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# The Impact of Postmodernism on the Thought of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (IMIs)

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## Abstract

Postmodernism is a worldview that borrowed its nomenclature from an era after modernism into progressive thought that turned into a reputed idea denouncing the absolute truth, affirming relativism, pluralism, and hermeneutics. The current study attempted to disclose their impact on the thought of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals (IMI). However, the depiction of the idea of postmodernism and its embedded concepts would precede it. The current study was based on a qualitative research design and the data was utilized from the prevailing discourses in mass media, journal articles, books, MA thesis, and PhD dissertation. To analyze the data, descriptive and critical analysis methods were adopted. The research determined the impact of postmodernism on the thought of IMI which can be identified in three major issues namely, in the Qur'anic studies, in gender equality, and in religious pluralism. In a number of articles, books, and theses the IMIs have applied the postmodern hermeneutic approach to Qur'anic studies uncritically. Consequently, it can shift or override the science of interpretation in Islam (*tafsīr*). In gender equality, the influence is even clearer, since the IMIs applied this postmodern doctrine and search justification from the Qur'an by using hermeneutical approach which brought about discrepancies in legal decisions. The impact of postmodern relativism on religious pluralism is apparent. In this part, the IMI discourses revolve around the validity of all religions, implying the denouncement of absolute truth or the exclusivity of religion, including Islam. In fact, each of the three major issues could be scrutinized further.

**Keywords:** hermeneutic, Islamic studies, pluralism, postmodernism, religion, relativism

## Introduction

Discourses that deal with the issue of postmodernism and religion became a pivotal concern of some scholars of sociology, philosophy, education, and religion in the last three decades in the West and the East. Ernest Gellner,<sup>1</sup> David Griffin,<sup>2</sup> and Huston Smith,<sup>3</sup> Akbar S. Ahmed,<sup>4</sup> are among those who earnestly delineated this issue. One of the issues that concern the authors above is that

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<sup>6</sup> <sup>2</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> David Griffin, *God and Religion in Postmodern World* (Albany: N.Y. State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Huston Smith, *Beyond The Post-Modern Mind* (Illinois: Quest Book, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernisme and Islam* (London: Routledge, 1992).

postmodernism has influenced the study of anthropology, literature, philosophy, and religion.<sup>5</sup> In the West, the main issues revolve around postmodernism's influence on religious institutions and educational practices.<sup>6</sup> It is due to the fact that postmodernism has been introduced so extensively to the new worldview that it denies the absolute truth and supreme authority, approves nihilistic values, employs deconstructive method of change to everything, and rejects metanarratives. Moreover, it also offers new methods and approaches to understand the reality and truth. Therefore, postmodernism radically questions fundamental ideas pertaining to philosophy, rationality, and epistemology. However, the main methods and approaches of postmodernism can be simplified into three forms, namely relativism, pluralism, and deconstructionism.

In response to postmodernism, some intellectuals and religious scholars started questioning its relevance from the Christian Church. Forghani et al, for instance, questioned the problem of postmodernism in religious and moral education.<sup>7</sup> Justin and Made discussed the negative impact of postmodernism on theological knowledge and Christian faith.<sup>8</sup> From among Muslim intellectuals, Shirin Akter, for instance rebuffed the postmodern thought for its incompatibility with unchangeable injunction of Islam, yet he prudently admitted postmodern interpretation for some changeable teaching of Islam.<sup>9</sup> Abdul Muhaimin also attempted to delineate the impact of postmodernism on Pakistani society, yet he was not very successful in showing the very impact of postmodern worldview on their social life.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike in other Muslim world, some Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia appear to be open to conceding the ideas of postmodernism, however in an uncritical manner. They do not seem to be identifying the discrepancies between postmodernism and Islam, instead justifying it by unpopular and authoritative opinions of scholars. Some writers even dabbled the use of the concept of postmodernism to study Islam, even though there appeared to be a lot of clumsiness. Three works of Rozi, Rouf, and Ismail<sup>11</sup> are lucid examples of those who admitted and applied postmodernism to

<sup>5</sup>Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, 23.

<sup>6</sup>Olufemi J. Ishola, "Effects of Postmodernism on Religious Education Practice," *The American Journal of Biblical Theology* 24, no. 9 (2023): 14.

<sup>7</sup>Nooshin Forghani, Narges Keshtiaray, and Alireza Yousefy, "A Critical Examination of Postmodernism Based on Religious and Moral Values Education," *International Education Studies* 8, no. 9 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v8n9p98>.

<sup>8</sup>Justin Thacker, *Postmodernism and the Ethics of Theological Knowledge* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 83 and 99.; See also Made Nopen Supriadi, "Tinjauan Teologis Terhadap Postmodernisme Dan Implikasinya Bagi Iman Kristen," ["A Theological Review of Postmodernism and Its Implications for the Christian Faith"] *Manna Rafflesia* 6, no. 2 (2020): 112-34, [https://doi.org/10.38091/man\\_raf.v6i2.115](https://doi.org/10.38091/man_raf.v6i2.115).

<sup>9</sup>Shirin Akter, "Postmodernism and Its Reflection on Understanding Islam," *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 31, no. 2 (2018): 225.

<sup>10</sup>Abdul Muhaimin, "Modernism and Postmodernism: A Study of the Islamic Teachings with Special Reference to the Related Issues of Pakistani Society," *JIRS: Journal of Islamic and Religious Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017): 31–40, <https://doi.org/10.12816/0037078>, 31–40.

<sup>11</sup>Syafwan Rozi, "Agama Dan Postmodernisme: Menelusuri Metodologi Dan Pendekatan Studi-Studi Agama," [Religion And Postmodernism: Exploring the Methodology and Approach of Religious Studies], *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 2, no. 3 (2012): 244; see also Abdul Mukti Ro'uf, "Posmodernisme: Dampak dan Penerapannya pada Studi Islam," ["Postmodernism: Its Impact and Application on Islamic Studies"] *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* [Journal of Islamic Studies] 19, no. 1 (2019): 155–76. <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v19i1.4161>; also Yusuf Ismail, "Postmodernisme Dan Perkembangan Pemikiran Islam Kontemporer," ["Postmodernism and the Development of Contemporary Islamic Thought"], *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* [Journal of Qur'anic Studies] 15, no. 2 (2019): 235-48, <https://doi.org/10.21009/JSQ.015.2.06>.

deconstruct the method of Islamic Studies in general and for the study of the Qur'an in particular, which is conceptually untenable.

