity. In this context, history was viewed as a data laboratory, with the spiritual dimension of its practitioners ignored to maintain so-called scientific neutrality.

Positivism is a school of thought that stems from a belief that something can be proven and is worthy of being categorized as science if it has passed a real, factual and exact test and its scientific value is high (Dozan & Rohimi, 2019). If a science is only based on an experience that cannot be proven then it will not be accepted in Auguste Comte's positivism school of thought everything must be able to be proven with sensory tools (Rofiq, 2018). It is interesting to further see the contribution of Comte's positivism school to the basis of the development of da'wah science (Syam, n.d.). In a process of Islamic da'wah or the process of transferring knowledge to society, an appropriate method or method is needed that is easily accepted by the community if the process of selecting the wrong method or method will have fatal consequences in the process of da'wah of Islamic religious knowledge (Dhaouadi & Hatab, 2013). In this case, there is a very important role of a school of positivism, the fruit of Auguste Comte's thoughts, in the success of Islamic preaching, which includes three things, namely, ontological, epistemological and axiological (Hasanah, 2019).

This hegemony of positivism has triggered a sharp separation between the author's Muslim identity and the scientific work they produce. Muslim historians are forced to shed their robes of faith upon entering the research space to avoid being perceived as biased or unscientific by the global academic community. This creates a paradox in Indonesian Islamic historiography: a historian who personally believes in the Qur'an as a source of truth writes the history of his people without incorporating revelation as a framework for his analysis. This situation aligns with criticisms published in various contemporary journals regarding the de-Islamization of science, in which history loses its moral spirit and becomes merely a mechanical intellectual tradition. The validity of such work is measured only by the accuracy of its rationality and the breadth of its bibliography, while neglecting its axiological responsibility before God and society (Macdonell et al., 1991).

Furthermore, the strong influence of this positivistic tradition is evident in the way Muslim historians treat traditional Islamic sources through a radical technique of "demythologization." Religious texts, imbued with visions of the future and divine values, are often stripped down to merely search for chronological facts deemed plausible by modern scientific standards (Kuntowijoyo, 2005). This process has unconsciously marginalized the Islamic worldview, which should serve as the foundation for understanding the interconnectedness of the past, present, and future (Zarkasyi, 2013). The use of purely empirical content analysis methods, without recourse to religious intuition, often yields dry conclusions. When rationality and empiricism become the sole yardstick for determining the validity of scientific truth, 20th-century Indonesian Islamic history tends to be a frozen portrait of the past, deprived of its emancipatory power, and separated from the moral roots that should guide future civilization.

Axiological Critique: Qur'anic Reason as an Analytical Tool

The term "criticism" can be understood from various perspectives. Etymologically, the word "criticism" comes from the word "krites" (noun) which in Ancient Greek means "judge," because it comes from the verb "krinein" which means to judge. In English, this term is known as "critique" which means "a considered assessment of a literary work." It can also mean "criticism" which is to criticize, condemn, or examine. Meanwhile, according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, "criticism" is defined as the process of criticism, sometimes accompanied by descriptions and considerations of a work's or opinion's good and bad points. Meanwhile, in Arabic, there is a term "al-naqd" from the word *naqada-yanqudu-naqdan*. In Arabic, the word al-naqd is used in various ways such as, 1) giving immediately (cash) as opposed to deferring payment, 2) choosing or distinguishing something, such as choosing good dirhams (currency) from bad ones, 3) spying on something, 4) criticizing by stating good or bad. In terms of terminology, the word criticism, as defined by M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, is an attempt to analyse, interpret, define, classify, and evaluate a work to assess its suitability to applicable standards (norms). As defined by H. James Jansen, criticism is a systematic effort to find errors/deficiencies in a work by analyzing it and then providing an assessment, evaluation, and appreciation of it. Meanwhile, Mohammed Arkoun understands criticism as an effort to reconstruct and reconfigure the structure of reasoning in exploring new thoughts. Furthermore, A more radical understanding of criticism emerged from Ali Harb, who stated that criticism does not mean having to reveal weaknesses, or simply correct and invalidate opinions, but goes beyond that, namely criticism is understood as a system of reading what has

not been read (*qirā'ah mā lam yuqra*). Criticism can also be understood as a fundamental form of progressiveness, as it always questions, evaluates, and seeks new ideas or alternatives to achieve better possibilities.

