

The Islamic Response to Modernity and Ecological Crisis

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Abstract.

The problem of the ecological crisis and various environmental issues that arise today cannot be separated from the role of religion and religious communities as entities that are in contact with the environment. Muslims as the largest number of people in Indonesia have an influenced by their lifestyle in the environment. Therefore, awareness of environmental preservation is an important thing to consider in the actions and behavior of Muslims. This study aims to reveal how Islam responds to environmental issues. This research is a literature study using discourse analysis. The results of the study show that Islamic thought provides a critique of modernity that is misguided, and it causes human domination over nature. In addition, there is an Islamic understanding of new interpretations of the doctrine that can build relationships between humans and others. Also, there are daily practices of Muslims that show respect for nature.

Keywords: *Islam, environment, Ecological crisis, and Modernity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, this forest is destroyed because of man's rights; that sea is polluted because of man's supposed needs. Man is made absolute, his "rights" dominating over both God's rights and the rights of His creation[1][2]. The ecological problems facing this planet are not just worldly problems, but they are a religious area because they relate to human rights to nature given by God. In today's modern world, spiritual entities have evolved into something that permeates and spreads in every aspect of life [3]–[5], including environmental affairs. Nowadays, the dividing line between the sacred and the profane is increasingly difficult to see. Thus, religious phenomena must be captured in their amalgam form intertwined with other entities. It is necessary to reveal how religion emerges and responds to these problems in the ecological crisis discourse. In the debates on the response to the ecological crisis, two notions have different responses to solving the problem. Conflicting ideas in the discourse of ecology are environmentalism and ecomodernism. It relates to the acceptance and rejection of modernity regarding solving the ecological crisis. Environmentalism believes that the crisis is caused by the idea of modernity and its derivatives including science and technology. So, in solving the crisis, the annihilation of modern products is a must. on the contrary, ecomodernism considers that the ecological crisis is the only “residue” of modernity. To solve the crisis, the redirection of modernity and exploring green technology is the best solution for the crisis.

The disputes between ecomodernism and environmentalism are relevant to discuss as a framework for scrutinizing Islam's notion of the environment. Jonathan Symons revealed how the debate between environmentalists and eco-modernists [6]. Symons argued that thinkers and activists who are pro-environment in this case are called Greens or environmentalists in some literature. They reject modernity metanarratives and various foundations of modernity, such as reason as a judge of truth, the idea of progress, and the separation between man and nature. Nor do they support the idea of living naturally. They ask to minimize the use of technology and more standardized life in nature. Another concept that was brought up was about simple life [7]. Modernity's notions of progress and abundance will lead to the overexploitation of nature. Therefore, global capitalism that wants to develop prosperity and progress is exploiting nature on the other hand. The idea of simplicity is a resistance to it. The ecomodernist have a different notion about how to deal with the ecological crisis. Ecomodernists recognized that modernism could embrace the green concept, and it would be a regression for humankind to come back to a rudimentary way of life. Modern life today does provide many problems and burdens that have never been thought of before. However, as Harari said, going back to the past and doing daily activity such as digging tubers is impossible for humans today [8].

So, Ecomodernist say that there is no turning back in the history of human struggle and development. As Symons said, we need to maximize and enhance technological innovation so that the resulting adverse effects on the environment can be eliminated [6]. Using low-carbon technology is a way out that is more likely to be done by humans today [6]. This view is also more or less in line with Nasr's thought which does not entirely reject technology but technology that is spiritual and respectful to nature needs to be developed. In his book, *The Turning Point*, Capra also explains that the solution to the civilization crisis experienced by humans is to develop consistent knowledge where the technology developed should be environmentally friendly. The ecological crisis is a significant issue today because it has a vast impact on human existence, but few people are aware of it. Religion, an ancient institution that regulates human behavior, is awaited to provide honest discourse and action in this environmental crisis. As one of the world's largest religions, Islam has a large following and a far-reaching influence on the human condition and environment today. We know that the current ecological situation of our planet is the responsibility of what humans do. Islam followers as much as 2.2 billion people is certainly not a tiny element in environmental variables. This section will reveal the urgency of the discourse on Islam and ecology, particularly on the practices and actions of Islamic organizations. The issues addressed in this paper are the ecological crisis and how Islam builds a discourse on the Islamic response to modernity and environmental crisis. Furthermore, this paper delineates the discourse construction of Islam and the ecological crisis by explaining the concept of modernity and its challenge to religious traditions and the dispute between eco-modernism and environmentalism. The concept