From those cases, it may be inferred that postmodernist thought has influenced the Islamic thought in a dominant, if not hegemonic, sense. It may also be regarded that Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (IMIs) tend to respond to postmodernism in a more positive manner rather than in critical fashion. The current study elaborated the extent to which postmodern thought influences the thought of Muslim intellectuals, especially on three important issues namely Qur'anic studies, gender equality, and religious pluralism. However, it is imperative to explicate at the outset the very nature of postmodernism.

## 2. Postmodernism

Postmodernism is an era that came after modernism and was assumed to be appearing for the first time in 1970, however, was not explicitly mentioned in certain fields of knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Over the decades, the term had come to mean different things to different people; hence, it could not be defined without ambiguity and controversy. Others assumed that postmodernism is a movement that introduces ideas in various fields of discourse, such as in architecture, art, philosophy, and intellectual style, that embodies complexity, ambiguity, diversity, and contradiction.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, "it does not have one standardized meaning, but several often quite diverse, relatively standardized one,"<sup>14</sup> and almost impossible to be defined.<sup>15</sup>

However, in this predicament, the meaning of postmodernism shall be apprehended at the outset, relevant to the topic under current discussion and in any possible sense. Definitions that are commonly expounded by scholars are related to the idea of truth. Barry Smart, for instance, portrays postmodernity as a way of living with doubts, uncertainties, and anxieties.<sup>16</sup> Robert B. Pippin regards postmodernism as a phase or era of irrationalism, anxiety, and lost hope.<sup>17</sup> Even though, the two definitions do not depict the whole meaning of postmodernism. However, it may be viewed as an intellectual movement introducing new worldview<sup>18</sup> that distrusts and abolishes the absolute truth, anti-foundation, denies reason or rationality and ultimate reality, and became current society's mental and intellectual attitude.

To capture further details of the above mentioned attitudes, the salient features of social aspects of postmodern age shall be depicted in the current study. Akbar S. Ahmed explored eight salient features of postmodernism. However, only two points are concerned with the topic under current discussion. *Firstly*, postmodernism is supported by the spirit of pluralism and in the case of religious doctrine, postmodern age is skeptical of traditional orthodoxies. *Secondly*, postmodernism marked the rise of ethnoreligious revivalism or fundamentalism, however, in the form of conflict and tension. Additionally, postmodern thought also brought the doctrine of relativism *vis a vis* the absolutism advocated by all religions.<sup>19</sup> There are two conspicuous affinities in Akbar's and Gellner's depiction of postmodernism, that is, the emergence of relativism and the rise of fundamentalism. However,

<sup>12</sup>Malcolm Bradbury, "The World After the Wake," *The Guardian*, 1990.

<sup>13</sup>Mats Alvesson, *Postmodernism and Social Research* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2002), 18.

<sup>14</sup>Alvesson, *Postmodernism*, 19.

<sup>15</sup>Gellner, *Postmodernism*, 29.

<sup>16</sup>Barry Smart, *Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15.

<sup>17</sup>Robert B. Pippin, *Modernity as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1995), 156.

<sup>18</sup>David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>19</sup>Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 10–26.

Akbar emphasized the spirit of pluralism. In contrast, Gellner stressed the growing tendencies to employ hermeneutics as a method of thinking and the existence of rationalist fundamentalism in the postmodern era. Therefore, the current study explicates the influence of relativism, pluralism, and hermeneutics as three salient features of postmodern thought on the thought of Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia which, in turn, could bring about change in Islamic studies.

### 2.1. Postmodern Relativism

The doctrine of relativism, in the postmodern era, is conceptually parallel to the idea of pluralism, and the former might have resulted in the latter or the other way round. Relativism is against the unique, exclusive, objective, and transcendent truth. This idea is embedded in rationalist fundamentalism, which refers to those who repudiate absolutization, “desacralized, disestablishes, disenchant everything substantive.” In other words, it rejects revelation, divine intervention, sacred church, and sacramental society.<sup>20</sup> The rejection of absolute truth coincides with the end of the modern era, the closing of metaphysical thought. It is marked by the emergence of two dominant trends of existentialist and analytical philosophy, which refers to the idea of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Nietzsche (1844-1900) on religion,<sup>21</sup> it may also be understood that postmodernism has shifted metaphysical method of thinking to an analytical one.<sup>22</sup>

The impact of the closing of metaphysics on religion is manifested, especially in the marginalization and denigration of religious doctrines. These two thinkers share the same framework and tendencies. In the perspective of Friedrich Nietzsche, nihilism works by devaluating the ultimate value and by turning into the declaration of the death of God. In contrast, nihilism, in the view of Heidegger (1889-1976), starts from the elimination of "Being" in such a way that it reappears in the form of value. In this non-metaphysical fashion of thinking, reality was no longer comprehended as structural, in which God, as the Creator is posited at the top of the hierarchy and absolute. Therefore, the point where both Nietzsche and Heidegger agree is that human beings have no valued structure and value is meaningless. Here, the postmodernist standpoint is quite clear, that idea or truth can hardly be based on metaphysical or something divine. Therefore, Snyder states that nihilism is not simply the elimination of value, but changing the idea of truth which is originally divine and religious into human opinions and beliefs.<sup>23</sup>

This postmodern article of faith attacks all the religions and beliefs as the foundation of morality. The pre-modernists held that truth was found in revelation, the modernists admitted that truth could be provided by reason and science, and the postmodernists hold that truth is not found and even cannot be found as well. Everyone creates it. For postmodernists, it is impossible to find universal truth that applies to all the people since they believe that those who claim to possess universal and absolute truth are suspected of asserting power over others.

One may assume that while repudiating metaphysics, Nietzsche defines metaphysics pejoratively as a science that discusses the fundamental human falsity, as if everything was fundamental truth.<sup>24</sup> He also negatively argues that the highest value achieved by metaphysical truth could be considered to be God, even though for him, that reality is nothing more than a subjective value which may be as wrong as other human opinions. Not only does it rebuff the metaphysical

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 80–81.

