OPEN ACCESS

Check for updates

Editorial

Cosmopolitanism and Epistemological Inclusivism

Supriyanto Abdi

Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
supriyanto.abdi@uii.ac.id

As a civilization, Islam is known for its cosmopolitanism, characterized by its strong orientation and ability to dialogue with other civilizations creatively and constructively. In its long history, Islam has proven itself to be a civilization that boldly dialogued with, and absorbed elements from, various civilizations. This cosmopolitan and inclusive nature of Islamic civilization is shown in its success on various stages and historical episodes in exploring and integrating so many traditions and cultures such as Greek, Persian, Roman, Indian, Chinese, Berber, Kurdish, Turkish, Habashi (Ethiopian), Tajik, Uzbek, Malay, Javanese and many more. It is this nature of cosmopolitan intellectualism that is also shown by the great names of Muslim scholars in the long history of Islamic civilization such as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn 'Aqil, Ibn Baja, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Tufayl, al-Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi, Jalaludin Rumi, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Khaldun and many others who have made scholarly contributions that transcend narrow denominational contexts, and extraordinarily enrich the collective heritage of human civilization (el-Fadl, 2015: 474-475). With all these characteristics and tendencies, the cosmopolitanism of Islamic civilization is widely recognized to have contributed significantly to encouraging the development of science both in the Islamic world and in the West. As reminded by Seyyed Hoshein Nasr (2001: 17), many fields of knowledge that are engaged globally today, which are often seen as just a product of Western civilization, were actually born and developed

thanks to the contributions of Muslim scientists who studied and produced these fields of knowledge because of religious vocations and inspirations.

Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is a contested concept and not without criticism. Some scholars, such as Rorty (1998) and Barber (1996), object to cosmopolitanism because they think this idea tends to downplay the meaning of nationalism and patriotism. Cheah and Robbins (1998) argue that cosmopolitanism, deeply rooted in the Western Enlightenment tradition, can easily fall prey to ethnocentrism and imperialist logic. However, while being aware of the diversity of definitions and controversies, cosmopolitanism is better understood as the idea of the value of considering the perspectives of others and placing oneself in a broader whole, which can generally be considered as the world, as can be understood from the Greek term *cosmopolitanês* meaning "*citizen of the world*"). As a normative idea, as put forward by Mehta (in Euben, 2013: 300), cosmopolitanism expresses "*suspicion of the closed horizon... willingness to engage with 'the Other'... [and] aesthetic and intellectual openness to various endeavors, cultures, and forms of reasoning*".

The conceptions of cosmopolitanism mentioned above are not unfamiliar to the doctrine, tradition of thought and history of Islamic civilization. Roxanne Euben (2006; 2013), for example, refers specifically to the Islamic ethos of seeking knowledge (*tholabul-ilmi*), which includes a series of encouragements to Muslims to seek wisdom wherever it may be, as a rich countergenealogy of the currently developing cosmopolitanism, and supported by a variety of doctrinal sources and historical practices. The key concept of Islam that is also the source of the idea of Islamic cosmopolitanism is the concept of *ummah* which is used to refer to communities of followers of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, both within and outside national borders. For a very long period, Muslim scholars have debated the scope of this concept extensively, and some suggest that it can

also refer to the human community as a whole. In line with that, as stated by Aljunied (2017), there are many manifestations of the *ummah*, some of which imply a form of Muslim cosmopolitanism. In the context of Islam in Southeast Asia, for example, Aljunied (2017: 3) asserts that "*cosmopolitan ideals and pluralist tendencies have been creatively used and carefully adapted by Muslim individuals, societies and institutions in modern Southeast Asia to generate the necessary context for mutual tolerance and mutual respect between and within different groups in society*".

