

TARIQ RAMADAN'S INTERPRETATION OF THE REALITY OF MUSLIM MINORITIES IN THE WEST

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Abstract

The issue of minorities and the majority of Muslims is still an issue in the midst of socio-religious relations in world society. Especially between Muslims and Western society. Misunderstandings often occur and even lead to hostility, because a balanced understanding has not yet been reached. Tariq Ramadan, as a scholar and Muslim citizen in the West, reminded Western citizens that they need to understand Islam. Likewise, Muslim citizens must also understand things that occur in the Western cultural system which is based on modernism, democracy and rationality. The prerequisite he offered was that, based on his interpretation of the reality of Muslims in the West, it was necessary to encourage attitudes and changes in views, that Islam could also live in the dimensions of modernity and democracy in coexistence in the West and proclaimed that Islam is a religion of love for humanity and peace.

Keywords: *Tariq Ramadan, Minority, Muslim, West*

Introduction

The number of Muslims is estimated at 1.2 billion, and constitutes about 20 percent of the world's population. Around 800 million live in

45 countries where the majority of the population is Muslim, and another 400 million are minorities in 149 countries. Being a Muslim in a country with a majority Muslim population is normal. Muslims in Indonesia, the Middle East and North Africa are used to being the majority.¹ However, being a Muslim in an environment outside a Muslim-majority country is something different of course. Both in terms of culture, relationships, freedom of expression and other challenges in social life in these countries.

Cultural and ideological challenges are a necessity when faced with this reality. In fact, it is not uncommon to see discrimination and marginalization as well as the perception of Islam as a "barbaric" religion, due to acts of terrorism committed by unscrupulous Muslims.² Although there have also been quite a few attempts at compromise and harmony between the Muslim minority and the non-Muslim majority in

¹ Anis Baswedan, "Minoritas vs Mayoritas", in *Jawa Pos*, Thursday 11 Oktober 2007.

² See John L. Esposito's book, *Unholy War: Kekerasan Atas Nama Agama*, trans. Arif Maftuhin, Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2006. After the September 11 events and the bomb explosions in Madrid and London, European Muslims faced more difficult and depressed conditions, and they face new challenges. At the level of European political institutions and mass media, the problem of the condition of Muslim minorities living in European countries has emerged as an actual problem. Not a day goes by without discussions and questions regarding Muslims published in European newspapers. See <http://www.irib.ir/worldservice/melayuradio/perspektiindex.htm>. The phenomenon of Islamophobia, or excessive fear of Islam, has struck some intellectuals, experts and conservative Christian circles in America and Europe. The only opinion they wish to impose is that terrorism is a true aspect of the Muslim Ummah. That way, there is no distinction between radical Muslims and moderate Muslims. According to them, this is so identical because Muslims adhere to one source of doctrine and learn from the same teachings. A wiser effort is that we must be open and must be more active in promoting dialogue. We must not act naive. Behind all that there are always political and geo-political interests. In addition, there are a group of people who only want to advance their own religion at the expense of other people's religions.

the West. Therefore, a new concept and paradigm is needed for continuous intensive efforts to carry out dialogue and mutual understanding for two or more different aspects of religion and culture. It is in this capacity that Tariq Ramadan appears to give his thoughts, as written in this simple paper.

Origins of Minorities

Islam itself started as a minority, which was initially one person, namely the Prophet Muhammad SAW. However, because of the quality of the people chosen by Allah SWT. This makes something that was previously a minority slowly grow and develop despite great resistance and even persecution. This minority then in the next stage of evolution became the majority, especially in the Arabian Peninsula before Muhammad died, within a period of about a quarter of a century.

Islam does not encourage a Muslim to deliberately accept the state of minority if he cannot exercise his right to worship God. In this case, Muslims are required to emigrate to a country that is more suitable for practicing their beliefs, with the intention of returning to their original homeland and protecting their right to live according to the teachings of Islam. Hijrah to protect one's beliefs is an act of virtue according to religion. In some cases the act is even a religious obligation. Such people are called muhajirs, not refugees. He was required to work hard to prepare to return to his country, and the Muslim

community in general was required to help such Muhajirs, such as the close relationship between the Muhajirin and Ansar.³

This is the case seen in the first wave of migration of Makkah Muslims to Abyssinia (Ethiopia/Habsyah) during the time of the Prophet. Likewise, there was a more drastic case of the migration of the Great Prophet Muhammad SAW. from Mecca to Medina with all remaining Muslim communities. Such is the importance of this event that it is the starting point of the Muslim calendar. The Prophet returned to Makkah with the Muslims when they were able to secure their passage back to their homeland (futih Makkah). Therefore, when a Muslim's right to carry out worship according to his beliefs is denied by any power, he must fight in order to defend himself, and become a mujahid; or if he cannot fight or fails in his resistance, he must emigrate and become a muhajir. If he cannot do either the first or the other, he must continue to maintain his faith, even in a secret way if this must be done, and try as hard as possible to pass it on, at least to his descendants. A Muslim may also emigrate, either to seek knowledge or material gain, and so on as long as it does not endanger his beliefs. In this case he must try to appear as an example of a good Muslim and must also be a messenger of peaceful Islam to the people around him.⁴

