

Islamic Studies as an Object of Religious and Cultural Study

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ABSTRACT

Islamic Studies has often been narrowly understood as a theological and normative field of study centered on sacred texts and religious law. However, as a social phenomenon embedded in society, Islam also manifests as a cultural reality that interacts dialectically with local contexts, historical developments, and the everyday practices of its followers. This article aims to critically examine Islam as a dual object of study: as a religion, representing its normative-theological dimension, and as a culture, representing its historical-empirical dimension. This study employs a qualitative approach using library research and content analysis of contemporary academic literature on Islamic studies methodologies. The findings indicate that the normative and cultural approaches are not opposing perspectives but rather complementary dimensions for understanding Islam comprehensively (kaffah). An integrative-interconnective approach enables researchers to examine Islam not only as a fixed body of doctrine but also as a living practice (Living Islam) that continuously interacts and negotiates with local cultures, as demonstrated by the phenomenon of Nusantara Islam. This article concludes that contemporary Islamic studies require a multidisciplinary framework that integrates classical Islamic sciences with the social sciences and humanities to capture the complexity of Islam as both a religion and a culture.

Keywords: Islamic Studies, Religion, Culture, Interdisciplinary Approach, Nusantara Islam.

I. Introduction

Islam, as a world religion, does not exist in a social vacuum; rather, it continuously develops through interactions with the historical, cultural, and political conditions and the everyday lives of the communities in which it is practiced. As a system of teachings derived from revelation, Islam possesses a normative dimension that is transcendent through the Qur'an and Sunnah. However, when these teachings are understood, interpreted, and practiced by humans within specific times and spaces, Islam also manifests as a dynamic social and cultural phenomenon (Esposito & Maftuhin, 2010). Therefore, the study of Islam is not limited to sacred texts but also encompasses the lived experiences of Muslims, which are influenced by social, economic, political, and cultural contexts (Arkoun, 2002). This perspective demonstrates that Islam has a multidimensional character and therefore requires a non-singular scientific approach. In the development of Islamic Studies, two major paradigms have emerged in understanding Islam. The first paradigm views Islam as a normative religion that emphasizes the study of the sources of revelation, Islamic law, theology, and classical Islamic thought. This approach has developed through the disciplines of tafsir, hadith, fiqh, usul al-fiqh, and kalam, which aim to preserve the authority of Islamic teachings as inherited through the tradition of Islamic scholarship. In contrast, the second paradigm views Islam as a historical and cultural phenomenon that

can be examined using approaches from the social sciences and humanities, such as anthropology, sociology, history, political science, and cultural studies. Within this paradigm, religious practices are understood as the result of interactions between Islamic teachings and the realities of social life (Rahman, 2017).

The differences between these two paradigms have become a long-standing discourse within the tradition of Islamic Studies. Early generations of Orientalists predominantly employed philological and historical-textual approaches to understand the development of Islam. This approach was subsequently criticized for placing excessive emphasis on written documents while paying insufficient attention to the religious practices of Muslim communities. In response to these limitations, anthropologist Clifford Geertz, through his research in Java, demonstrated that Islam should be understood as a living religion, or religion as lived experience, practiced in everyday life through symbols, rituals, and community culture (Geertz, 1960). This approach was further developed by Mark R. Woodward, who emphasized that local Islamic practices should not necessarily be regarded as deviations from Islam but rather as forms of religious expression shaped by local history and culture (Woodward, 2010). The development of this paradigm increasingly demonstrates that religion and culture are not necessarily two entities that contradict each other. From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, culture provides a space for the processes of accepting, interpreting, and actualizing religious teachings, while religion provides moral and spiritual legitimacy for the social practices of communities (Hefner, 2011). This dialectical relationship can be observed in various regions of the Islamic world, including Indonesia, a country with the world's largest Muslim population and a high degree of cultural diversity. Therefore, understanding Islam in Indonesia is insufficient through a purely normative approach; it also requires an interpretation of the cultural dynamics that shape the religious practices of Muslim communities (Bowen, 2003).

