

The Logic of Ibn Warraq's Islamic Apostasy

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ABSTRACT

Apostasy, sociologically, is a despicable behavior, because it is an act of betrayal against the fundamentals of a religion. Let alone, if the apostate ventured into public space to spread his ideas of apostasy, the consequences of his act would be more severe. But epistemologically, apostasy cannot be judged as a terrible action, because the ways of thinking in an epistemological framework is not religion, but is measured by paradigmatic-objective rationality. Paradigmatically, apostasy is a conversion or a change of religious conviction. The apostate usually underwent an anomalous process, before critically reconstituted his new religious knowledge which he or she believed is more true. This happened to be Ibn Warraq. This paper tries to discuss the case of his apostasy, epistemologically, by using Thomas Khun's paradigm theory. Findings of this study indicates that Ibn Warraq's apostasy is based on three anomalies of Islamic thoughts. They are anomaly of the Qur'anic knowledge, of the prophecy and of the Muslims' attitudes. These anomalies were then developed by Warraq through three critical paradigms of thinking: a historical dialectics that is anti-hermeneutic, partial reductionism, and rational realism. By this he wanted to build an understanding of Islam that is applicable to Western religious cultures, that is, anti fundamentalism, anti sacredness, anti intolerance, and anti totality in religion.

Keywords: *Anomaly, apostasy, epistemology, fundamental and sacredness, paradigm theory*

1. INTRODUCTION

Human life tends to be sociologically bound by values, norms, laws and so on. Human action that deviated from the shared values believed collectively in society are called a betrayal. One of the common shared values that are binding in society is religious teachings. Religious teachings often transform into a basic source of values or social rules, whose existence is binding. Hence, it can be stated that people who do not obey their religious teachings are called religious traitors. They are the ones who are called the apostate. They no longer adhere to the religious values believed collectively in their social communities. Thus, sociologically, they will be excluded and become an object of hatred among members in their society who still hold the theological beliefs the apostates had left.[1]

Apostasy, epistemologically, is a transformation of a logic of theology. The theological logic of an apostate is reconstructed upon an anomalous theological knowledge of religion, which she or he had left behind. Their decision to abandon their previous religion is certainly made through a construction of a new paradigm, which logically, must be in opposition to the old paradigm of their previous faith. As such has made the apostate to build a contradictory logic about their previous religion. That is done because they want to show to public about their belief that the teachings of their previous religion are an anomaly, and that everyone has to be aware of it.

The apostates often seem to act in an extreme manner with regard to their effort of building the contradictory logic of their previous religion. This is because apostasy is a despicable act and is related to the community's fundamental commitment. Some scholars have examined that people, especially those who are Muslims, tend to regard apostates as detrimental to society. Bryan Turner, one of the experts in religious relations and social life, said that Islam has assumed apostasy as sinful when it results in actions that are damaging to the community.[2] Among Muslims, apostasy is considered as a big mistake, because it destroys the group's fundamental beliefs.

The above uniqueness is the main setting of this paper. This paper will discuss the logic of apostasy of a former Muslim Ibn Warraq. His name became famous after he wrote several books that try to reveal the contradictory ideas in Islamic teachings. His most phenomenal work is *Why I Am Not a Muslim*. Ophelia Benson said that Ibn Warraq is a very brave man, because he wrote his reason of becoming of an apostate from Islam, when as such was considered a big crime in the Islamic world.[3] Ibn Warraq's ideas were certainly not born out of an empty space. Surely, there is a paradigmatic construction. This is the reason why this research wants to examine the logic of his apostasy, by using Kuhn's notion of paradigm, as the theoretical approach.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researches about apostasy has been done by many scholars. Some of them examine the issue of apostasy in general, and others focus their examination on issues of apostasy in Islam. Zina O'Leary, for example, in her research *Apostasy: Exploring Resistance and Transformation*, argued that apostasy should no longer be labeled rebellion against religious orthodoxy. In a postmodern era, apostasy thinking is an inclusive epistemology.[4]

Similar research has also been conducted by Jennifer Elizabeth Nooney. In her research entitled *Keeping the Faith: Religious Transmission and Apostasy in Generation X*, she argues that thoughts of apostasy are shaped by the relationship between religious community and family institutions. This relationship has become the most effective medium for spreading the apostasy thoughts.[5]