Muslim minorities outside the Middle East first emerged due to the increase in Muslim traders who settled in ports or ports in foreign countries to trade. Initially, these traders were ambassadors from a

³ M. Ali Kettani, *Minoritas Muslim Di Dunia Dewasa Ini*, trans. Zarkowi Soejoeti, Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2005, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid*

powerful country. They were the first Muslim communities around the coast of India, Sri Lanka, China, East Africa, the islands of Indonesia and the Philippines and islands in the Indian Ocean. Over time, these traders married local women and the second and third generations became part of the country. It often happens that local residents move to the new religion, thereby increasing the strength of the Muslim community. In some places, this religious conversion occurred on such a large scale that what appeared at first to be an insignificant minority, in the course of time, became a fully capable majority as in the cases of Malaysia and Indonesia.

Muslim states expanded dramatically after the Prophet Muhammad died. For more than a century the Muslim people remained organized as one political entity, but then broke up into several fragments. Despite political fragmentation, Muslims are united by a shared view of religion, shared standards of moral values and a shared legal system. Moreover, their religious idealism provided the impetus to develop the greatest civilization in the history of humanity so that for several centuries they remained the leaders of all mankind in all branches of life.

However, no nation remained successful throughout time, and ultimately Muslim civilization also experienced decline. This showed itself, among other things, in the shrinking of Muslim states and the conquest of Muslim territories by non-Muslim peoples. The result was that many of the Muslim majority were forced to come under non-Muslim rule. Usually the development follows the following pattern:

First, a community is rendered ineffective even in terms of numbers, the majority, because of non-Muslim occupation. When the occupation lasted long enough, the majority was transformed into a numerical minority due to large-scale expulsion of Muslims, immigration of non-Muslims and a low rate of natural increase among Muslims due to abnormally difficult conditions. It is in this category that the history of the fall of the minorities of the Soviet Union, Palestine, Thailand, Ethiopia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the former Yugoslav countries, etc. is seen.

Second, there is another form of Muslim minority which is slightly different from the form mentioned above. This is the case when Muslim rule in a country does not last long enough. Because efforts to spread Islam were not great and effective enough to turn Muslims into a majority in numbers in the countries they controlled. Once political power collapsed, Muslims found themselves reduced to minority status in their own country. This is like the case of India and the Balkan countries.⁵

The *third*, form of Muslim minority can occur when a number of non-Muslim people in a non-Muslim environment change their religion (conversion) to become Muslims. If these new converts to Islam are aware of the importance of their Islamic faith and give priority to other characteristics and achieve solidarity among themselves because they share the same faith, a new Muslim minority will be created. Usually, the flow of immigrants and the flow of Muslim

⁵ *Ibid.*

converts merge together to form a Muslim minority that adapts well to the local culture and is still linked to the Muslim ummah. An example of such a case is the Sri Lankan Muslim community which is actually a combination of Muslim immigrants from South Arabia and Muslim converts from the island. The same thing also happened to the group of Negro immigrants from Africa to America who called themselves black Moslems.

Profile about Tariq Ramadan

He was born in Switzerland, and grew up there in a very religious family. He and his family have a very long history of exile in search of justice and freedom. His father (Sheikh Ramadan) died after spending 41 years in exile. The length of exile is exactly the same as his current age and he has officially become a Swiss citizen.⁶

Apart from being known as the grandson of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the famous Muslim Brotherhood movement, Tariq is also widely known as the most enthusiastic advocate of Islamic-Western dialogue today. Currently he is a lecturer at the College of Geneva and an expert in Islamic Studies at Friborg University. Apart from that, he is also a senior researcher at St. Antony's College, Oxford University and Lokahi Foundation, London. He is also President of the European Muslim Network (EMN), in Brussels. Some of his books include; *To Be European Muslim, Islam The West and Challenge of Modernity*,

⁶ Tariq Ramadan, *Menjadi Modern Bersama Islam: Islam, Barat, dan Tantangan Modernitas*, trans. Zubair dan Ilham B. Saenong, Jakarta: Teraju, 2003, p.. xxvii

Western Muslim and The Future of Islam, and of course there are many more works by Tariq in other scientific writings.