Immanuel Kant is a renowned critical philosopher who developed critical theory in the field of science. Kant emphasized three major ideas in the culture of criticism: critique of pure reason, critique of practical reason, and critique of the power of judgment. Kant attempted to break through rational thought per se, which was constrained by dogmatism. According to Kant, pure reason cannot achieve a comprehensive understanding of reality. Because reason has limitations that only reach the world of sensation (phenomena). Therefore, in this case, Kant understood "critique" as an offer to maximize the ability of reason to solve various problems of human life by synthesizing rationalist thought with empiricism. Meanwhile, methodologically, the term criticism can be understood as: "the analysis, study, and evaluation of individual works of art, as well as the formulation of general methodological or aesthetic principles for the examination of such works." So, criticism is a way or method to find errors (fault-finding) and at the same time to praise by studying, observing, comparing, examining, interpreting, selecting, reviewing, commenting, assessing, evaluating, and enjoying (to appreciate).

Therefore, based on the discourse of "criticism" above, it can be concluded that at least criticism boils down to two main functions, namely, first, *al-hukm* (judgment), which means giving an assessment of something; second, *al-tafsir* (interpretation) or *al-tahlil* (analysis). Therefore, what is meant by "criticism" is the effort to analyze and classify a text to understand its ins and outs and delve into the depth of its content. Thus, criticism is defined as an objective response from someone to another person's work by describing in detail the good and bad of a work based on arguments (*dalil*) and parameters (*dawābit*) which is scientific. So criticism can be destructive, or it can be constructive. Meanwhile, the term 'tafsir' is taken from Arabic which is linguistically composed of the letters *fa'-sin-ra'*, is a form of *ism masdar* (abstract noun) from the word *fasara-yufassiru-tafsiran* which means to explain something so that it becomes clear. Tafsir can mean *al-ibānah* (explaining), *al-kashf* (revealing), and *al-idhar* (reveal) a hidden meaning or understanding.

As an antithesis to the value-lacking nature of positivist historiography, axiological critique grounded in Qur'anic reasoning offers a fundamentally new orientation to the function of history. From an Islamic perspective, history is not merely a mechanical attempt to accurately reconstruct past events, but rather an instrument of social transformation aimed at extracting wisdom or *'ibrah*. The Qur'an explicitly directs human perspective not to focus solely on what has happened (*ma qaddamat*), but to make it the foundation of a vision for a better future or *li-ghad* as stated in Surah Al-Hashr verse 18 (Ali, 2015). Therefore, writing history from a Muslim perspective must be an expression of religiosity aimed at affirming moral messages and divine guidance in human life. History, in this context, functions as an axiological compass that gives meaning to every empirical fact found in the field (Zarkasyi, 2013).

Qur'anic reasoning as an analytical tool demands a reintegration of modern scientific methodology with transcendental values, which have been separated by the barriers of academic secularism. This means that objectivity in history should not be understood as the negation of religious values, but rather as intellectual honesty that remains grounded in the foundation of monotheism. As criticized by Sayyid Qutb regarding the vision of Islam (*al-Tasawwur al-Islami*), every movement of human history is actually within the circle of God's law (*Sunnatullah*) which has a fixed pattern (Qutb, 1991). Therefore, research into the works of 20th-century Muslim historians demonstrates the urgent need to go beyond sociological structural analysis. The main challenge for Indonesian Muslim historians going forward is how to use sophisticated diachronic and synchronic methods without losing the spiritual substance of the events they study. History should not simply be a record of "who did what," but must be able to answer "why" an event occurred within the larger framework of God's plan.