<sup>21</sup>Hugh J. Silverman, “The Philosophy of Postmodernism,” in *Postmodernism-Philosophy and the Art*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (London: Routledge, 1990), 5.

<sup>22</sup>For further discussion on this matter see Nancy Love, *Marx, Nietzsche, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 113–34.

<sup>23</sup>Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*, ed. Jon R. Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), xi.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., xii.

truth, however, it also denies truth and falsity, because both are false beliefs or delusions that cannot be trusted.

He argues that if someone denies falsehood, then he must also deny truth, or in other words, “*to do away with one is to do away with another too.*”<sup>25</sup> Ernest Gellner deduced from this frame of mind that truth for postmodernists is difficult to understand, subjective, and internal. Therefore, he cannot accept a single, exclusive, objective, external, and even transcendental truth. In short, postmodern philosophy dissolves the highest value by eliminating God as the source of all value. Relative values have the same status and are universal. Resultantly, any type of value can be traded for another value.

Nietzsche's doctrine of nihilism or the relativity of truth clearly implies that there are no values that are better than others. From a religious perspective, no religion can claim absolute truth. It is also known as the doctrine of the dissolution of values, which means the elimination of the human tendency to depend on authority and the reduction of the highest values that are believed to be absolute by every religion.<sup>26</sup> This doctrine is described as a situation where humans rotate from the center to point X, where the highest value is automatically devalued.<sup>27</sup> In the same tone, Heidegger described nihilism as a process where in the end there is nothing left.<sup>28</sup> Here, the difference between postmodernism and religion is, to a large extent, fundamental.

In terms of social affairs, postmodernists dismissed what they called “metanarratives” a set of basic beliefs or universal principles. They accepted “mini-narratives,” which means individual beliefs or judgments based only on the circumstances of a particular situation. The consequence of holding such a doctrine of relativism is the belief that such objective truth cannot be known since there is no such thing as objective truth, even no basis to determine and find it. Truth is determined by a group; it is like a social construct that must be abolished, constructed by an individual or a group of people based on their judgment. No individual can claim that his view is true; each view is valid for its own situation, however, not for others. However, the postmodernists do not envisage the case when a group or society in this postmodern era unanimously agrees on a universal principle or metanarrative.

In scientific discourse, postmodernism denies the existence of objective reality on the ground that reality lies in the beholder's mind and is considerably subjective. Hence, it crucially distrusts the objective knowledge and scientific truth, the very characteristic of modernism. If the modernist emerged with the maxim, *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), the postmodernist employed a different dictum “I feel, therefore I am, and what I feel is good.” The former stimulates *the will to reason*, whereas the latter encourages *the will to power*. In short, it may be inferred from Swidler's statement that “whereas the notion of truth was largely absolute, static, and exclusive up to the last century, it has subsequently become de-absolutized, dynamic, and dialogic.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, truth in the postmodern mind is no longer admitted as a universal concept.

### 3. Postmodern Pluralism

The spirit of pluralism in the postmodern era, as Akbar depicted, is an obvious consequence of relativism. In fact, relativism, pluralism, and other postmodern doctrines shape a conceptual network

<sup>25</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 41. In Will To Power, he asserts that “Truth is the kind of error.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 493.

<sup>26</sup>Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 167.

<sup>27</sup>Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 8-9.

<sup>28</sup>Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 19.

<sup>29</sup>Leonard Swidler, “Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue: The Matrix for All Systematic Reflection Today,” in *Towards a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swidler (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 7–8.

in which one concept is related to others. The conceptual network may be identified from the linguistics structure as developed by Ferdinand de Saussure. In the structure of linguistic signs, the absolute and fixed meanings are regarded as non-existence. It is because meaning can be disclosed only arbitrarily and the truth of that meaning is subjective and relative, resulting in the plurality of truth, the very idea of pluralism. Simon Blackburn bluntly assumes that pluralism is “a cardinal doctrine of post-structuralist literary theory, where it frequently consorts with relativism.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, when it is perceived in terms of language and with respect to hermeneutics, its relativity connects with the subjectivity of its interpreter. This point shall be discussed later.

From a sociological perspective, pluralism is related to social interaction and cultural sensibility in relation to a mini-narrative where absolute truth is abolished. For McGrath, pluralism is “something of a cultural sensibility without absolutes, fixed certainties or foundations.”<sup>31</sup> Ihab Hassan plausibly asserts that the problem with pluralism is that it is “deeply associated in the cultural, social, and aesthetic and intellectual field that brings about the abolition of the absolute truth.”<sup>32</sup> In this doctrine, the notion of truth is suspect since there is no way of stating unique truth and sometimes it holds that no view is correct or that all views are equally correct.<sup>33</sup> Although, pluralism is understood partly as a social condition where diversity of religions, races, cultures, and beliefs is present, its conceptual building block is relativism.

The grave problem with pluralism is that when it is applied to religion it appears as *religious pluralism*. Like postmodernism, the meaning of the term “religious pluralism” is ambiguous and has a variety of meanings, yet it can be generally classified into two meanings. *Firstly*, pluralism means something to do with social interaction, especially in a diversified society where different religions live together in one society and has mutual respect and tolerance. In the view of Akbar S. Ahmed, religious pluralism should become a reminder for re-applying simple virtues of traditional Semitic religions that had been “lost from our memory.”<sup>34</sup> Supportive of applying virtue and tolerance, Diana L Eck proposes that religious pluralism should be related to religious dialogue. “Dialogue means both speaking and listening and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another.”<sup>35</sup> Pluralism is positive in this sense.

However, the *second* meaning is pluralism in a theological sense, in which the doctrine of relativism is dominant and all religions are equally true. While portraying this second meaning Rick Rood, for instance, defines that “religious pluralism is the view that all religions are equally valid as ways to God.... This is the epitome of tolerance and relativism.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, John Hick also believes that other religions are equally valid and true.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the element of relativism is apparent in this second meaning of pluralism, for it holds the idea that there is no religion that has absolute truth or that all religions are equally true. Therefore, it is unsurprising if the idea of religious pluralism

<sup>30</sup>Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 281.