Becoming Modern with Islam

Tariq Ramadan explained that modernity is different from modernism, because modernism leads to extreme attitudes. In general, the values of Western modernity include individualism, rationalism, freedom, progress and democracy.⁷ Islam also has these values, but there are differences in them. In Islam, responsibility comes before rights, individuals have a collective attitude in the form of a community which means respecting other people. Tariq said "the first right lies with Allah and precisely because of that, we respect other people. The principle of individuality is also recognized that we ultimately face God individually."

Islam also recognizes the principle of rationality, but rationality in Islam is limited by revelation. The Iqra verse shows that we have to learn, and this is rational. However, rationality in Islam is limited by revelation, whereas in the West reason has absolute freedom to determine everything.⁸ Islam also has the values of freedom, but freedom according to Islamic teachings is responsible freedom. Freedom in Islam means respecting others and not destroying collectivism. That this freedom does not interfere with the rights of other people.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

⁸ See at the site <http://www.nuonline.co.id>. Access on 20 November, 2023.

The principle of progress is also valued in Islam. Ijtihad is one manifestation of the principle of openness to new things, but the ijthad process is also based on the signs and values contained in the Qur'an and Hadith. Progress is reflected in the form of ijthad, however, it remains within the framework of certain rules in the Koran and Sunnh. Meanwhile, the West is open to everyone.

The principle of democracy in the form of freedom to make choices is also highly upheld in Islam, by respecting other people, obeying the law, and so on. However, this element is not directly stated in the Koran so it must be adapted to the local culture of each region, there is even a form of democracy which is called *shurocracy*.⁹ Tariq Ramadhan also explained that secularization does not necessarily conflict with Islam. This is proven by the division of matters of worship and muamalah, where matters of worship are a direct relationship with Allah, while mu'amalah is a relationship between humans.

In the context of relations between Islam and the West, nowadays Muslims must admit that currently the West has a more advanced culture than the Eastern world. In anticipation of progress towards the West, Tariq gave suggestions and opinions that must be rejected and avoided, including; *First*, feeling dominated by other people. This situation will give rise to another attitude, namely that parties who are not Islamic are rejected, that is, they are exclusive towards other parties. *Second*, is total admiration for Western values so

⁹Compare with Humayun Kabir's writing, "Kaum Minoritas dalam Demokrasi", in Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Wacana Islam Liberal: Pemikiran islam Kontemporer Tentang Isu-isu Global*, trans. Bahrul Ulum and Heri Junaidi, Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001, p. 219.

that they swallow everything that comes from there. Another thing that must also be avoided is feeling like a victim who cannot do anything, which creates an attitude of resignation to the fate that is accepted by being passive.

To overcome this, an inclusive attitude must be instilled early on by accepting what is good and accepting existing differences by engaging in dialogue. According to Tariq Ramadan, "not everything that comes from the West, Arabs or from other Islamic countries is a good thing, so you have to choose it." Another attitude that must also be avoided is being paranoid, that the depravity we experience is caused by other people, that other parties always threaten our existence and this does not make us introspect.¹⁰

So what is important is to return to the universal principles of Islam where Allah created creatures into tribes and nations to know and understand each other. These principles are universal values, while the model is adapted to each culture and history. Because something that comes from the West or Arabia is not necessarily suitable for application in other regions. One more important thing, according to Tariq Ramadan, is that armed with universal Islamic sources, Muslims can live modernity by preparing a social, political, educational and economic order that must always be linked to ethical values, goals and ideals. his spiritual ideals.¹¹

¹⁰ See the site <http://www.nuonline.co.id> above.

¹¹ Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and The Future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 126.

Democracy and the Prerequisites for Facing Diversity and Differences

Democracy according to Tariq Ramadan, all parties who claim to play and play a role in upholding democracy, must be loyal to the following four principles. First, the principle of respecting the law. Second, the principle of equality in society. In this second principle, there is no difference between Christians, Jews or Muslims in the context of the state. Here there is respect for all citizens of a pluralistic country. All parties adhere to the same foundation. The third principle is general awakening and awareness, which can be articulated in a free general election. Some Muslims say that for a Muslim, what should apply is the principle of shura. We should also not be led astray by this model of thinking. The problem lies in the similarity of principles.