Furthermore, this axiological critique emphasizes that Indonesian Islamic history should not stop at the stage of mere scientific explanation, but must continue to the stage of emancipatory transformation. By making the Qur'an as an axiological basis, history is no longer merely a cold record of power struggles or shifts in political structures as often appears in mainstream historiographic journals. Instead, history becomes a living narrative capable of providing inspiration, vision, and real transformation for the development of human civilization. Kuntowijoyo (Kuntowijoyo, 2005) in his idea of prophetic social science emphasizes that history must contain the content of humanization, liberation, and transcendence. Thus, Qur'anic reason as an analytical tool serves to dissect the historical facts of the 20th century, removing the spices of falsehood or narrow interests (vested interests), and presenting them again as moral lessons capable of guiding the people towards a future that is preserved in divine truth.

For this reason, special attention is needed in developing the field of Qur'anic studies towards the study of critical interpretation. Finally, this paper concludes that, in the discourse of critical interpretation, a methodological framework is needed as an operational step in critical interpretation. Thus, the criticism

conducted is not political-ideological in nature, but is able to prioritize the values of objectivity, comprehensiveness, scientificity, and systematicity. There are at least four operational steps in carrying out critical interpretation work that culminate in the ontological, epistemological, and axiological areas: First, critics must first understand the nature of interpretation, namely interpretation as a process (interpretation as process) and interpretation as a product. Second, understanding the construction of interpretive criticism, namely the historicity of criticism, the basis of criticism, the purpose of criticism, and the principles and parameters of criticism. Third, starting the work of interpretive criticism with two areas of work, namely intrinsic criticism and extrinsic criticism. Fourth, providing an evaluation and assessment of the object of critical study (Ridwan, 2017).

Case Study on Azyumardi Azra's Dissertation Work

A historiographical study of Azyumardi Azra's thought within the concept of the ulama network presents a new perspective on the dynamics of Islamic intellectualism in the Indonesian archipelago. Azra goes beyond constructing a chronological historical narrative, but also conducts a historiographical reconstruction that emphasizes the interconnectedness of ulama across regions, particularly between the Middle East and Southeast Asia. In this context, Azra's historiography is transnational and rejects geographically fragmented historical approaches.

Methodologically, Azra employs an intellectual history approach by tracing the *sanad* (chain of knowledge), the mobility of scholars, and the transmission of ideas through classical Islamic educational networks such as the Haramain (Mecca and Medina). His monumental work, *"The Network of Middle Eastern Scholars and the Indonesian Archipelago in the 17th and 18th Centuries"*, serves as an important reference in understanding how these intellectual relationships formed and developed. In this work, Azra demonstrates that the Indonesian ulama were not peripheral entities, but rather an integral part of global Islamic discourse. From a historiographical perspective, Azra's thinking can be categorized as a critique of colonial narratives that tended to marginalize the role of local ulama. He deconstructed the Orientalist view that viewed Islam in the archipelago as a weak, syncretic form, demonstrating its strong connectivity with global centers of Islamic scholarship. Thus, Azra's historiography seeks to reposition the history of Islam in the archipelago as part of the broader history of Islamic civilization.

Furthermore, Azra's approach also demonstrates the existence of network analysis in Islamic historiography. He highlights not only prominent figures but also the relationships between individuals, institutions, and intellectual traditions that form a scholarly ecosystem. This aligns with developments in modern historiography, which emphasizes the importance of social relations and the exchange of ideas in shaping history. However, a historiographical analysis of Azra's thought also requires consideration of criticism. Some argue that the emphasis on the ulama network has the potential to overlook unique and contextual local dynamics. Furthermore, focusing on ulama as the primary actors can create an elite bias in historical writing, neglecting the role of ordinary people in the development of Islam in the archipelago.