<sup>31</sup>Alistair C. McGrath, “The Challenge of Pluralism for the Contemporary Christian Church,” *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society (JETS)* 35, no. 3 (1992): 363.

<sup>32</sup>Ihab Hassan, “Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 3 (1986): 508.

<sup>33</sup>Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 281.

<sup>34</sup>Ahmed, *Postmodernisme and Islam*, 27.

<sup>35</sup>Diana L. Eck, “What Is Pluralism?,” The Pluralism Project Harvard University, 2022.

<sup>36</sup>Rick Rood, “Is Jesus the Only Savior?,” in *Evidence, Answer, and Christian Faith*, ed., James F. William (Michigan: Angel Publication, n.d.), 35–36.

<sup>37</sup>For further detail of the discussion of religious pluralism see, Harda Armayanto, “Problem Pluralisme Agama,” [Problem of Religious Pluralism], *Tsaqafah* 10, no. 2 (2014): 191, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v10i2>.

faces a negative response from Christianity. Kenneth asserts that the relevance of Christianity and its ultimate validity have been challenged by the growing trend of religious pluralism and atheistic secular humanism.<sup>38</sup>

The theological impact of religious pluralism on Christian faith is considered grave. There emerged a number of exponents of this doctrine in many religions who do not claim that their religions are perfect and absolute. Two main schools of pluralism that are influenced by postmodern relativism are: *transcendent unity of religion*, a group that resists globalization, however, in its final analysis, it posits that different gods of all religions are One at a transcendental level. The second school is *Global Theology*. It is a group that believes that all religions would, in the future, merge into one theology globally admitted.

The nature of God believed in the postmodern era is parallel to the two schools of pluralism mentioned above. According to David Ray Griffin, the word “god” in the theology of postmodernism is not God in the sense of a personal God who is All-Powerful over the world and upheld by all religions. It is because postmodernism holds naturalistic theism or a naturalistic worldview, which is almost equal to a non-theistic worldview. It is a variant of pre-modern and modern super naturalistic theism or supernatural worldview that believed in the Supreme Being in the real sense of the word.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, relativism is the embedded concept in pluralism that theologically implies the abolition of the personal and absolute God of religions.

#### 4. Postmodern Hermeneutics

Albeit, hermeneutics, as the science of interpretation existed since the time of Greek philosophers and it became the philosophy of interpretation during the postmodern era. Postmodern hermeneutics could be traced back to the theory of European Nihilism that can be clearly comprehended from what is now labeled as “the philosophy of difference.” It is the view that any disparities between rational and irrational, truth and falsehood, must be put outside the scope of language and the concept inherent in it. The differences to interpret the reality are regarded as only the product of *will to power* or will to rule or the will of human-self to interpret. This implies that what every human being experiences in this worldly affair is only interpretation, which is exceedingly subjective. Due to this inclination, for the postmodernist, the knowable world is only a different world or the world of interpretations. This is the meeting of nihilism and philosophy of interpretation, namely hermeneutics. Therefore, the philosophy of difference subsequently becomes a connector between nihilism and hermeneutic (philosophy of interpretation).<sup>40</sup>

In literary theory, hermeneutics is related to the doctrine of post-structuralism; the basis of which is pluralism and relativism. Relativism is also related to the philosophy of post-structuralism that rebuffs the existence of fixed meaning or relatedness between language and the world. It is because postmodernism denies the fixed reality, truth, and fact as the object of inquiry. It is so-called post-structuralism, for it is the reaction against structuralism as has been done by writers in France like Derrida, Foucault, and Kristeva.<sup>41</sup> The truth from an epistemological perspective is relatively dependent on the subject, which has its own historical, cultural, social, linguistic, and psychological background.<sup>42</sup> So, the postmodernist favors subjectivity rather than objectivity; hence, the world is not a fact but meaning.

<sup>38</sup>Kenneth R. Samples, “The Challenge of Religious Pluralism,” *Review of Religious Research* 53, no. 3 (1990): 39, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-011-0014-5>.

<sup>39</sup>Griffin, *God and Religion in Postmodern World*, See “Introduction”.

<sup>40</sup>Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, xiii.

<sup>41</sup>Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary*, 165.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 314-15.

Madani Sarup and Ernest Gellner have well noticed the characteristics of hermeneutics. The former states that in recent years postmodernism emerged as a movement of the so-called "textualization" of everything that includes history, philosophy, law, sociology, and other disciplines are regarded as a form of text and optional discourse.<sup>43</sup> The latter discerns that in the current intellectual atmosphere of the postmodern world, there is nothing else than meaning. He states that "everything is text that the primary material of the text, societies, and almost anything is meaning, that meaning is there to be decoded or 'deconstructed,' and that the notion of objective reality is suspect."<sup>44</sup>

Gellner's expression is justifiable, since in the view of postmodern thinkers "this world is regarded as meaning and even everything is meaning and meaning is everything, and its prophet' is hermeneutics." In this notion, the objective reality which, in modernism, is considered to provide objective truth must be defeated by postmodern interpretation of reality. To replace the objective truth, hermeneutical truth was introduced in which the readers, truth seekers, and audiences are placed on the highest position. Since, the meaning of everything is entirely present in the reader's mind, the relativity of truth is still a necessity. All values and truths are relative or can be interpreted infinitely and no value or truth is more than another. In this predicament, the challenges faced by religions which have up to now adhered to belief in absolute truth, would be defeated by hermeneutical truth. Religion would ultimately be the same as human creation which is not absolute and is more or less equal to philosophy in the traditional sense.

## 5. The Impact on Muslim Intellectuals

Postmodernism, along with the four mentioned ideas depicted by Akbar S. Ahmed and Ernest Gellner, that is, relativism, pluralism, hermeneutics, and gender equality have intruded the thought of Muslim intellectuals. The intrusion is manifested in different works of Muslim scholars of Islamic universities. Resultantly, various methodological approaches of human sciences are employed as tools to understand Islam. The explanation below exemplifies the intrusion of postmodern thought to Muslim intellectuals in the field of Qur'anic studies, gender equality, and comparative religion.