Indonesia provides a clear example of how Islam has developed through a centuries-long process of acculturation. Historical evidence shows that the spread of Islam throughout the Archipelago was primarily facilitated through trade, education, marriage, and cultural transmission rather than political or military expansion. This process resulted in various forms of Islamic expression that interacted with local traditions without eliminating the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings. Traditions such as Sekaten in Java, Tabot in Bengkulu, Maulid Adat in various regions, and customary practices among communities in eastern Indonesia demonstrate that Islam has undergone a process of localization that has contributed to the moderate and adaptive character of Indonesian Islam (Van Bruinessen, 2013). This phenomenon provides evidence that the relationship between Islam and culture is dialogical rather than antagonistic (Ricklefs, 2007). In the context of contemporary academia, various efforts have emerged to bridge the dichotomy between normative and empirical approaches through the integrative-interconnective paradigm. This paradigm seeks to connect Islamic sciences with the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences so that Islamic Studies can explain both religious teachings and the social realities faced by Muslims (Abdullah, 2020). Amin Abdullah emphasizes that Islamic Studies cannot be conducted solely through the bayani approach, which is text-oriented, but should also be enriched by the burhani approach, which emphasizes rational inquiry, and the irfani approach, which considers human spiritual experiences. The integration of these three approaches enables Islamic Studies to produce a more comprehensive understanding of religious phenomena (Abdullah, 2006).

Nevertheless, some studies continue to strictly separate Islam as a religion from Islam as a culture. Some normative studies tend to regard local cultural practices as forms of deviation (*bid'ah*) without adequately considering their social and historical contexts. Conversely, some social studies treat religion primarily as a cultural construct, thereby neglecting the revelatory dimension that constitutes the fundamental foundation of Islam (Waardenburg, 1999). This polarization indicates the persistence of methodological gaps in Islamic Studies that may foster exclusive, reductionist, or relativistic perspectives. Therefore, a methodological framework that can proportionally integrate normative analysis with empirical approaches is needed to enable Islamic Studies to comprehensively explain the relationship between text, context, and social practice (Kersten, 2019). Based on the aforementioned discussion, this article aims to examine Islam as both an object of religious study and an object of cultural study from the perspective of

contemporary Islamic Studies. Specifically, this research aims to: (1) describe the development of the Islamic Studies paradigm from a normative approach to an integrative-interconnective approach; (2) analyze the dialectical relationship between Islam as a religion and Islam as a culture from the perspectives of Islamic Studies and the social sciences; and (3) formulate a relevant methodological framework for the development of Islamic Studies in a multicultural society, particularly within the Indonesian context. Thus, this research is expected to contribute conceptually to the development of Islamic Studies methodology by integrating theological, historical, and cultural dimensions in a balanced manner.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Islam as an Object of Normative-Theological Study

Islam, as an object of normative-theological study, is grounded in the belief that Islamic teachings originate from the revelation of Allah as contained in the Qur'an and explained through the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These two sources are regarded as the primary foundations with authoritative status in shaping the belief system, law, morality, and way of life of Muslims. Therefore, the study of Islam within the normative paradigm is oriented toward understanding, interpreting, and implementing the messages of revelation correctly in accordance with the principles of Islamic sciences (al-'ulūm al-Islāmiyyah). Disciplines such as tafsir, hadith studies, *usul al-fiqh*, *fiqh*, *kalam*, and *qira'at* have developed to preserve the authenticity of Islamic teachings while ensuring that the process of deriving legal rulings and understanding religious matters remains within the methodological framework established by scholars since the classical period (Hallaq, 2009). From this perspective, religious truth is understood as originating from revelation (revealed truth). Consequently, the research approach emphasizes textual analysis and normative argumentation rather than the observation of social reality. The main characteristic of the normative approach is the use of a deductive method, which begins with general principles derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah and subsequently applies them to various issues of human life. This approach positions sacred texts as the primary standard for assessing the conformity of social or cultural practices with Islamic teachings. According to Abdullah (2020), the normative paradigm plays an important role in maintaining the identity and authority of Islamic teachings because it functions to preserve the continuity of Islamic intellectual traditions across generations. Similarly, Hallaq (2009) explains that the classical Islamic scholarly tradition successfully established a robust epistemological system through the methodology of *usul al-fiqh*, which enables scholars to derive legal rulings systematically and responsibly. Thus, the normative approach does not merely interpret religious texts literally but also develops a set of scholarly methodologies that regulate how revelation is understood and applied in the lives of Muslims.