Some scholars who discuss specifically about Islamic apostasy are Rudolph Peters & Gert J. J. De Vries, in their collaborative study entitled *Apostasy in Islam*. They argued that in Islam the act of apostasy is regarded as a betrayal, and there is a social law accepted by Muslim apostates about them getting punishment because of their actions.[6] In addition, Fahrudin Faiz's research entitled *The Construction of Destructive-Criticism about Islam* has highlighted the figure of Ibn Warraq. According to him, Ibn Warraq's criticism about Islam relates to the contents of the Qur'an, the prophetic history, and the Islamic traditions. For Warraq, majority of Muslim communities turn a blind understanding toward Islamic teachings, so that their understanding of Islam is rigid and undeveloped. Overall, some of the statements established by Ibn Warraq are somewhat weak. Substantially, they are not based on the integrity of Islamic teachings, which are comprehensive and universal in nature. Thus, his argumentation seemed to be partial and is unable to completely destroy the teachings of Islam.[7]

None of the above mentioned studies focus on apostasy as a process of transformation of religious reasoning. While Zina O'Leary offered a description about the epistemology of apostasy according to a postmodern standpoint, Jennifer Elizabeth Nooney questioned social factors that lead to the development of apostate practices, and Rudolph Peters & Gert JJ De Vries studied apostasy from an Islamic social-political approach, and Fahrudin Faiz explored the argument of apostasy discourse. Thus, none of them study the logic of apostasy. Also, this research differs from other studies about apostasy in the use of theory. It uses Kuhn's theory of shifting paradigm. Khun explained that transformation of logic occurred because there is an anomaly in the general knowledge of religion adhered by the common believers. This anomaly will gradually encourage some individuals to develop a scientific critique. In the end, through the process of criticism, a new paradigm of that religious knowledge emerged in society of the believers.[8]

That being said, this paper will question, by taking up Khun's theory, the process of Ibn Warraq's logical transformation relating to his apostasy. This study consists

of three components: the anomaly of Islamic knowledge, Warraq's criticism to Islamic teachings, and the new paradigm that he has reconstructed, one that allows him to leave his previous religion, Islam.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paradigm theory that will be used in this research is Thomas Khun's construction of thought. According to him, a paradigm is always changing and shifting. The new paradigm is always born because of the existing revolutionary criticism due to an anomaly of knowledge. This study envisions that people who develop contradictory discourses on religious truth are working towards the creation of a new religion paradigm. Thus, what needs to be illustrated in order to understand the construction of such paradigm is about, how does the anomaly prevails? How is the criticism established? And finally, what is the ideal structure of the religious paradigm that are believed to be true according to the new paradigm? These three questions will be discussed comprehensively in this paper.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss how Ibn Warraq has conducted a critical reasoning process relating to his apostasy. The basic analysis point that is built here is about the process of developing a critical construction with regard to his thoughts on the anomaly of religious knowledge in Islam. Therefore, this part will also describe the critical logic of his concepts about apostasy. The authors will address it in accordance with various qualifications that has been classified in the previous section.

The first is his criticism on the logic of the Qur'an. Ibn Warraq's criticism in this regard concerns with two categories, namely the linguistic criticism and the content of the Qur'an. The paradigm that he built is the logic of historical dialectics and the anti-hermeneutics. Such logic is compiled through a historical reading which is believed to be dialectical in nature. This logical order is evidenced as when he criticized the textual compilation of the Qur'an which was performed through the dialectics of powers, or the caliphate. With regard to his anti hermeneutics logic, it is evidenced through his reading of the texts of the Qur'anic exegesis which are isolated from the contexts of its writers' intentions. He is even said to have separated texts of the Qur'an from its contextual realities.[9]

In addition, his critical ideas about the logic of the Qur'an also relies upon the use of the reductionist-partial paradigm. It is evidenced by the fact when he interpreted a content of the Qur'an which he considered to be deviated. It seems that Ibn Warraq had eclectically read particular interpretations of the texts of the Qur'an which he could reduce their meanings for reinforcing his arguments about the anomaly of Islamic teachings.[10] He has left other

texts in the Qur'an, which he can use to support his argument in a wiser and more objective manner.