### 5.1. Qur'anic Studies

Three schools of hermeneutics have been emulated by Muslim scholars. The first one is the *objective school* that attempts to reconstruct the intended meaning of the author of the text, that refers initially to Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). The second one is the *subjective school* that emphasizes the role of the interpreter to understand the text. The third is *objective-cum-subjective school* that uses the balanced method between the text's original meaning and the interpreter's role. This school originated from post-structuralism which refers to Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and Jorge J.E. Gracia (1942-2021).<sup>45</sup> Among the exponents of Muslim scholars who initiated this method are Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), Naşr Hāmid Abū Zayd (1943-2010), and Muḥammad al-Ṭālībī (1921-2017), yet the theory, as they claim, is the application of Gadamer's theory (*Anwedung*).<sup>46</sup> In fact, Gadamer's theory of fusion of horizons is problematic since all interpretations are based on tradition and social consciousness that could produce different meanings for different interpreters.

<sup>43</sup>Madan Sarup, *Panduan Pengantar Untuk Memahami Post-Strukturalisme & Postmodernisme* ["An Introductory Guide To Understanding Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism"], Bandung: Jelasutra, 2008, 206.

<sup>44</sup>Gellner, *Postmodernism*, 23.

<sup>45</sup>Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an* [Hermeneutics and Development of the *Ulum al-Qur'an*] (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawasea Press, 2009), 26.

<sup>46</sup>Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika*, 85.

The exponents of the hermeneutics' method argue that there are affinities within the Qur'anic method of interpretation. For this reason, they divided the postmodern hermeneutics into three: *quasi-objective traditionalists*, *quasi-objective modernists*, and *subjective*.<sup>47</sup> The most acceptable one, according to them, is the quasi-objective modernist, since it considers the text's original literal meaning (*al-ma'nā al-aṣlī*) and the main message behind the literal meaning. This method is also called *al-ma'nā-cum-maghzā* method of reading. However, the *al-ma'nā-cum-maghzā* method of interpretation is subject to further evaluation. The problem is that the interpretation of the Qur'ān, based on socio-historic situation or cultural-historical environment and the moral message of the verses, would deconstruct the fixed law (*qaṭ'iy*) in the Qur'ān.

In the case of inheritance (*mawārith*), for instance, the verse clearly states that the portion of men is twice as much as women. However, by using hermeneutical approach the verse was interpreted based on the socio-historical situation during the time of revelation and linked with the present situation, the portion written in the Qur'ān becomes untenable. Therefore, if hermeneutical interpretations depend on social conditions, the legal status of the fixed verses (*muḥkamāt*) would become relative. This implies that hermeneutics could jeopardize the fixed meaning of the Qur'ān.

The impact of hermeneutics on the study of the Qur'ān could be observed from number of articles published in different journals of Islamic universities that evidently apply hermeneutics, such as Ilham's work entitled *Qur'ānic Hermeneutics*,<sup>48</sup> Fitria, *Understanding Hermeneutics for Studying Qur'ānic Texts*,<sup>49</sup> and *Hermeneutics of the Qur'ān*.<sup>50</sup> Generally, the argument built by the exponents of this method is that the Qur'ān has absolute truth, however, the truth of Qur'ānic interpretation is relative and tentative. It is because the interpreter's understanding of the Holy Qur'ān is a personal response to social situations and problems. Therefore, they believe that there is no fixed interpretation of the Qur'ān, since all interpretation is the product of human reason based on social, cultural, and personal situations. Consequently, the impact of relativism on understanding or interpreting the Qur'ān is indubitable. However, the standpoint of Muslim intellectuals in this discourse is not without controversy, there are critical responses from other Muslim intellectuals as well. The article of Muchtar<sup>51</sup> and Asep Setiawan<sup>52</sup> are only among the few examples of repudiations.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 36-73. See also Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Tipologi Dan Proyeksi Penafsiran Kontemporer Terhadap Al-Qur'an," ["Typology and Projection of Contemporary Interpretations of the Qur'ān"] *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'ān Dan Hadits* [Journal for the Study of the Sciences of Qur'ān and Hadīth] 8, no. 2 (2007): 198-200.

<sup>48</sup>M. Ilham, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'ān: Studi Pembacaan Kontemporer Muhammad Shahrour," ["Hermeneutics of the Qur'ān: Study of Contemporary Readings Muhammad Shahrour"], *Kuriositas* 10, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35905/kur.v10i2.595>.

<sup>49</sup>Rini Fitria, "Memahami Hermeneutika Dalam Mengkaji Teks Al-Qur'ān, ["Understanding Hermeneutics in Studying the Text of the Qur'ān"], *Al-Hadharah Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* [al-Hadharah, Journal of Da'wa Science], 15, no. 29 (2016): 81-88, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.18592/alhadharah.v15i29.1017>.

<sup>50</sup>Anwar Mujahidin, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'ān* ["Hermeneutic of the Qur'ān"], Ponorogo: STAIN Ponorogo Press, 2013, 213.

<sup>51</sup>Muchtar, M. Ilham, "Analisis Konsep Hermeneutika Dalam Tafsir Alquran," ["Analysis of Hermeneutical Concepts in Al-Qur'ān Interpretation"], *Munafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika* 13, no. 1 (2016): 67-89, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24239/jsi.v13i1.414.67-89>.

<sup>52</sup>Asep Setiawan, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'ān 'Mazhab Yogya,' Telaah Atas Teori Ma'nā-Cum-Maghza Dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'ān" ["Hermeneutics of the Qur'an 'Yogya School', Study of the Ma'nā-Cum-Maghza Theory in the Interpretation of the Qur'ān"], *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'ān dan Hadis* [Journal for the Study of the Sciences of Qur'ān and Hadīth] 17, no. 1 (2016).

Resultantly, the impact of postmodernism on Qur'ānic studies can be identified from two sources. These sources include *firstly*, discourse among scholars in the Muslim world who support the use of hermeneutics for Qur'ānic studies, such as Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), Muhammad Shahrur (1938-2019), Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943-1910), Hasan Hanafi (1935-2021), Asghar Ali Engineer (1939-2013), Riffat Hasan (b. 1943), and Amina Wadud (b. 1952). *Secondly*, Muslim intellectuals, who conceded hermeneutics as a new method of Qur'ānic interpretation and made it a compulsory subject at the Department of Tafsīr and Ḥadīth. Not only was hermeneutics taught in postgraduate classes, however, was also regarded as a new approach and an alternative method of *tafsīr*.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, the problem is that the hermeneutics method is only applied to certain verses in response to pluralism, gender equality, women's leadership, slavery, inheritance, polygamy, *hudūd*, *qiṣās*, *rajm*, and the likes. One may ask that why it is not applied to interpret the universal verses that are not based on the social background of their revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).