Thus, Azra's historiography not only contributes to enriching the study of Islamic history but also opens up space for critical discussion on methodology and approaches to historical writing. His thinking bridges local and global history and offers a new paradigm for understanding a more inclusive and dynamic Islamic intellectual network. Azyumardi Azra's work entitled *"Network of Middle Eastern Ulama and the Archipelago of the 17th & 18th Century: The Roots of Islamic Renewal in Indonesia"* is very important, because it has presented an intellectual aspect that highlights the form of ideas and teachings transmitted through the network of ulama. What is more important is that the sources used by Azra in his book are primary sources in the form of manuscripts and printed books in Arabic and English. It seems that this is the first book that uses Arabic sources extensively in studies related to the history of the renewal of Islamic thought in the archipelago. In this study, Azra has succeeded in presenting the method used by Azra, namely the scientific historical method with four stages, namely - heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The theory used is transmission and network. Azra is more inclined to the New History school of historical thought. While the approach used is that Azra sees the historical journey of Islam in the archipelago must be seen from a global and local perspective at the same time. Azra's work made a major contribution to the literature and became an inspiration for enthusiasts and writers on Southeast Asian and Muslim studies in the 17th and 18th centuries (Hakim et al., 2020).

As the most representative case study in late 20th-century Indonesian Islamic historiography, Azyumardi Azra's dissertation, *"The Transmission of Islamic Reformism to Indonesia: Networks of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesian 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,"* offers a profound portrait of both methodological maturity and axiological challenges. Completed at Columbia University in 1992, this work technically represents the culmination of a rigorous application of the intellectual history method. (Azra, 1994) successfully dismantled the hegemony of old orientalism, which tended to underestimate the intellectual quality

of Nusantara Islam, by presenting massive data on the network of ulama connecting the centers of scholarship in the Haramayn with the Malay-Indonesian region. Methodologically, this work is highly positivistic, relying on a vast array of primary documents, from ancient manuscripts and lineages to biographical records (*tabaqat*), to empirically and rationally prove the existence of this network. However, when analyzed using the analytical blade of Qur'anic reasoning, Azra's dissertation reveals an interesting duality. On the one hand, Azra uses a highly objective sociology of knowledge approach to explain how ideas of reformism are transmitted through personal and intellectual connections. His primary focus is on the "process" and "structure" of this transmission. From this perspective, the author's Muslim identity seems hidden behind the cloak of global academia, which must adhere to Western historiographic standards that demand value neutrality. As noted in the previous analysis of the hegemony of positivism, the spiritual dimensions of the scholars he studies—such as their divine motivations for seeking knowledge or the monotheistic framework underlying the reform movement—are often positioned as mere objects of sociological study, rather than as the spirit that drives the historical narrative axiologically. The diversity of source languages parallels that of the authors Azra references.

Most of the sources come from Arab authors, several Indonesian scholars, European authors, and a Chinese man named Chan Ju-Kua, whose travelogues were translated into English. Azra does not use any East Asian sources, such as Chinese, Korean, or Japanese. This is likely due to Azra's lack of East Asian language skills. Beyond that, however, the need for East Asian sources seems to be unrelated to the topic of his book. As the author explains, Azra's work relied almost entirely on written sources. But what about oral sources? Not all events in society were documented by the government, so oral sources were also necessary. Oral sources can be obtained through oral history methods. In oral history, the necessary information is obtained through interviews with historical actors. Interviews are conducted in-depth to uncover a person's origins and experiences over a specific period. Interviews are also conducted using a family-tree interviewing model, which can cover two generations within the same family. However, in works like this, Azra's work, in any of his books, appears to have avoided interviews. No oral sources were used in Azra's works. This book, however, spans a relatively short period of time. This allows for some oral sources to still exist. However, Azra does not provide any explanation in his work as to why he did not use oral sources to enrich his discussion.

The second stage is source criticism, which can be divided into external and internal criticism. External criticism is conducted to determine the authenticity of archives and documents obtained. Meanwhile, internal criticism is conducted on the authenticity (truth value) of the contents of the documents to determine the validity of the data they contain. External criticism of the informants interviewed is conducted by selecting people directly involved in the research topic. Information provided by one informant is cross-checked with information provided by other informants to test its validity. Because Azra uses quite a lot of manuscript sources, source criticism is indeed appropriate. However, there is no evidence in her work that she did so. However, because the manuscript sources come from official storage institutions, such as the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, Leiden University, the Raffles Collection and Marsden, it seems that the manuscript can be ignored for source criticism, to find its originality and authenticity, because the official institution has previously passed through the hands of manuscript experts to check its originality and authenticity, so according to the author it is permissible to then just use it without worrying about this, unless for example the manuscript is in the hands of a private collective or is still in the hands of its first holder.