The second, the critical logic of Muhammad's prophethood. The main paradigm used by Ibnu Warraq here is still the historical dialectics and anti-hermeneutics. The history of Muhammad's prophethood is not separated from social problems of the previous times. As such is reflected through his explanation that the idea of Muhammad's prophethood had actually long existed in the previous traditions before Islam. His criticism was constructed by contemplating the historically dialectical role of the prophet within the rational dialectics of Arab politics.[11] Meanwhile, his anti-hermeneutic paradigm is reflected in his reading of the historical texts, in which he did not consider as important the worldview of the time for which that historical texts were written. In addition, in his logic there is the use of the rational realism paradigm. The Prophet Muhammad, in his understanding, is seen only as an ordinary human being, whose attitudes and utterances could be rationally comprehended. This means, ideas and actions of the prophet are only seen in relation to his role as a leader of the state, a lord-war, and a religious leader. The construction of such paradigm is clearly observable when he discussed about the prophet's leadership.[12]

Third, the critical logic of the attitudes of the Muslim *ummah* (community of religious believers). The partial reductionist paradigm once again appears here, when he criticized about the intolerant attitudes of the Muslim *ummah*. In referring to Islamic praxis, he only comprehends a few events that he could reduced them as a negative knowledge of Islam. He never saw an event as a whole. His argument that Islam is intolerant is only based on a selection of Islamic texts which are used as a basic argument for the wars in Middle East countries.[12] He brushed aside the fact that in other Muslim majority countries, Islamic teachings have become a spirit for social harmony and peaceful society. His arguments about Islam to a great extent are a continuation of those that have been lied out by individuals whose works have been so much quoted by Warraq. They are, mostly of orientalist figures, such as, Charles Adams, W. Margoliuth, Daniel Pipes, Richard Bell, S. Horugrounje, W. Mayer, and Andrew Rippin. Indeed, there are some non-orientalist figures whose works are become a reference in his book, such as the Qur'anic interpreter, As-Sayui, and the Mu'a'tazilah scholar who converted from Islam, Ibn Rawandi.[11]

Thus generally, much of his ideas are highly influenced by the orientalist thinking whose views about Islam is full of hatred. The use of his paradigms can be classified into three types. The paradigm of rational realism is used in constructing the figure of Prophet Muhammad. The reductionist-partial-rational paradigm is used to describe the reality of the praxis of Islamic teachings and the content of the Qur'an. The paradigm of historical dialectics and anti-hermeneutics is used to construct the textual composition of the Qur'an and to understand the hagiography of the prophet. Of course, Ibn Warraq's ideas of apostasy certainly offers a new logic for understanding fundamental knowledge of Islam. Yet, we want to first describe his paradigms as a whole, based on his logical

thinking that we have explained before. We want to do so here by using Khun's theory of paradigm. See the following picture:

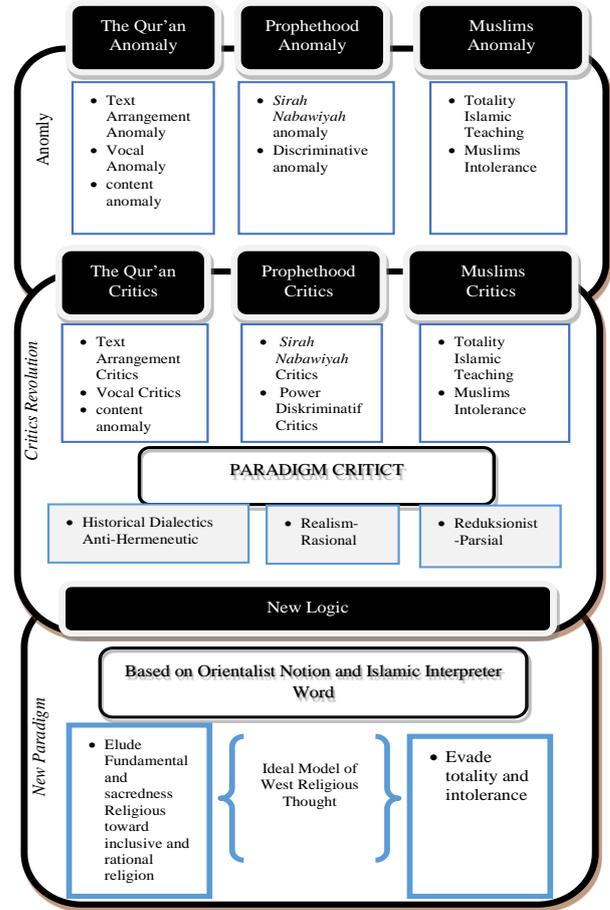


Fig. 1 The conception of Ibn Warraq's Apostasy Paradigm

pride in a particular religious culture, which he referred to it as the Western religious culture. He argued that Western religions are better than eastern religions, which tend hold a stiff and exclusive feature. His ideas which tend to discredit Islamic fundamental teachings, are based on both his admiration of Western culture and his dislike against the East. According to him Eastern culture as a whole is so strongly influenced by Islamic teachings that turns the Western society rigid and backward. Moreover, due to the fundamental teachings of Islam, the Eastern culture is inclined to hold an intolerant behavior so that it is always prone to violation of human rights.