Although it occupies a fundamental position in Islamic Studies, the normative-theological approach also faces several criticisms in the development of contemporary Islamic Studies. A strong focus on textual sources often results in insufficient attention to the historical, social, political, and cultural aspects underlying the emergence and development of religious practices. Consequently, the phenomenon of Islam as it develops within society may be assessed solely based on its conformity to ideal norms without adequately considering the social dynamics that influence it. Fazlur Rahman (2017) argues that understanding the Qur'an requires consideration of both the historical context of revelation and the context of modern society so that Islamic teachings remain relevant to changing circumstances. A similar critique was expressed by Mohammed Arkoun (2002), who argued that the dominance of textual approaches has constrained the development of Islamic Studies by limiting the incorporation of historical analysis and the social sciences. Therefore, although the normative approach remains a fundamental foundation for understanding Islam as a religion, its development in the contemporary era increasingly requires dialogue with empirical approaches to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between text, context, and religious practice.

2.2. Islam as an Object of Historical-Cultural Study

Unlike the normative-theological approach, which centers on the authority of revelation, the historical-cultural approach views Islam as a social phenomenon that develops through historical processes and interactions with various contexts of human life. From this perspective, Islam is understood not only as a set of ideal teachings but also as an empirical reality practiced by communities within specific historical and social contexts. Therefore, the study of Islam cannot be conducted solely through the analysis of religious texts but also requires historical, anthropological, sociological, political, and cultural approaches to understand how Muslims interpret, internalize, and implement religious teachings in their everyday lives. This approach has developed alongside the recognition that religious practices are continually influenced by the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions surrounding community life (Bowen, 2003). Thus, Islam can be understood as a lived religion, meaning a religion experienced and practiced through the everyday realities of its followers rather than merely as a normative doctrinal system. One of the scholars who made a significant contribution to the development of the historical-cultural approach was Clifford Geertz through his influential work *The Religion of Java* (1960). Geertz demonstrated that the expression of Islam in Java cannot be understood solely through the teachings of fiqh or theology but must also be examined in relation to systems of symbols, traditions, social structures, and local culture. He introduced the typology of *santri*, *abangan*, and *priyayi* as forms of variation in the religious expressions of Javanese society, although this typology subsequently received various criticisms and refinements from later scholars. Subsequently, Mark R. Woodward (2010) developed a more comprehensive perspective by demonstrating that local Islamic practices in Indonesia should not necessarily be regarded as deviations from Islamic teachings but rather as the result of a creative dialogue between universal Islamic values and local traditions that have developed historically. This perspective demonstrates that culture does not necessarily conflict with religion but can serve as a medium through which Islamic values are internalized within society.

In the Indonesian context, the historical-cultural approach is particularly relevant because the process of Islamization in the Archipelago occurred through prolonged processes of acculturation, adaptation, and cultural negotiation. The spread of Islam was primarily facilitated through trade, *pesantren* education, the preaching activities of Islamic scholars, and cultural approaches rather than through political or military power. This process resulted in various forms of Islamic expression characterized by local contexts without abandoning the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings. The concept of local Islam, or *Nusantara Islam*, illustrates how Islamic values interact with customs, language, art, traditions, and social systems within Indonesian society, thereby contributing to the formation of an inclusive and moderate religious character (Van Bruinessen, 2013). According to Azyumardi Azra and Hasan (2002), the diversity of Islamic expressions in Indonesia is a logical consequence of the dynamic relationship between Islamic teachings and local culture. Therefore, the study of Islam in Indonesia requires a multidisciplinary approach capable of explaining the relationship between normative, historical, and cultural dimensions in an integrated manner. Thus, the historical-cultural approach is not intended to relativize Islamic teachings but rather to understand how these teachings are manifested in diverse social practices according to the historical and cultural contexts of different communities.

