

**HISTORICAL METHODS IN INTERFAITH STUDIES: A COMPARISON
FROM AN ISLAMIC-WESTERN PERSPECTIVE
METODE PENSEJARAHAN DALAM KAJIAN ANTARA AGAMA: SATU
PERBANDINGAN DARI SUDUT ISLAM-BARAT**

Aemy Elyani Mat Zain^{1*}, Jaffary Awang²

¹PhD Candidate, Institute of Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM); Lecturer, Department of Islamic Understanding and Thoughts, Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), aemyelyani@kuis.edu.my

²Chairmen of Research Centre for Usuluddin and Philosophy, Faculty of Islamic Studies; Research Fellow, Institute of Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), jaffary@ukm.edu.my

*Penulis Penghubung

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Abstract

Interfaith studies is one of the areas of Islamic knowledge that is increasingly gaining public attention. However, in terms of methodology, it is still less known to many. Therefore, this research will discuss one of the methods in interfaith studies which is historiography discussed by scholars who are more focused on comparison from an Islamic-Western perspective. The research methodology is qualitative which refers to the past studies such as articles and books on the issues discussed and is divided into two aspects specifically Islam and the West. The results of the study found that the discussion on the method of historiography according to the Islamic-Western mold is different and to some extent the difference can cause their understanding of the existence of other religions to differ.

Keywords

Methods, historiography, interfaith studies

Abstrak

Kajian antara agama merupakan salah satu bidang ilmu Islam yang semakin mendapat perhatian ramai. Namun dari sudut metodologinya masih kurang dikenali ramai. Oleh itu, kertas kerja ini membincangkan salah satu metode dalam kajian antara agama iaitu pensejarahan yang dibincangkan oleh para sarjana yang lebih menumpukan kepada perbandingan dari kaca mata Islam-Barat. Metodologi kajian adalah bersifat kualitatif yang merujuk kepada kajian-kajian lepas seperti artikel-artikel dan buku-buku mengenai isu yang dibincangkan dan dibahagikan kepada dua aspek iaitu Islam dan Barat. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa perbincangan mengenai metode pensejarahan mengikut acuan Islam-Barat adalah berbeza dan sedikit sebanyak perbezaan ini boleh menyebabkan kefahaman mereka tentang wujudnya agama lain juga berbeza.

Kata kunci

Metode, pensejarahan, kajian antara agama

1.0 Introduction

The comparative knowledge of religions or interfaith studies is a discipline of knowledge that has received attention and has often been discussed by scholars of the Western world and the Eastern world (Islam) for centuries. As a matter of fact, this knowledge is so vast and it has various methods and approaches in researching and understanding any of a religion. Methods such as historiography or historical, sociological methods, psychological methods, phenomenological methods, theological methods, anthropological methods are used by comparative scholars of Western religions and Islam. Each of these methods has its own philosophy in the study of religion.

In a smaller scope, this article discusses one of the methods in religious comparison namely the method of historiography or Historiography of Religion. The method of historiography is a method that has its own uniqueness. At the same time, this method has different point of views among Islamic and Western scholars. Therefore the purpose of writing this article is to explore the method of historiography from an Islamic-Western point of view.

2.0 Historical Methods in the Tradition of Interfaith Studies in the West

In interfaith studies, the method of historiography is a method used by Eastern (Islamic) scholars or Western scholars. In fact, this method is said to be the oldest in the study of religions (Iqbal 2018). Although this method is the oldest and is used by both the Eastern and Western worlds, the context of the discussion of historical methods by Eastern (Islamic) and Western scholars are different according to their understanding and belief.

The first thing discussed is about the leading Islamic and Western figures in using this method of historiography. Among his figures are CJBleeker, G.Widrengen, A.Reviolle, A Berth and Fr.M.Muller(Mohd Yazid Saad 2012). Each of these figures has their own book in processing religions through historical or historical methods, including *Historia Religionum* and *Handbook for the History* written by CJ Bleeker and G.Widrengen(Ariyanto 2007). Similarly, from the perspective of Islam, the figure who use the method of historiography in interfaith studies is Ibn Hazm(Ghulam Haider Aasi 1986).

Generally, the external features in the method of historiography understood by Islamic and Western scholars both have similarities. Among its features is to understand the history of the emergence of religions clearly(Ghazali bin Basri 2013; Mohd Yazid Saad 2012; Yussamir Yusof 2012) and also to understand the aspects of the transmission and influence of a religion on society. The existence of world religions can be understood through the development of a religion from a historical point of view such as examining its development and connecting it with certain events, so that a researcher can find the patterns of the existence of the religion clearly. For instance, the study of religions through artifacts, scriptures, or relics related to religion in knowing the origin, development and emergence of a religion(Dadang Kahmad 2000).