Nevertheless, Azra's work implicitly carries a strong axiological significance within the context of the intellectual emancipation of Indonesian Muslims. By proving that Nusantara Islam is not a "periphery" but rather an integral part of global Islamic cosmopolitanism, Azra has in fact made an effort to humanize and elevate the dignity of Indonesian Muslim history. From the perspective of Qur'anic reasoning, this can be seen as an attempt to present the facts as they are to counter historical distortions driven by colonial interests. However, the remaining challenge is how to transform the data of this very rich intellectual network into a more explicit vision of the future (*li-ghad*). As an academic-positivistic work, this dissertation is scientifically successful, but as a work of Islamic historiography, it leaves room for further research to inject a stronger rationale of transcendence, so that the history of the network of ulama is not only understood as a sociological fact of the past, but as a moral inspiration for the development of a future network of Islamic civilization based on the values of revelation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that a significant epistemological transformation has occurred, shifting from traditional historical writing to modern academic methodology. The emergence of pioneering historians who adopted

Western sources has successfully elevated the history of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago from a mythic-apologetic narrative to a globally recognized scholarly discourse. However, this methodological advancement has had serious consequences, including the hegemony of positivism, which tends to separate historical facts from transcendental values. The dominance of this perspective often results in history being viewed as merely dry empirical data, with the author's Muslim identity seemingly alienated from the object of study in pursuit of a value-free, pseudo-objectivity. The failure of 20th-century historiography to articulate an authentic religious perspective stem from an overly strong attachment to a reductionist sociological-structural paradigm. Historical facts are accurately reconstructed from their material perspective, but lose their "spirit" or moral message as a guide to life. This creates an axiological hole in which Islamic history becomes merely a frozen archive of the past with no transformative power for the future. Without a strong Islamic worldview, Muslim historians risk becoming trapped in the politicization of knowledge or simply following the mainstream of Western thought that does not represent their own religious vision. As an integrative solution, this study offers an axiological critique grounded in Qur'anic reasoning, an analytical tool capable of bridging scientific methodology with divine values. Through the concept of *'ibrah* and the vision of *li-ghad* embodied in Qur'anic reasoning, history is restored to its function as an instrument of emancipation and a moral message for civilization. The writing of Islamic history in Indonesia in the future must be able to integrate the sharpness of scientific analysis with the depth of spirituality, so that history is no longer merely an intellectual career separate from religion, but rather a form of actualization of Islam oriented towards the betterment of the people. Thus, Qur'anic reasoning is not merely a complement, but becomes the main foundation in producing a historiography that is visionary, honest, and has a transformative impact on the future of the nation.

The study of Indonesian Islamic historiography throughout the 20th century demonstrates remarkable intellectual achievements in methodology, but also leaves behind profound axiological concerns. On the one hand, the transformation from traditional historiography to an academic-scientific tradition has successfully elevated Indonesian Islamic history to the global scientific stage. The success of Muslim historians, as seen in Azyumardi Azra's monumental work, in wresting narrative authority from Western orientalis is a testament to their methodological maturity, worthy of appreciation. However, the total adoption of the positivist paradigm has caused history to lose its transcendental dimension. Islamic history is often reduced to a mere collection of empirical facts and dry sociological analysis, where the author's Muslim identity and the spirit of the divine message are seemingly marginalized in the pursuit of a false standard of objectivity. Axiological critique through Qur'anic reasoning emphasizes that history, for a Muslim, must not stop at the mechanical reconstruction of the past. History carries a moral burden to serve as a lesson that transforms the lives of the people. The vision of the future, or *li-ghad*, emphasized by the Qur'an demands that historians view events not merely as data laboratories but as living narratives containing moral messages and guidance for civilization. Therefore, the challenge for Islamic historiography going forward is to undertake a creative synthesis: maintaining the rigor of modern scientific methodology while still embracing the Islamic worldview as its axiological foundation. Thus, history will no longer be merely an intellectual pursuit separate from religion, but rather a form of religious actualization capable of guiding the people toward a better future based on authentic values of truth.

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