of modernity is a significant notion in discussing the religious response to ecological issues because modernity is a key variable in the discussion of the origin of ecological crises. Scrutinized by Nasr, the cause of ecological crisis refers to modernity and its materialistic paradigm toward the world and humankind. On the other side, modernity and its derivatives have been bringing marvelous benefits to humans. Modernity might be considered an unfinished project, and the task of civilization is to pursue the most ideal types of modernity that provide advantages for both humans and nature.

II. METHODS

This research used the discourses approach. The consequence of this approach is to see knowledge not as a neutral thing, but as a political-loaded entity. The discourses approach explored how something considered normal is an ideological construction. By dismantling power relations in the formation of related discourses, it saw how the concept is formed. Therefore, the discourses approach analyzed how certain knowledge was formed by discourse formations. Discourse research explored and provided the rules and dynamics of attributing meaning to texts or things and establishing shared knowledge. In this research, discourse analysis was used to uncover how the discourse of Islam constructs the understanding of the environment and ecological crisis.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The genesis of the Ecological Crisis

The origin of the ecological crisis is important to be discussed in revealing how Islam responds to environmental problems. By uncovering the genealogy of the ecological crisis, it will be seen the relevance of discussions about religion in responding to this crisis. And we will see that the problem is very ecological with theological. There are two opinions about the root causes of the ecological crisis, namely the theology of religion, which is anthropocentric, and the current of modernity which justifies human activity in exploiting nature. The problems that arise regarding the ecological crisis we face are rooted in the epistemic foundation built from two significant knowledge traditions, namely modernity, and theology. In short, this crisis is caused by human activity and the side effects of technology. However, when viewed in-depth and further, the various variables that caused the crisis were rooted in the ideas of modernity and theology. Many thinkers have reviewed the ecological crisis rooted in modernity. However, Fritjof Capra did it convincingly. Meanwhile, the discussion about the root of the ecological crisis that comes from the theological paradigm is the study of Lynn White. Both of them provide the view that the roots of the analysis today are fundamental and idealistic, which have strong power and authority to shape discourse.

Knowing for sure the ultimate cause of the ecological disaster that we are experiencing is complicated. Scientists have detected global warming, pollution, and

deforestation as some of the causes of ecological disasters, but they cannot reveal the hidden variables behind these causes. Therefore, the study of ecological roots is more on philosophical and speculative analysis. In their philosophical studies, Lynn White and Seyyed Hossein Nasr gave their opinion on the genealogical roots of the ecological crisis. White blamed the theological views on this ecological disaster, while Nasr blamed the spiritual decline in this modern era as the root of the crisis [9]. White analyzed the causes of the ecological crisis historically to find out the main reasons. White Lynn noticed that scientific power and technological dominance impact natural changes [10], [11]. But science is not the base cause. White continues to explore how medieval views influenced the paradigm of science and its treatment of nature. In the end, White discovered that the leading cause of this crisis was the theological paradigm, especially Christianity. The view of the human as a superior creature and the human's right to control other creations are the root cause of the ecological crisis. Because it comes from religion, White suggested that solving the ecological crisis is also religious [11].

The ecological crisis is not a new thing. This condition is because the crisis has occurred throughout the history of human civilization. However, an ecological crisis that was so massive and large only occurred when humans experienced the modern era at this time. Various indications of natural damage such as forest fires, increasing carbon gas, increasing earth temperature, and pollution from industrial waste are currently facing the modern era. As criticism by Nasr and Fritjof Capra, the modern paradigm is the root of the problem of this crisis [1]. Therefore, the idea of progress in the modern era is something that causes the crisis. Environmentalists argue that progress should be limited. To protect nature, humans must live simply and not do outrageous things. Various human activities that are excessive will have an impact on the destruction of nature. Environmentalists propose the concept of degrowth, a non-growing living, as a counter to modernity and the notion of progress.