2.3. Toward an Integrative-Interconnective Paradigm

The development of contemporary Islamic Studies demonstrates that the dichotomy between the normative-theological approach and the historical-empirical approach is increasingly inadequate for explaining the complexity of Muslim life. The normative approach has the strength of maintaining the authority of revelation and the integrity of Islamic teachings, but it is often less sensitive to social changes. Conversely, the historical-cultural approach can explain the dynamics of religious practices within society but may overlook the transcendental dimension that constitutes the foundation of religion. This situation has led to the emergence of an integrative paradigm that seeks to balance these two approaches so that Islamic

Studies is no longer confined to the dichotomy between "text" and "context" but is able to understand both as complementary dimensions (Abdullah, 2020; Kersten, 2019). Thus, Islamic Studies is directed toward producing a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings and the social realities in which they are actualized (Alim & Arifi, 2026). One of the most influential figures in the development of this paradigm is M. Amin Abdullah through his concept of the integration and interconnection of knowledge. According to Amin Abdullah (2020), classical Islamic sciences (ulum al-din) should not be rigidly separated from the social sciences, humanities, or natural sciences. Each discipline has epistemological limitations, necessitating dialogue with other disciplines to explain religious phenomena more comprehensively. Within this framework, Abdullah developed an approach that integrates three epistemological traditions within Islamic thought: bayani, which is oriented toward textual authority; burhani, which emphasizes rationality and empirical analysis; and irfani, which highlights spiritual experience and ethical dimensions. These three approaches are not positioned as conflicting paradigms but rather as complementary sources of knowledge that enrich one another in understanding Islam.

The integrative-interconnective paradigm therefore serves as a methodological foundation that enables Islamic Studies to explain the relationship between revelation, reason, experience, and social reality simultaneously. The idea of integration is further reinforced by Kuntowijoyo's thought through the concept of Islam as Science. In his view, Islam is not only understood as a collection of normative doctrines governing the relationship between humans and God but also as a scientific paradigm capable of explaining and transforming social reality. Kuntowijoyo (2007) introduced the concept of Islamic scholarship, which refers to the process of making the values of the Qur'an a foundation for developing knowledge that is objective, empirical, and relevant to societal issues. Through this approach, Islamic teachings do not remain at the normative level but are developed into an analytical framework capable of critically examining social, economic, political, educational, and cultural changes. Therefore, the integrative-interconnective paradigm not only serves as a methodological solution to the dichotomy between religion and culture but also creates space for the development of multidisciplinary, contextual, and responsive Islamic Studies that can address the challenges of modern society.

2.4. Research Propositions

Based on the theoretical review of Islam as an object of normative-theological study, Islam as a historical-cultural phenomenon, and the development of an integrative-interconnective paradigm in Islamic Studies, it can be understood that the relationship between religion and culture cannot be adequately explained through a dichotomous approach. Various studies demonstrate that Islam possesses a normative dimension derived from revelation as well as an empirical dimension manifested in the social and cultural practices of Muslim communities. Therefore, this research begins with the assumption that a comprehensive understanding of Islam requires the integration of various scientific approaches to explain the relationship between text, context, and lived religion holistically. Based on this conceptual framework, this research formulates several propositions that serve as the foundation for the analysis of Islam as an object of religious and cultural studies. Based on the literature review presented above, this research proposes the following propositions:

- P1: The normative-theological approach and the historical-cultural approach are not two contradictory paradigms but rather complementary approaches for understanding Islam comprehensively.
- P2: The stronger the interconnection between classical Islamic sciences and the social sciences and humanities in Islamic Studies, the more comprehensive the understanding of Islam as both a religion and a culture.
- P3: The acculturation of Islam with local cultures, as reflected in the practices of Nusantara Islam and various local expressions of Islam in Indonesia, provides empirical evidence that Islam as a religion and Islam as

a culture exist in a dialectical relationship in which they influence each other rather than in an oppositional or mutually exclusive relationship.