Rethinking Epistemological Inclusivism

The view of Islam as an inclusive and cosmopolitan civilization presupposes an inclusive attitude towards various scientific epistemologies. Islamic cosmopolitanism is thus strongly associated with what Ebrahim Moosa (2005) calls "*epistemological and methodological openness*" deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and civilization. According to Moosa (2005), the classical Islamic tradition is so strongly colored by openness and epistemic freedom that many Muslim thinkers and writers vigorously interacted with various traditions of knowledge without questioning their origins. Therefore, most early Muslim intellectuals were open to the spirit of knowledge, whether it was derived from Greek, Indian, Biblical traditions, or other philosophical traditions.

This orientation of inclusive epistemology is also close to what Turkish Muslim scholar Recep Senturk calls as "*open ontology*" and "*multiplex epistemology*", a more complex vision of the world that can accommodate various types of "truth" including the truth of the modern physical, social and humanities sciences as well as the speculative sciences of premodern metaphysics (Senturk, 2001: 101). In this view or paradigm, contemporary identity in every context must be approached with an inclusive and open worldview. Such a view would encourage dialogical understanding and egalitarian cultural engagement. Epistemologically, this worldview demands a broad and participatory process by

which different cultures rediscover their own traditions and respect each other's cultural values and motivations. Through empathic understanding of other cultural systems, they also begin the process of expanding and rebuilding their own cultural foundations and intellectual identity (Senturk, 2001: 11).

Thus, the main challenge today for Muslim intellectuals is no longer about choosing between Western and Islamic knowledge. The challenge they are facing today is how to ensure that their education is able to build a strong critical and creative attitude in the young Muslim generation so that they can always appear at the forefront of combining *endogenous* knowledge and *exogenous* knowledge, according to their contextual needs, while striving to contribute knowledge to the larger human community. In other words, Muslims need to continue to take inspiration from scientific advances emerging from around the world, including local intellectual heritage and Western traditions (Ibrahim, 2017: 14). In other words, scientific reconstruction and development should not be translated as denying the intellectual heritage born of other civilizations, including the West. Western scientific tradition in this regard can be utilized for the benefit of Muslims through an objective process of selection and adaptation (Kuntowijoyo, 2006; AE. Priyono, 2008: 62).

Nevertheless, it is also important to emphasize that an inclusive view of civilization and epistemology is consciously followed and balanced with a high degree of critical engagement. Although Muslim intellectuals are required to actively explore or learn from Western and other traditions, at the same time they must also reject imperialistic tendencies in knowledge production. Thus, the pattern of scientific epistemology developed by Muslim intellectuals and Islamic universities always leads to "integration" or "moderation" defined by Syed Farid Alatas (2020: 100-101) as an effort to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity. Muslim intellectuals and communities must remain rooted in tradition intellectually and culturally while remaining engaged with the modern world and benefiting from the intellectual and cultural resources that modernity offers. At

the same time, they also remain vigilant and critical of what Omid Safi calls *"the arrogance of modernity",* a view that regards the West and its culture as the inevitability of the end of history, or the final stage in which humans reach the limits of their social, economic, and cultural development (Safi, 2003: 4).

This Issue

This issue consists of six articles dealing with a variety of topics with different geographical focus and various disciplinary analytical perspectives. The first article by Manzoor Apenna Lawal and Kazeem Oluwaseun Dauda examines Nigeria's turbulent decade of religious insurgency, its position within the Islamic context, and Islamically-inclined practicable solution to the threat. It argues that a turbulent decade of *Boko Ḥaram* insurgency has wreaked havoc on the peace and tranquility previously existing among Nigeria's diverse ethno-religious entities, and that *Boko Ḥaram*'s religious insurgency is inconsistent with Islamic doctrines. The second article by Nazar Ul Islam focuses more on building Islamic theory and perspectives on peace and conflict resolution. It argues that various terms/concepts in Islam like *al-ʿadl* (social justice), *sulh* (settlement), *muslaha* (reconciliation), *wasta* (patronage-mediation), *tahkim* (arbitration), and *salam* (a peace greeting among Muslims) form the conceptual framework of the conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Islam. The third article by Mazin Abdulhameed Dawood Hassan et.al examines the administrative relationships between the Shari'ah Board (SB) and other stakeholders by looking at the duties, roles, and responsibilities of the SB toward other stakeholders and vice versa in Brunei Darussalam. It argues that the administrative relationship between the *Shari'ah* Board and other stakeholders may take the form of *imamah* (ultimate authority), *wilayah* (specific authority), *taʿlimiyah* (educational), or *istishariyah* (consultative) relationship, depending on the type of relevant stakeholder. The fourth article by Sheikh Mohd Saleem reviews the accuracy and relevance of the Qur'anic medical concepts in light of modern medical knowledge through critical