In addition, this method can help a researcher to understand the continuity of circumstances found in a religion by connecting them in the context of history and analyzing them from one event to another. (Iqbal 2018) This is because this method involves processes such as the use of archaeological and philological methods as additional knowledge in understanding religion (Yussamir Yusof 2012)

The reality is undeniable that the characteristics and importance found in the method of historiography in examining religions have similarities between the Eastern (Islamic) and Western worlds. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the discussion, those two have differences that are elaborated according to their respective perspectives.

In the context of the Western world, the method of historiography in interfaith studies discussed takes into account the development of Western civilization itself. The development of Western civilization includes several stages which are the stone (stone age), metal age (iron age), antiquity age, enlightenment age, postmodern era (postmodern era) and modern age.(Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Wan Razali et al. 2017).

In brief, the emergence of Western civilization until modern times which has been discussed is different and there is still disagreement among Western scholars. Nonetheless, the six levels mentioned earlier are still within the framework of their discussion. This discrepancy can be seen from the writing(Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Wan Razali et al. 2017) who examined two different views among Western scholars; Sullivan viewed that the modern age began in the late 15th century, while CEBlack saw the modern age emerged as soon as the fall of Constantinople or the discovery of the American state at dawn on 29 May 1453.

In fact, the development of the classical era to the modern era also explains the relationship between the development of certain beliefs and religions are actually exist in Western civilization. This is especially evident with the emergence of Western works in the study of religion which has been illustrated before Western civilization emerged, particularly during the early times that had the characteristics of a divine nature. For examples, the Iliad (1909) and the Odyssey (1909) by Homer (lived in the 8th century to 7 BC), the Theogony by Hesiod (lived in the 8th century BC), Euhemerus (lived in the 4th century BC)), Epicurus of Samos (341-270BC) and Cicero of Arpinium (106-43BC) have unraveled the state of society in early times are more to speculative and philosophical thinking in understanding religion as a polytheistic nature of divinity (Wan Mohd Fazrul Wan Razali et al. 2017)

3.0 Historical Methods in the Tradition of Interfaith Studies According to Islam

That is the general picture of how Western scholars discuss the comparison of these religions through the method of historiography. They examine within the scope of the emergence of the earliest times so as to develop and create Western civilization itself. In this regard, to some extent explaining the discussion of interfaith studies in the method of historiography by the Western world does not trace the whole of the religious matter itself. On the other hand the Eastern (Islamic) world also has a slightly different point of view of the use of historical and historical methods in religious comparisons.

First, the use of historical and historical methods in the comparison of religions by Islamic scholars is to take into account what is already present in the teachings of Islam that is the source of revelation before others to become a process in this method. The following verses of the Qur'an are one of the main points of Islamic scholars making it as the core of researching religions

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَى وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Meaning:

Indeed, in their stories (the prophets) there is a lesson for people who have sense. The Qur'an is not a fabricated story, but it is a confirmation of the previous revelation and explains everything and as a guidance and a mercy for the believers

(Surah Yusuf 12: 111)

Generally, the narration in this verse is about the story of Prophet Yusuf who should be an example and a lesson to Muslims. In fact, the essence that is more appropriate in the context of this historical and historical method is the essence of taking the teachings or *ibrah* that expressed from the verse into the fiqh of human life. This is very clear from what is stated by (Wahbah Az-Zuhaili 2018) in his perception, which is the interpretation from the above verse, reveals that Qur'an allows the previous books such as the Taurat, Injil and other holy books of Allah SWT to be used as overseers for mankind.

This also explains that the narrations from the previous prophets found in the books should also be used as a core source in tracing the origin of a belief, religion and the development of that religion itself.

Next, there are current researchers in the discipline of interfaith studies who examine the methodology used by some Muslim figures in the comparison of religions, for example (Ghulam Haider Aasi 1986) in his book of *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: An Analytical Study of Ibn Hazm's Kitab al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Nihal* gives an example of the method of historiography used by Ibn Hazm.

Ibn Hazm uses the method of historiography or historical in the study of Judaism that is about the nasakh in the marriage of siblings at a time. He disagreed with the theory of some Jews who rejected the issue of nasakh in marriage because they claimed that God did not know what would happen later if this matter was confirmed, whereas the issue of nasakh had been accepted by the Jews before.

So in this case, he argued that the manuscript has taken place since the time of the previous prophets through the arguments of their philosophy and scripture, the Taurat. For example, Ibn Hazm refers to the historiography or history of the marriage of Prophet Yaakub with two women (sisters) at one time. Afterward, this abrogation took place in the time of the Prophet Musa and this matter is expressed in Lev 18:18

(Ghulam Haider Aasi 1986). Through history and historical methods, he also presents the story of what happened to the father of Musa who married his aunt and the daughter of his aunt and this matter was officially confirmed in the time of Musa as revealed in the Taurat book; Dt.20: 15 and Jos.9: 3-27 (Ghulam Haider Aasi 1986).