In one of his ideas, he mentioned that despite the West is well-known as an actor of colonialism and imperialism, it does not tolerate an intolerance practice. For him, orientalists are more civilized than the Easterners. The orientalists, he added, who were suspected by Edward Said as colonialists of knowledge, were scientists who taught inclusive science. In this regard, he provided a number of evidences that Western thinkers such as Eugene Fromentin and Charles Cordier, are tolerant and sympathetic to

eastern societies. He depicts the orientalists as one who liked to travel around the globe, learning the culture and traditions of the Eastern people, and recording them for example in paintings, in which they seem to admire the eastern traditions: by which he means that they are not racist at all. Even in the historical data that he revealed, some orientalists were described as helping the Eastern people to reach their glory, such as the Ottoman emperor. For him, these are a proof of how Western scientists are more open-minded and do not embrace religious fundamentals thought as the Easterners.[13]

Essentially, the criticism built-in Ibn Warraq's ideas substantively leads to two major religious knowledge revolutions. The revolution attempts to eliminate the fundamentalism and sacredness of Islam, which, according to him, causes terrible culture in society. Moreover, he desired to present an assertion that religion that teaches intolerance and totality of the fundamental teachings is a disgrace, even dangerous. These two revolutions are of a Western religious culture which to this day has been able to progress very well.

Thus, the construction of the new logic of apostasy by Ibn Warraq is a subjective logic that is based on what he considered as the best culture, the West. The entire criticisms and anomalies that occur are due to the leverage of knowledge about the diverse community compared to the Islamic community. These are the reasons of his criticism against the teachings of fundamentalism, sacredness, intolerance, and the universality of Islam, which he considers as the main factor for the deterioration of eastern civilization.

In our view, such logic is not always correct. On the one hand, his criticism can encourage for inclusiveness of Islamic sciences. Yet on the other hand, the paradigms that he used to support his arguments is not based on a wise and objective objective framework of a logic of religious knowledge. This is possibly caused by the use of weak epistemology when he structured his revolutionary criticism about what he called the anomaly of Islamic teachings. Some paradigms that he used, such as anti-hermeneutical, rational realism and so on, are not suitable for the basis of a comprehensive epistemology in constructing his criticism. As such has arguably lead to the lack of objectiveness and comprehensiveness of his logic of apostasy, as a paradigm for the development of religious thought.

It can be concluded that the construction of his logic of apostasy is far from objective. His logic about religious knowledge is not enough to study a religion, especially Islam, in a comprehensive manner. Nevertheless, our findings about his logic help us understand about a logic of apostasy, from which we could see that the logic of apostasy in Islam is built upon a sense of dislike against teachings of fundamentalism, sacredness, intolerance, and religious universal-ism in Islam.

5. CONCLUSION

The logic of Islamic apostasy by Ibn Warraq is resulted from what he argued as an anomaly in Islamic teachings. For him, there were three anomalies in Islamic teachings. They are anomaly of the contents of the Qur'an, of the prophethood, and of attitudes of the Muslims. These anomalies are then responded by him reconstructing a revolutionary criticism that is based on a number of paradigms, which are, the paradigm of anti-hermeneutic and historical dialectics, of partial-redaction, and of rational realism. From these paradigms, he construction two types of logic of his apostasy: anti-fundamentalism and the sacredness of religion, which he used to reject intolerance and universal ideas of Islamic teachings. Such construction is strongly influenced by his admiration of and pride in Western's religious culture, which he considered open-minded and rational, and better than that of the Eastern's religions.

In general, the logic of his apostasy was built not on Islamic teachings, so that his conversion from Islam is understandable. He established his religious logic of apostasy upon orientalists knowledge of Islam, which has been criticized by many as unfair, partial, and power-laden othering. The combination of his orientalists' affirmation and his personal life experience has become the foundation for his discredit about Islam and glorification of Western religiosity.

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