## 5.2. Gender Studies

To put feminism and gender equality under the postmodernism thought is not really wrong, as Edman argues that a “number of feminist theories in the past decade have found that they hold much in common with postmodernism.”<sup>54</sup> The death of the subject in postmodern thought parallels the feminist agenda to abolish male domination or, from a social perspective, the deconstruction of social class in the socialist concept of society. Therefore, the feminist message of gender equality is supported and advocated mostly by liberal thinkers, Marxists, radical feminists or postmodern thought.

In order to vindicate their message of gender equality, the postmodern feminists define gender as not related to physical differences between men and women in the traditional sense or biological or sexual anatomy. They choose collective cultural and social life, psychological, and other non-biological aspects as the determinant factors.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, the discrepancies are manifested. On the one hand, they hold the determinant factors as relative. On the other hand, they hold that gender equality is absolute. The problem is that absolute equality for men and women contradicts the fundamental tenets of almost all religions.

There are a number of evidences which prove that the postmodern doctrine of gender equality has infiltrated the thought of IMIs. The first and the most strategic point to advocate gender equality is to attack the Prophet's (*SAW*) traditions (*ḥadīth*) that are regarded as “injustice” towards women

<sup>53</sup>Aksin Wijaya, *Arah Baru Studi Ulumu Al-Qur'ān: Memburu Pesan Tuhan Di Balik Fenomena Budaya*, [New Directions for the Study of *Ulumul-Qur'ān*: Hunting for God's Message Behind Cultural Phenomena] (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2009), 175. See M. Amin Abdullah, “Introduction,” in *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'ān Mazhab Yogya*, [“Hermeneutics of the Qur'ān of Yogya School”], Yogyakarta: Islamika, (2003), xxiii. See also M. Zainal Abidin, “Ketika Hermeneutika Menggantikan Tafsīr Al-Qur'an,” [“When Hermeneutics Replaces Tafsīr of the Qur'an”] *Republika* [Republika Daily], 2005.

<sup>54</sup>Rosalind Smith, “Feminism, Postmodernism and Thomism Confront Questions of Gender,” in *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Roman T. Ciapalo (Indiana: American Maritain Association, 1997), 97-98.

<sup>55</sup>Linda L. Lindsey, *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2–3; see also H. T. Wilson and Hugh T. Wilson, *Sex and Gender: Making Cultural Sense of Civilization* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 2.

(misogyny).<sup>56</sup> In their view, a huge number of Islamic injunctions are against their doctrine of gender equality. Therefore, the activists of gender equality among IMIs look at Islamic teachings that deal with women in a very critical way. In mass media, for instance, a lecturer of State Islamic University, Jakarta, asserted that becoming heterosexual, homosexual (gay and lesbian), and bisexual are natural.<sup>57</sup> A student of State Islamic University Semarang bluntly proposed that homosexuals should be given their rights and society must be informed that homosexuality is normal and in accordance with *firah* in Islam and no adequate reason to forbid this.<sup>58</sup> Those two statements that blindly emulate the crucial idea of radical feminist school have no basis in Islamic teachings whatsoever. They are dangerous not just for academia but also inculcate deviant sexual behavior in the Muslim society.

Now, an analysis is presented of the impact of postmodernism on the thought of Muslim intellectuals who work at higher education institution. In this field, Muslim lecturers who vindicate the doctrine of gender equality develop university curriculum by searching the justifications from Qur'ānic verses,<sup>59</sup> by re-understanding the Qur'ānic verses<sup>60</sup> or by introducing new-perspectives of Islam.<sup>61</sup> All these vindications are still prevalent within postmodern approach, employing different disciplines of modern knowledge, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, and the like. One of the main approaches for gender mainstreaming is called "the additive approach", which means infusing various new perspectives and ideas about gender into the curriculum.<sup>62</sup>

In Islamic State University Yogyakarta, for instance the gender-based curriculum incorporates the compulsory course of Qur'ānic studies (*'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*) and the lecturers are requested to base their study on a gender perspective by contextualizing the verses about gender equality.<sup>63</sup> In the

<sup>56</sup>Syamsul Hadi Untung, and Achmad Idris, "Telaah Kritis Terhadap Hadis Misoginis," ["Critical Study of Misogynist Hadīth"], *Kalimah* 11, no. 1 (2013): 37-53, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v11i1.483>.

<sup>57</sup>Siti Musdah Mulia menyatakan: "Allah Hanya Melihat Takwa, Bukan Orientasi Seksual Manusia", [Siti Musdah Mulia states: "Allah only looks at human's piety, not his sexual orientation,"] *Jurnal Perempuan* (Women Journal), 2016, <https://www.jurnalperempuan.org>. See also Harda Armayanto, "Islam Memandang Homoseksual-Lesbian," ["Islam Views Homosexuals-Lesbians"] *Ijtihad* 4, no. 1 (n.d.): 49-62.

<sup>58</sup>Ahmad Khoirul Umam, "Memahami Sosio-Psiko-Religi Kaum Homoseksual," ["Understanding the Socio-Psycho-Religion of Homosexuals"], *Justisia* 25, no. 11 (2004): 33-40.

<sup>59</sup>Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Jender: Perspektif Al-Qur'ān* ["Argument of Gender Equality: al-Qur'ān Perspective"], Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999.

<sup>60</sup>Sri Suhandjati Sukri, *Bias Jender Dalam Pemahaman Islam* ["Gender Bias in Understanding Islam"], (Yogyakarta: Gama Media, 2002); Sri Suhandjati Sukri, *Pemahaman Islam dan Tantangan Keadilan Jender*, ["Understanding Islam and the Challenges of Gender Justice"], Yogyakarta: Gama Media, 2002.

<sup>61</sup>Siti Musdah Mulia, *Gender Dalam Perspektif Islam*, ["Gender in Islamic Perspective"], Jakarta: Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak, 2007).