III. Research Method

This research employs a qualitative approach using library research (Saefullah, 2024). This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is to examine and analyze theoretical concepts concerning Islam as an object of religious and cultural studies through a review of various relevant scholarly sources. Library research enables the researcher to explore in depth the development of paradigms in Islamic Studies, particularly the relationship among normative-theological and historical-cultural approaches and the integrative-interconnective paradigm. Thus, this research does not aim to produce statistical generalizations but rather to develop a conceptual synthesis based on a critical examination of authoritative academic literature. The research data are derived from primary and secondary literature, including reputable international and national journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and previous research relevant to the themes of Islamic Studies methodology, the sociology of religion, Islamic anthropology, and the philosophy of science published between 2018 and 2024. The literature was selected purposively based on its relevance to the research focus, the credibility of the publishers, and its theoretical contribution to explaining the development of contemporary Islamic Studies paradigms. In addition to contemporary literature, this research also draws upon several foundational works that have significantly influenced the development of Islamic Studies, including works by Clifford Geertz, Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Arkoun, M. Amin Abdullah, and Robert W. Hefner.

The data collection technique involves documentation, consisting of the search, identification, selection, and compilation of various written sources related to the research object. The literature search was conducted through scientific databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Crossref, DOAJ, and Garuda to ensure the credibility and traceability of the sources used. The collected documents were then classified according to thematic areas, including normative Islamic Studies, historical-cultural approaches, the integration of knowledge in Islamic Studies, and the relationship between Islam and culture. This classification process was intended to facilitate systematic analysis while minimizing the inclusion of references that were not relevant to the research focus. The data were analyzed using content analysis with a descriptive-interpretative approach (Eriyanto, 2011), which consisted of the following stages: (1) data reduction through the selection of relevant and up-to-date literature; (2) thematic categorization based on two main paradigms, namely the normative-theological approach and the historical-cultural approach; (3) interpretation and synthesis to formulate an integrative framework; and (4) drawing descriptive-analytical conclusions. Data validity was established through source triangulation by comparing arguments, findings, and perspectives across authoritative academic literature to ensure the consistency, validity, and objectivity of the analysis. Through this procedure, the research is expected to produce a comprehensive conceptual synthesis of Islam as an object of religious and cultural study and contribute to the development of Islamic Studies methodology from an integrative-interconnective perspective (Zed, 2008).

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1. The Dialectic of Islam as a Religion and Islam as a Culture

The results of the study show that the relationship between Islam as a religion and Islam as a culture is neither dichotomous nor contradictory but rather constitutes a dialectical and mutually influential relationship. As a revealed religion, Islam encompasses fundamental principles that are universal, permanent, and transcendent, derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. These principles encompass faith, worship, moral values, and the general objectives of Islamic law (*maqāsid al-sharī'ah*), which serve as guidelines for the lives of Muslims wherever they live. This normative dimension provides identity, legitimacy, and direction for