Besides, questions of issues concerning religion are exactly able to provide more accurate explanation through history and historical methods. For example, one of the issues that some non-Muslims misunderstand about Islam is the issue of polygamy where they consider Islam to teach its people polygamy by introducing the concept of polygamy in the Qur'an. Thus, in repelling this misunderstanding, the historical method is used by examining the time before the revelation was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad saw, polygamy was practiced by men around the world and they are free to marry as many women as they wish and that was their practice including the ignorant Arab community at that time (Yussamir Yusof 2012).

In other words, the revelation mentions polygamy in fact to explain the limitations and guidelines that should be for men in marrying women, which is as revealed in the Qur'an, that is

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثَلَىٰ وَثَلُثَ وَرُبُعَ فَإِنْ
خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا

Meaning:

And if you fear that the orphans will not be treated fairly, then marry (others) whom you like. Two, three or four. But, if you fear injustice, then (marry) only one or the female slave that you have. That is more suitable that you may not incline (to injustice) (Surah an-Nisa 4: 3)

The passage of this verse, at the same time explains that the teachings of Islam take into account the balance and harmony in marriage not only to men but also to women. The balance and harmony is clearly seen through the important element that must be present in polygamy according to what is restricted in Islam so that there is no element of oppression and can act justly. (Wahbah Az-Zuhaili 2018).

Furthermore, the method of historiography in Islam also explains the origin of all human beings whether Muslim or non-Muslim is from the same father, the Prophet Adam as described in several verses of the Qur'an, namely surah al-Baqarah 2:30, surah an-Nisa 4: 1, surah al-An'am 6:98, surah al-A'raf 7: 189, surah al-Hijr 15:29 (Al-Quran Al-Karim nd). Referring to interpretation of al-Mishbah on the verse in surah al-An'am 6:98, he explains that the similarity of human origin is the same as the prophet Adam as which through his wife, Hawa, then human beings have multiplied (M. Quraish Shihab 2010b) and this meticulous process proves the glorious and greatness of Allah SWT.

In the meantime, M. Quraish Shihab also clarify the verse by relating it with surah An-Nisa 4: 1 which means *"O people! Be careful of (your duty to) your Lord, Who created you from a single Adam, and made from it his mate, and multiplied from them many descendants of men and women. And be careful of (your duty to) Allah, Whom you ask by mentioning His name, and guard (against) the relations of your kindred, for Allah is ever watching over you"*. He explained that although this verse mentions or calls to the believers, this verse also invites all human beings especially to the believers and non-believers to be united, complement each other and do not break the friendship because they all come from the same soul, the Prophet Adam, even for this reason peace and tranquility can be created in society because of respecting each others human rights. In the meantime, good relations also not only involve fellow creatures, but the need to maintain a relationship with the Creator because Allah SWT is the best Preserver and allows peace and tranquility for all of His creation(M. Quraish Shihab 2010c).

Thus, the basis explained in surah al-An'am 7:98 is closely related to surah an-Nisa 4: 1, both affirming the reality of humanity regardless of the believers or non-believers are born from the same lineage and the most important for fellow human beings to maintain harmony and peace through maintaining friendship between them. Similarly, it can be seen that the element of *dakwah* and comparative religion in this context which highlights the diversity of human beings is derived from one and how the aspect of *dakwah* is needed because of the value of the call to piety to Allah SWT which encourages believers to invite their non-believers to the path of truth.

Starting from this point, the method of historiography in interfaith studies discussed in the context of Islam-Western is different according to their respective, but in terms of general matters such as the advantages and basic characteristics of the method of historiography, both sides have the same point of view.

4.0 Analysis and Conclusions

In general and the summary from the above discussion to some extent gives awareness to the reader that in this interfaith study, although the external viewpoint is the same method or approach used by the researcher, still, from the point of view of argumentation and theory, they are different. Apart from that, the author suggests that there is a need to further refine the method of historiography, especially in inter-religious studies so that it is clear to see the complete similarities and differences brought by Islam-West. This is because from the point of view of its impact on the thinking of researchers who examine the world's religions whether they are influenced by theories or molds of Islamic or Western thought. While in the study of historical methods in Islamic reference, they are more the development and emergence of the religions is referring to their main source which is the Qur'an, that puts all these human beings are descendants of Adam AS and for generations they have their main reference, in fact each of these races was sent by the Prophet and Rasul as a messenger. However, for the westerners, they tend to see the emergence of the religion from the development of Western civilization itself.

Basically a comparison of the method of historiography according to the Islamic-Western perspective can be described as follows:

Basic characteristics of historical methods

- To understand the aspects of the spread or influence of a religion on society
- To understand the history of the emergence of religions
- To help researchers understand the continuity of events found in a religion that is through how to connect them in the context of history and analyze them from one event to another event

Islam		West
The basic and policy features are the same, yet in terms of discussion they are different		
Al Quran	Source	Western civilization
Making the basis of an argument is revelation		Tracing the chronology of the development of civilization as the basis of the argument
The matter of nasakh mansukh in religions such as polygamy	Example	The development of Western civilization: stone age, bronze age, classical antiquity, age of enlightenment, postmodernism, and modern age
The matter of the creation of all human beings from the same soul and father		

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