<sup>62</sup>Other approaches are *contribution approaches*, this approach is carried out through system and policy of education institution by including gender issues in the curriculum and, and *social action approach*, this is by giving direction to the students to make decisions and action on those who are somewhat sensitive in their activities. This is more about discussion and problem solving on the issues of gender in society. Susilaningsih and Najib Agus, *Gender Equality in Islamic Higher Education: Baseline and Institutional Analysis for Gender Mainstreaming in IAIN Sunan Kalijaga* (Yogyakarta: UIN Sunan Kalijaga and McGill-IISEP, 2004), 31-33.

<sup>63</sup>Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, *Dinamika Discourse Gender Di UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta* ["Dynamics of Gender Discourse at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta"], Yogyakarta: Pusat Studi Wanita [Yogyakarta: Centre for Women Studies], (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2013), 1-3.

study of Science of *Hadīth*, the focus of discussion is to examine the source of *hadīth* narration (*sanad*), especially on the text of *hadīths* which is regarded as an injustice to women, like the issue of polygamy, the prohibition for women to lead men in the *Ṣalāt*, and the portion of women in inheritance.<sup>64</sup> The subject of *Tafsīr* (Qur'ānic interpretation) also focuses to study man as God's creature and a social being who intends to do justice to another. The verses studied in this course are related only to sex, women leadership, men-women in the hereafter, and the like. The objective of this course is to critically examine the term employed for men and women in the Qur'ān, the concept of human beings as social beings with gender equality.<sup>65</sup> *Hadīth*, Sufism, *ʿIlm al-Kalām*, and *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Arabic language also examines the same terms and studies pertaining to Arab figures.

The program of gender mainstreaming in State Islamic University (UIN) Yogyakarta was so successful that about 326 undergraduates,<sup>66</sup> 12 Masters,<sup>67</sup> and 1 Ph. D thesis were based on gender equality. Of those undergraduate theses, the highest percentage belonged to the Faculty of Islamic law (*Sharīa*), followed by the Faculty of Usuluddin.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, based on the above mentioned theses, it was reported that there is an increasing the so-called progressive trend of the feminist approach to Islamic studies among UIN Sunan Kalijaga students from 50% in 2008 to 87.5% in 2012. While, the moderate trend continued to decline from 21.4% in 2008 to 0% in 2012.<sup>67</sup>

In UIN, Jakarta offered a course for postgraduate program called "Islamic Studies and Gender." The main objectives of this course included a) to re-understand Islamic teachings from gender perspectives and b) to criticize the interpretation of Qur'ānic verses and *hadīth*, which are not supportive of gender equality.<sup>68</sup> In its contextual approach to the Qur'ānic verses, the study focused on the condition of Arab culture in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to be relevant to gender equality. The themes in this course were based on human creation, women leadership, inheritance, witness and guardian, polygamy, and women's right to reproduction and health.

The influence of postmodern thought on gender equality is discernible from the fact that Islamic teachings are compelled to justify the principle of gender equality. People who propose the integration of Islam and feminism can hardly be successful. It is not so simple to integrate Islam and feminism fairly, since the two have the same complexity and are emotionally provoking and contradict each other.<sup>69</sup> Those who would eliminate male domination on women in Islam, such as in inheritance, the number of witnesses, domestic right, and others do not or fail to comprehend the whole concept of men-women relationship in Islam.

### 5.3. Religious Pluralism

The impact of postmodernism on the thought of Muslim intellectuals is traceable from the discourse of religious pluralism which, in turn, intruded the department of comparative religions in most of UINs. The first clue which indicates this impact is the alternation, the nomenclature of the department of comparative religions into studies of religions (*Studi Agama-agama*).<sup>70</sup> The

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 7-9.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 13-15

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>68</sup>Nina Nurmila, *Modul Studi Islam Dan Jender: Pedoman Mata Kuliah Studi Islam Dan Jender Pada Sekolah Pascasarjana UIN Jakarta* ["Islamic and Gender Studies Module: Guidelines for Islamic and Gender Studies Courses at the UIN Jakarta Postgraduate School"], Jakarta: Pusat Studi Wanita [Centre for Women Studies], UIN Jakarta, Sekolah Pascasarjana dan British Embassy, 2008), 3, 7-8.

<sup>69</sup>Rita M Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>70</sup>This change was officially decreed by Directorate General of Higher Education, Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia. See Chairul Akhmad, "Program Studi Perbandingan Agama Diganti

department of comparative religions employed a *historic-comparative-theological* approach or *historic phenomenological* and *theological* approach. In this approach, each religion is taught based on the historical-theological and religious phenomenon, however, at the end, they are compared with Islam to seek its superiority. Nonetheless, in the department for the studies of religions, *objective-humanist* approach was used which subsequently developed into *historical-phenomenological*, *sociological-anthropological*, *phenomenological*, or *comparative* approaches. Another approach, which clearly inclines postmodernism is *multi-disciplinary* approach, which borrows various disciplines of social sciences combined with phenomenology and theology to elaborate religions, however, blended with perennialism. In this approach, hermeneutics is employed to understand the Qur'anic verses related to religions other than Islam. The problem of Western scientific analysis of religions, such as Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, and Phenomenology of Religion has separated religion from its very essence due to which it is often deprived of a sense of holiness and spirituality. Those methodologies do not satisfy the adherents of the religions discussed.<sup>71</sup> Since, religious diversity is discerned in postmodern propensity, a paradigm shift from modernism's monolithic understanding to postmodernism's multi-view of ultimate reality is inescapable. Therefore, the theology of religions is not seen from within including their confessional doctrine, ethic, ritual, and truth, however, understood in terms of religious pluralism, by which all religions are regarded as having a similar right to have truth claims, but none is true.<sup>72</sup> Here, the postmodern propensity is conspicuous.

From the foregoing approach and paradigm, it may be inferred that religious pluralism in relativistic flavor is a more dominant approach than religious pluralism in the sense of tolerance. This is justified based on the fact that some of the important references for religious studies at Islamic universities are dominated by the relativistic-pluralism. For instance, Thomas Dean, *Religious Pluralism and Truth*; Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*; Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning of Religion*; John Hick, *Global Theology*; The references that are directed to response religious fundamentalism are Oliver McTernan, *Violence in God's Name. Religion in An Age of Conflict*; Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence*; Lester R Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village*. From a detailed examination of the above development of methodological approaches and the recommended references, postmodernism's obvious impacts on religious pluralism may be inferred.