analysis of current literature. It argues that while the medical knowledge presented in the Quran has been praised for its accuracy and relevance, it is important to recognize that the Quran was revealed during a specific time and cultural context. The fifth article by Ali Mursyid Azisi et.al examines the resolution of the core values of *wasathiyah* Islam as an effort to counter the movement of religious radicalism, both directly in the community and in the digital space. It argues that values of *wasathiyah* Islam needs to be promoted in various media and platforms, including on the internet. The last article by Windy Lidyaningsih and Muh. Hanif examines Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on the reforms of Islamic education in Indonesia, primarily centred on his call for modernization and secularization. Altogether, these articles offer interesting and unique perspectives on some of important topics in Islamic studies, framed within a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives.

FURTHER READINGS

Alatas, Syed Farid, (2020). 'The Meaning and Objectives of Progressive Islam' in Norshahril Saat and Azhar Ibrahim (eds). *Alternative Voices in Muslim Southeast Asia*. Singapore: ISEAS

Aljunied, K. (2017). *Muslim cosmopolitanism: Southeast Asian Islam in comparative perspective*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Barber, B. (1996). Constitutional faith. In M. Nussbaum & J. Cohen (Eds.), *For the love of country? Debating the limits of patriotism* (pp. 30–37). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Cheah, P., & Robbins, B. (eds). (1998). *Cosmopolics: Thinking and feeling beyond the nation.* Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press

El-Fadl, Khaled Abou, (2015), 'The epistemology of the truth in modern Islam', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Vol. 41

Ibrahim, Azhar, (2017). 'Islam and the West: Clashes and Cooperation', in H. Daun, R. Arjmand (eds), *Handbook of Islamic Education*. Springer, 2017

Euben, Roxanne L, (2006) *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge*, Princeton University Press

_____. (2013), Cosmopolitanism Past and Present, Muslim and Western in Mehrzad Boroujerdi (ed), Mirror for the Muslim Prince: Islam

and the Theory of Statecraft, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press

Kuntowijoyo, (2006). *Islam sebagai Ilmu: Epistemology, Metodologi dan Etika*. Bandung: Teraju, Mizan Media Utama

Moosa, Ebrahim, *Ghazali and Poetics of Imagination*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005

Muzakki, Akh, (2018). 'Islam Tiga Kaki: Rekonstruksi Epistemologi Pendidikan Islam Indonesia, *Proceeding International Seminar on Islamic Education (ISIE)*

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Science and Civilization in Islam.* (Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 2001

Priyono, AE, (2008). 'Marginalisasi, Oposisi, dan Integrasi Islam Indonesia: Menyimak Pemikiran Dr. Kuntowijoyo' dalam AE. Priyono (ed.), *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi untuk Aksi*. Bandung: Mizan

Rorty, R. (1998). Justice as a larger loyalty. In P. Cheah & B. Robbins (Eds.), *Cosmopolitcs: Teaching and feeling beyond the nation* (pp. 45–58). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Safi, Omid, (2003). 'Introduction: The times they are a-changin'—a Muslim quest for justice, gender equality and pluralism' in Omid Safi (ed), *Progressive Muslims* Oxford: Oneworld

Senturk, Recep, (2001). 'Toward an Open Science and Society: Multiplex Relations in Language, Religion, and Society' *Turkish Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 6