Modernity and religion

Weber stated that “the calling” in the concept of Protestantism was the seed of rational actions in modern economic society. Capitalism which drives western society toward secularism and modernity is supported by the presence of spiritual actions, although it does not work in direct correlation. However, this indicates the complexity of modernity in which there are rationalism and secularism that cannot be separated from religion and spirituality. Both religion and science are not monolithic entities where one is present and the other will disappear, or vice versa. The deepest spirit of secularism in the form of religion has been revealed by Peter Berger. According to Berger, the process of secularism is a consequence of the transcendental concept of God, especially in the traditions of the Abrahamic religion in the statements of the old covenant [5], [12]. Berger emphasized that Protestantism had been opening the path for secularism. It should be noted that Berger sees the relationship between religion and secularism as a dilemma. Namely, when religion began to open the way to secularism,

religion began to be abandoned. In Weber's terms, it is called disenchantment. But it is not the hallmark of the end of religion. Secularization also drives the religion to transform.

However, the process of disenchantment and the pace of modernity and secularism is not a linear process that always annihilates religion. In an increasingly modern world, religion does not disappear, but religion is transformed to respond to modernity. Modernity that discloses a rational and mechanistic worldview and separates the world from angels' interference has brought a meaningless world. The absence of meaning and spirituality in the world makes the process of modernity must call back religions. As revealed by Berger in some of his final works and also by Casanova for his criticism of the modernization process [12], [13]. Furthermore, what is called disenchantment as a sign of modernity cannot be simplified as contradicting religion on the one hand and secularism-rationalism on the other. The Agil Aspem sees that the discourse of disenchantment is a "problem" that opens up a pluralistic battlefield where religion, esotericism, and science fight each other to become legitimate knowledge [14].

The grand narration of modernity does not walk along the way presumed before in secularization theory. Even though modernity diminished spirituality, the contemporary form of religion is prevailing [5], [14]. The emergence of new religious forms in the modern era indicates that there is a process of re-enchantment of the world. So, it is obvious that modernity and religion go hand in hand and the secularization theory must be questioned [13], [14]. This phenomenon demonstrates that there is no single narrative of modernity, and religion and modernity always have dynamic interactions that shape and give influence each other.

On Islam and Ecology Discourse

Seyyed Hossein Nasr is one of the Muslim intellectuals who, in the 60s, responded to the various adverse effects of modernity [1]. Nasr had the opinion that the modern world today is less spiritual. In his book *Encounter of Men and nature: a spiritual crisis of modern man*, he reveals that moral and spiritual decline only causes humans to view nature as a material entity. The value of nature's sacred values and its connection with God are reduced. The degradation of respect for nature and the desacralization of nature have severely damaged the destruction of nature in the modern era. Based on this analysis, Nasr provides a critique of modern science in which science is currently more inclined toward a western perspective and less religious. In his book *Need for the secret science*, Nasr explains a science based on religious values. With science that has insight into religious values, when examining nature, scientists still have respect for nature because they regard nature as a representation of divinity.

Nasr's view of sacred science has many responses, both supporting and rejecting the points. For instance, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi saw that the concept of Nasr was still too abstract and philosophical and had not yet been formulated as a technical

guide to form Islamic science that was more respectful of nature and respected humans as religious creations. A contradictory concept was put forward by Abdus Salam, who saw that modern science was universal and free-value knowledge; as a Muslim, there was no need to form Islamic science [15]. Although Nasr has received a lot of criticism so far, the intellectual who has devoted his thoughts on Islam and nature philosophically and profoundly is Nasr. Therefore, his view of the spiritual nature and the perennial concept he initiated is an excellent way to see how Islamic institutions and organizations today respond to the ecological crisis.