Consequently, by examining the references and approaches employed in the study of religions, religious pluralism that introduces relativism could be vividly discerned. Islam is not the foundation to compare religions anymore. In the study of other religions, Muslim students are not taught or are not allowed to judge the truth of other religions. The impact of those approaches could jeopardize Muslim faith, since they cannot claim the truth of their religion but may admit the truth of other religions.

The impact of postmodern thought in the discourse of religious pluralism among IMIs is observable from articles in media, book publishing, university thesis, and dissertation. An article written by a young Muslim activist who has a *pesantren* background bluntly declares that all religions

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SAA" ["Department of Comparative Religion Has Been Replaced by the Study of Religions"]  
Republika.co.id, 2014.

<sup>71</sup>Kamaruniah Kamaruzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC IIM, 2003), 4.

<sup>72</sup>Hick bluntly asserts that religions are different responses to the same ultimate reality. For him, Allah in Muslim belief, God in Christianity, Tao in Taoist belief, Brahman in Hinduism are different names but for the same ultimate reality. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 252–53.

are true, all lead to true path, so Islam is not the only true religion.<sup>73</sup> Other relativistic views of Muslim intellectuals, in this regard, could be referred to the book of Alwi Shihab, who states that the Qur'ān admits the existence of religious community (other than Islam) and, hence they deserve to get reward from God. It is because the Qur'ān does not differentiate one religion from other.<sup>74</sup> Another book entitled *Basis Teologi Persaudaraan Antar Agama* (Interreligious Theology of Brotherhood) also proclaims the truth of all religions on the ground that any religious adherent could be called "believer" (*orang yang beriman*) and anyone who believes in God – without looking at what religion he embraces – is equal before Allah, because our God is one.<sup>75</sup> Mulkhan shares the similar opinion on the truth of all religions by expressing that all religious adherents have the right to enter heaven.<sup>76</sup> The standpoints that admit the truth of all religions are lucidly relativistic elements of postmodernism.

Not only has postmodern religious pluralism intrude the public discourse of IMIs, however, it has also intruded the academic works in some Islamic universities as well. One such lucid example can be seen from a Ph.D thesis written at Islamic State University, Jakarta in 2008 entitled *Argument of Religious Pluralism*.<sup>77</sup> This thesis also strives to prove that all people of the book deserve to enter paradise. It starts the argument by interpreting the Qur'ān,<sup>78</sup> that those who believe in Trinity are not disbelievers (*kufir*). The verse, according to the student, is only applicable for the sect of Ya'qūbiyah Najran, not all Christians. To support this argument, the author argues that the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) is similar to those of other Prophets. However, each Prophet had their own *sharī'a* and the form of each *sharī'a* might be different, but the objectives of all *sharia* are the same. Therefore, the advent of Prophet Muḥammad (*SAW*) was not to abolish *sharia* of previous Prophets.<sup>79</sup>

The foregoing argument clearly denounces the exclusivity of Islam, Christianity and Judaism and their validity. This is conceptually untenable, since in Islam there is no such doctrine of relativity.<sup>80</sup> The two statements of Qur'ān are elucidated further by the Prophet's saying, ".....no one of this *ummah*, who heard about my message (Islam), either of Jews or Christians, then he dies and does not believe in the message I brought unless he becomes the inhabitant of Hell" (*Hadīth* narrated by Muslim). The Prophet also said, "should my brother Moses alive (at this moment), certainly he had no objection to follow me" (*Hadīth* narrated by Ahmad and al-Bazzār). For Christianity, this thesis is also unacceptable for it denounces the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ as being the only way to God.

## 6. Conclusion

<sup>73</sup>Ulil Abshar Abdalla, "Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam," ["Renewing Islamic Understanding"], *Harian Kompas* [Kompas Daily], 2002.

<sup>74</sup>Alwi Shihab, *Islam Inklusif: Menuju Sikap Terbuka Dalam Beragama* ["Inclusive Islam: Towards an Open Attitude in Religion"], Bandung: Mizan, 1998), 109.

<sup>75</sup>Budy Munawar Rachman, "Basis Teologi Persaudaraan Antar Agama," ["The Theological Basis of Inter-Religious Brotherhood"], in *Wajah Liberal Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Jaringan Islam Liberal, 2007), 51–53.

<sup>76</sup>Abdul Munir Mulkhan, *Ajaran dan Jalan Kematian Syekh Siti Jenar* ["Teachings and Way of Death of Sheikh Siti Jenar"], Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2002), 44.

<sup>77</sup>Abd. Moqsiṭh Ghazali, *Argumen Pluralisme Agama* ["Argument of Religious Pluralism"] (Depok: KataKita, 2009), 206–7.

<sup>78</sup>Al-Maida 05:07.

<sup>79</sup>Ghazali, *Argumen*, 184.

<sup>80</sup>Aal-e-Imran 03:19, 85.

The purported essence of postmodernism lies in its position to fabricate new ideas that deny truth-claims and consequently throws a critical attack on the exclusivity of all ideologies, religions, and foundational thoughts. Therefore, it is denounced as relativistic, nihilistic, irrational, and hyper-rational. The impact of postmodernism on the discourses of IMIs manifested when those ideas intruded the Qur'anic studies, gender equality, and religious pluralism. In these three areas, postmodern thought deconstructs the established values, abolishes the given structure, and appears to be full of misery and despair that create confusion among Muslim intellectuals. In this situation, Muslim intellectuals should be encouraged to employ the traditional methodology and develop a new approach compatible with the challenge of contemporary society. This civilizational task requires complex theological, epistemological, sociological, and political approaches that enable Muslims to maintain their traditional values and their own identities. A valuable statement regarding Muslim achievements based on traditional values, especially in the study of religions, can be attributed to Rosenthal who said that "the comparative study of religion has been rightly acclaimed as one of the great contributions of Muslim civilization to mankind's intellectual progress."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Bruce Lawrence, *Shahrastani on the Indian Religions* (Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton, 1976), 85.

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