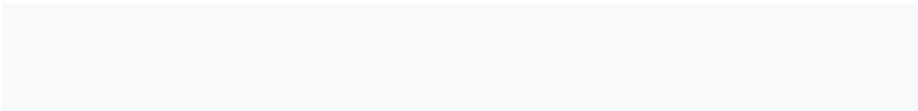
Meanwhile, the final or fourth principle is the possibility of alternate succession of power. We must be able to tell our leaders that they can be removed from power if they are incompetent. There are specific mandates for several years. And this mandate can be decided collectively. Apart from that, we can also hold general elections and install leaders who are in accordance with the principles of accountability and public responsibility.¹²

As for overcoming the fear of diversity and differences that occur in minority Muslim communities in the West towards the majority of non-Muslim communities in the West, there can be three

¹² As when he came to Jakarta and was interviewed by Luthfi A. Syaukanie on the site <http://islamlib.com/id/index.php?page=article&id=410>. Accessed 16 November, 2023.

prerequisites. *First*, law enforcement. Each of us must respect the laws of the country and apply them indiscriminately to all citizens, both majority and minority and with full respect for every religious and cultural community. *Second*, recognition and respect for religious and cultural symbols and practices. A diverse society must provide its citizens with the tools to understand religions, their symbols, and their practices. To overcome fear, we must offer appropriate instruction to our youth and must cultivate their understanding and critical spirit. This means demanding a better understanding of other philosophical and cultural orientations in a way that sees the other world as a source of riches, and not as a threat.

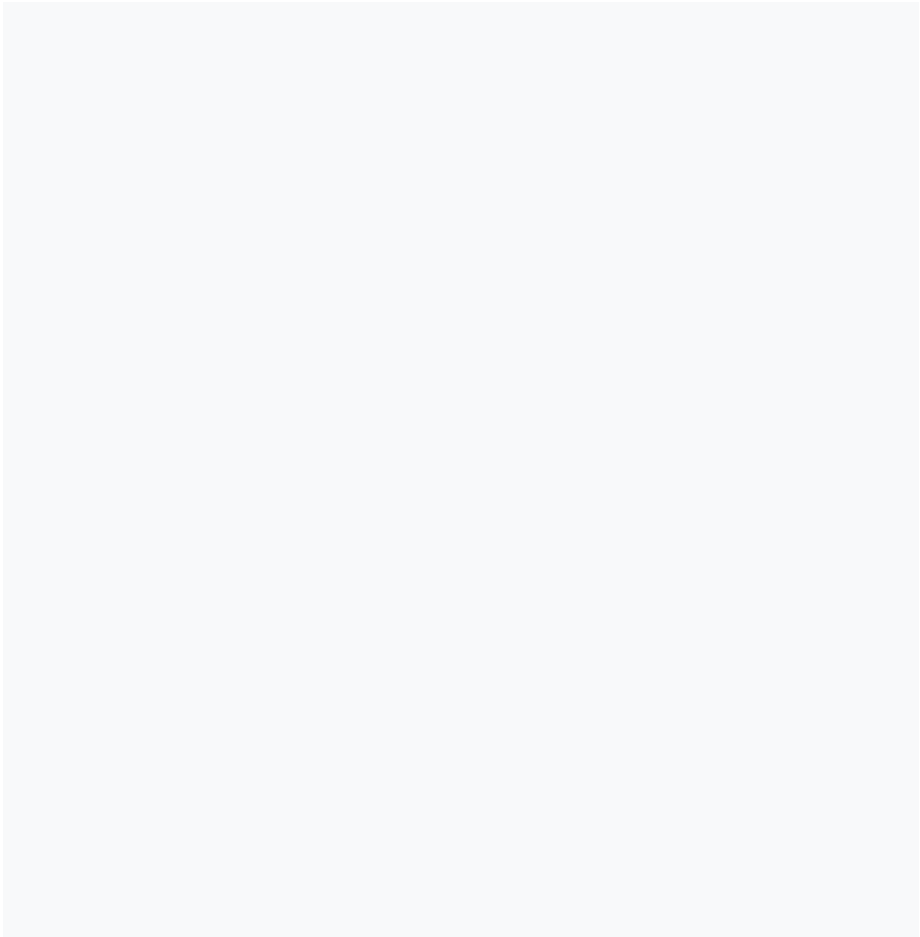
The *third* relates to common sense and politeness. We must get used to debating social issues in a thorough and critical manner, without sacrificing our principles, and without giving a damn about thoughtless, hurtful, and sometimes ill-intentioned and cowardly criticism. In the name of defending freedom of thought, some intellectuals, journalists and politicians have actually endorsed the racist hatred that undermines our democracy, resulting in the opposite of what they say they are fighting for. To provide for a responsible and reasonable expression of diversity in society We. We must explain, educate and learn to know each other, understand and respect our neighbors and society. How our freedom is used depends on each individual.¹³



¹³ *Ibid.*

Closing

Tariq Ramadan's thoughts as a result of his observations and interpretations in Muslim minority communities in the West are worthy of appreciation and are relevant in the context of the Islamic majority world, especially Indonesia. So that in practice life can treat non-Muslim religious minority communities well and live side by side in peace and harmony. Efforts to dialogue and understand each other seem to be a necessity that must be carried out by both parties by continuing to build mutual understanding, not build prejudice and suspicion.



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