religious activities, ensuring that the substance of Islamic teachings remains intact even when implemented in societies with diverse cultural backgrounds (Hallaq, 2009; Rahman, 1982). Thus, the universality of Islam lies in its fundamental values rather than in the uniformity of the social practices through which these values are expressed. On the other hand, the findings also demonstrate that the implementation of Islamic teachings always takes place within specific social and cultural contexts. When Islamic values are adopted by a society, processes of interpretation, adaptation, and negotiation occur in relation to the local value systems that have already developed. These processes result in various expressions of religiosity that remain rooted in Islamic teachings while exhibiting different cultural characteristics according to their respective historical contexts and social environments. From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, this phenomenon can be understood as lived Islam, referring to Islam as practiced by Muslims in their everyday lives through traditions, rituals, language, art, architecture, and social systems that develop within communities (Geertz, 1960; Bowen, 2003). Therefore, the diversity of religious practices does not necessarily indicate differences in the substance of Islamic teachings but rather reflects the various ways in which communities actualize Islamic values within their cultural contexts. This phenomenon can be observed in various regions of the Islamic world, including Indonesia, which is characterized by a high level of cultural diversity. Historical evidence shows that the process of Islamization in the Archipelago took place through peaceful means, emphasizing trade, education, the preaching activities of Islamic scholars, and social interaction with local communities. As a result, various local traditions underwent processes of Islamization without losing their cultural identities.

Traditions such as Sekaten in Java, Tabot in Bengkulu, Grebeg Maulid, the celebration of the Prophet's Maulid in various regions, and customary practices among communities in Maluku and Sulawesi demonstrate a process of dialogue between Islamic teachings and local cultures. According to Woodward (2010) and Hefner (2011), this phenomenon demonstrates that culture is not necessarily a threat to the integrity of religious teachings but can instead serve as an effective medium for internalizing Islamic values, provided that it does not contradict the fundamental principles of sharia. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, the relationship between religion and culture can be understood as reciprocal. Religion provides systems of values, norms, and moral legitimacy for social life, while culture provides a space for the actualization and institutionalization of religious values within society. In other words, religion influences culture through processes of sacralization, while culture influences how society understands, interprets, and practices religious teachings. This relationship explains why the religious practices of Muslims in the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia take different forms even though they originate from the same Islamic teachings (Esposito & Maftuhin, 2010). These differences are primarily related to cultural contexts rather than differences in the fundamental principles of Islam. The results of this study also reinforce Proposition P1, which states that the normative-theological and historical-cultural approaches are not conflicting paradigms but rather complementary approaches to understanding Islam comprehensively. This finding also supports Proposition P3, which posits that the acculturation of Islam with local cultures provides empirical evidence of a dialectical relationship between Islam as a religion and Islam as a culture. Therefore, a strict separation between the normative and cultural dimensions has the potential to produce a partial understanding of Islam. A comprehensive study of Islam requires the ability to examine the relationships among revelation, history, and culture simultaneously, thereby explaining how the universal values of Islam are preserved while being adapted to the social and cultural diversity of different communities. This finding is consistent with the contemporary paradigm of Islamic Studies, which positions Islam as a system of teachings that encompasses both normative and empirical dimensions.

4.2. Nusantara Islam as a Case Study of Acculturation

The phenomenon of Nusantara Islam provides strong empirical evidence of this dialectical relationship. The process of Islamization in the Archipelago took place peacefully and accommodated local traditions, resulting in distinctive forms of cultural integration, including the traditions of *selamatan* and *tahlilan* and various forms of Islamic-themed performing arts (Van Bruinessen, 2013). Ishom Fuadi Fikri (2016)

emphasizes that Nusantara Islam should not be understood as "mixed Islam" in a negative sense but rather as the result of a creative dialogue between universal Islamic values and local wisdom, which contributes to enriching Islamic civilization as a whole. Furthermore, the process of Islam's acculturation in the Archipelago demonstrates that the spread of Islam was not carried out through the eradication of local cultures but through the selection, adaptation, and reinterpretation of cultural elements in accordance with Islamic values. The da'wah approach developed by Islamic scholars, particularly the Wali Songo, utilized various cultural media, including art, literature, language, architecture, and community traditions, as means of internalizing Islamic teachings. This strategy facilitated the acceptance of Islam by local communities without generating significant cultural conflict.