Even though he has a lot of works in books and articles on Nasr's thoughts, it has not been implemented practically and widely by Muslims. Nasr's thought is more of a philosophical and general nature. Therefore, his concept of perennial philosophy and Islamic science is not a technical guide but a philosophical foundation for more practical Islamic thought. Besides Nasr, there is prominent Islamic researchers who had discussed how Islam responds to environmental problems, namely Richard Foltz. He argued that Islam must have relevance to various problems at this point; even though Islamic teachings originate from sacred texts that emerged centuries ago, recent questions today must also be answered essentially. Foltz described various Muslim intellectual responses to environmental issues. Richard Foltz believed that Islam is an actual religion and is responsive to various problems faced by humans [16]. The reason is that Islam is a religion that grants grace to the universe and always provides solutions to current problems, where various ecological problems can be resolved with religious considerations.

Various Islamic values such as justice, common good, and safety can be used to form ideologies that can provide solutions to environmental problems. Various verses in the Koran and hadith also explain that Muslims must protect nature. Although it has a slightly anthropocentric concept, as believed by Nasr, anthropocentrism in Islam does not consider humans as owners of nature. Alternatively, the concept was more appropriate to call it theo-centrism. The concept offered is that humans are responsible to nature to maintain and preserve it as a religious duty. From Richard Foltz's thought, it can be concluded that Islamic theology is not wholly void of ecological issues [17]. Islam has concepts and values that are very relevant to various environmental problems that we are facing in the modern era at this point; however, like the criticisms expressed by Zainal Bagir, Islamic studies that exist today are more on the theological side [18]. Their efforts tend to theologize their concepts and strategies for overcoming ecological disasters. Another prominent thinker concerned about Islam and the environment in the local and traditional society is Anne D. Gade. Her book *Muslim Environmentalism* reveals that the interaction between Islam and Environment is complicated, and it should address the non-expert people and non-religious textual doctrine. When Muslim commitments to environmentalism are primarily for the sake of religious goals and not the reverse, teachings that are not part of a standard interfaith menu, such as apocalypticism or the exemplary model of the

Prophet Muhammad, emerge as central [19]. Here, it can notice that the ordinary people in their daily life indicate actions that construct the understanding of Islamic ecological practices. Anne D. Gade's notion delivers an understanding that in scrutinizing the concept of Islam and the environment, ordinary people's traditional ways of life should be considered.

Nasr's idea on the environment enlightened that the materialistic paradigm and the degradation of spirituality are the ultimate roots of the ecological crisis. His criticism of modernity which brings exploitative behavior toward nature is essential to reveal the flaws of modern paradigm and technology. Nasr suggested a *scientia sacra*, spiritual-based science, as a substitute for science today. It would be a gigantic task because of building such a new kind of science from scratch. Nevertheless, pointing out the weakness of modernity and the significance of spirituality is a priceless idea. Form Foltz's idea reveals that reinterpreting traditional religious scripture is important to coin novel religious understanding toward recent issues, especially about nature. However, Foltz slightly fails to address the significant role of practical context among Muslim who vividly interprets their religious doctrines to deal with real-world situations. Anne D. Gade portrayed the Muslim who stands in a peripheral position and extract their unique practice as a tenet of religious response to the environmental issue. Hence, from those thinkers, it can be concluded that there are points that there are several dimensions where Islam and the environment are intertwined connected, namely criticism of modernity, interpretation of religious doctrine, and everyday religious practices.

IV. CONCLUSION

The environmental crisis is a phenomenon that is difficult to find the root of the problem and cannot be determined whether it comes from religious understanding or modern thought. In conditions of ecological crisis, religion has an important role because it can have an impact on the environment at large through the actions of its adherents. In this modern world, religious thought cannot be removed and still contributes to shaping the world. Islamic ideas provide many opinions about the love of nature and its maintenance. Various thinkers about Islam provide an understanding that Islamic doctrine must be reinterpreted so that it is relevant to current conditions related to economic problems. In addition, Nasr also provides an alternative to spiritual science so that the paradigm of nature is more religious. The various practices of the Muslim community related to daily life can also be a reflection of how they really care about the preservation of nature.

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