Traditions such as Sekaten, Grebeg Maulid, wayang kulit, kasidah, selamatan, and tahlilan illustrate how local cultural practices can undergo processes of Islamization while retaining their social functions as media for strengthening solidarity, collective identity, and religious education within society. According to Ricklefs (2007), the process of Islamization in Java demonstrates that the development of Islam occurs through dynamic interactions among religious teachings, social structures, and local culture, resulting in distinctive forms of religiosity that remain rooted in Islamic principles. From the perspective of contemporary Islamic Studies, Islam Nusantara can be understood as a manifestation of Islam's ability to engage in dialogue with cultural diversity without losing its normative identity. Azra and Hasan (2002) explain that the character of Indonesian Islam has been shaped by networks of Islamic scholars and intellectuals from the Archipelago who have been able to integrate Islamic teachings with the social realities of island communities in a moderate, tolerant, and inclusive manner. This view is reinforced by Robert Hefner (2011), who argues that the success of Islam in Indonesia in fostering a relatively harmonious social life cannot be separated from its ability to accommodate local traditions, provided that they do not contradict the fundamental principles of sharia. Therefore, Nusantara Islam should not be understood simply as a form of syncretism involving the mixing of beliefs but rather as the result of contextualizing Islamic teachings within diverse cultural settings. This phenomenon further demonstrates that the relationship between Islam as a religion and Islam as a culture is complementary and strengthens the argument that acculturation constitutes part of the historical dynamics of Islamic civilization rather than a deviation from Islamic teachings.

4.3. The Urgency of the Integrative-Interconnective Paradigm

The next finding reinforces Proposition P2, which states that strengthening the interconnection between Islamic sciences and the social sciences and humanities leads to a more comprehensive understanding of Islam. An approach that relies solely on textual sources without considering the social context risks producing a rigid and ahistorical understanding of religion. Conversely, an approach that focuses exclusively on cultural dimensions without being grounded in normative sources risks reducing Islam to merely a social construct and undermining its theological authenticity (Abdullah, 2020). Therefore, the integrative-interconnective paradigm constitutes a highly relevant methodological framework for contemporary Islamic Studies, particularly in multicultural societies such as Indonesia. The integrative-interconnective paradigm also has significant implications for the development of research methodologies in Islamic Studies. This approach encourages the use of multidisciplinary perspectives that combine Islamic Studies with sociology, anthropology, history, political science, economics, and even the philosophy of science in analyzing religious phenomena. Thus, contemporary issues such as religious moderation, radicalism, digital transformation, bioethics, sharia economics, environmental change, and cultural pluralism are no longer understood solely through a normative fiqh approach but are also examined through analyses of the social, historical, and cultural factors underlying them.

According to Abdullah (2006), the integration of various disciplines enables a more comprehensive understanding because each discipline has its own strengths as well as epistemological limitations. Therefore, interdisciplinary dialogue is not intended to eliminate the identity of Islamic sciences but rather to strengthen the ability of Islamic Studies to address various issues in modern society in a more contextual and solution-

oriented manner. In the context of Indonesia, a country characterized by a high degree of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity, the integrative-interconnective paradigm has become increasingly relevant. This approach helps explain that the diversity of religious practices developing in various regions constitutes part of the social dynamics of Muslim communities, provided that such practices remain within the framework of the fundamental values of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Moreover, this paradigm can serve as an academic foundation for the development of Islamic education curricula, research, and community service programs that are more responsive to contemporary challenges. The integrative framework not only strengthens dialogue between religion and culture but also encourages collaboration between religious studies and modern science in building a moderate, inclusive, and civilized society. Thus, the integrative-interconnective paradigm is not merely a methodological approach within Islamic Studies but also offers a new direction for the development of Islamic thought that is adaptive to social change without abandoning its normative foundations (Kersten, 2019).

4.4. Implications for Contemporary Islamic Studies Methodology

This study also finds that contemporary Islamic higher education institutions are increasingly moving toward multidisciplinary models of study that combine textual-normative approaches with social science perspectives, such as the anthropology of religion, the sociology of religion, and cultural studies (Kersten, 2019). This model enables Islamic Studies to move beyond mere theological apologetics while also explaining religious phenomena in a critical and objective manner without abandoning their normative foundations. The development of these methodologies also influences the transformation of Islamic higher education, particularly in the areas of curriculum development, research, and community service. The integration of Islamic sciences with the social sciences and humanities encourages the development of a learning model that is oriented not only toward mastering classical texts (*turāt*) but also toward the ability to critically and contextually analyze contemporary issues. In practice, students are encouraged to combine the methods of Qur'anic exegesis, hadith studies, and jurisprudence with approaches from anthropology, sociology, history, and public policy, enabling them to understand religious phenomena more comprehensively. According to Abdullah (2020), this transformation is a logical consequence of the increasingly complex issues facing modern society, which can no longer be adequately explained through a single discipline. Therefore, Islamic Studies is required to develop multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and even transdisciplinary approaches to remain relevant to the dynamics of social change and the development of knowledge. Another implication is the increasing openness of dialogue between the tradition of Islamic scholarship and the development of modern science without requiring the elimination of their respective epistemological identities. An integrative methodological approach enables research in Islamic Studies not only to produce normative explanations but also to provide solutions to various real-world issues, such as strengthening religious moderation, developing the sharia economy, promoting ethical digital technology, improving Islamic education, preserving the environment, and resolving conflicts in multicultural societies. Kersten (2019) emphasizes that contemporary Islamic Studies is moving toward a more reflective and dialogical approach by positioning Islamic teachings as a source of values while also treating social reality as an object of scientific analysis. Thus, the methodology of Islamic Studies in the contemporary era no longer functions solely to understand religious texts but also serves as a scientific instrument for explaining the dynamics of Muslim life and contributing constructively to the resolution of various social issues.

V. Conclusion

This research concludes that Islam as an object of study encompasses two intertwined dimensions, namely the religious dimension (normative-theological) and the cultural dimension (historical-cultural). These two dimensions should not be viewed as diametrically opposed but rather understood as dialectical and complementary aspects of Islam. The normative dimension provides theological foundations and universal

principles derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, while the historical-cultural dimension demonstrates how these teachings are interpreted, internalized, and manifested in social life through social and cultural processes. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of Islam can only be achieved when both dimensions are appropriately positioned within an integrated analytical framework. The phenomenon of Nusantara Islam provides empirical evidence that the universal teachings of Islam can engage in constructive dialogue with local cultures without compromising their normative substance. The process of acculturation throughout the history of Islamization in Indonesia demonstrates that culture is not necessarily a threat to the integrity of Islamic teachings but can serve as an effective medium for the internalization of Islamic values within society. This finding further reinforces the view that the diversity of Islamic expressions is a consequence of historical and social dynamics that do not fundamentally alter the core principles of Islam. The research findings also indicate that the integrative-interconnective paradigm is a highly relevant methodological approach for the development of contemporary Islamic Studies. The integration of classical Islamic sciences with the social sciences and humanities enables Islamic Studies to explain the relationship among texts, contexts, and religious practices more comprehensively. Through this approach, Islamic Studies can maintain the authority of normative sources while also critically and contextually explaining various socio-religious phenomena in response to the dynamics of modern society.

This research reinforces the integrative-interconnective paradigm in Islamic Studies by demonstrating that the normative-theological and historical-cultural approaches represent two complementary perspectives. These findings contribute to the development of a more holistic conceptual framework for Islamic Studies by facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the relationship among text, context, and religious practice. The findings of this research can serve as a reference for universities, researchers, and Islamic educational institutions in developing curricula, research programs, and learning activities that integrate Islamic Studies with the social sciences and humanities. This approach is expected to foster a more contextual, moderate, and responsive understanding of Islam that is sensitive to the cultural diversity of society.

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