Al-Jabiri's Quranic Hermeneutics and Its Significance for Religious Education

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Abstract. The Quran is believed to have always been in dialogue with mankind throughout the ages. Accordingly, each Muslim generation is responsible for presenting new interpretations. Therefore, al-Jabiri offered a hermeneutic approach to interpreting Quranic verses and Islamic *turâts* (cultural heritage) to explore the meanings and significance of sacred and canonical texts. This study aims to analyse al-Jabiri's Quranic hermeneutics, its application and its significance for religious education. Hence, the application of the holistic method in analysing al-Jabiri's works is to construct main ideas and contextual meanings. According to al-Jabiri, the hermeneutic approach fulfils the interpretation's demand for objectivity and continuity. The conceptual framework of sharia universality and the main purpose of sharia is used as a contextualisation paradigm for the interpretation of scripture, while the chronology of revelation is used as a basis for contextually aligned interpretation. His efforts to formulate the concept of human rights in the Quran are based on the application of his hermeneutic approach to verses that speak of human nature. Although it does not specifically discuss education, al-Jabiri's hermeneutic approach is appreciated as a foundation for the development of religious education. Therefore, religious education is required to execute its role in humanisation and hominization.

Keywords and phrases: al-Jabiri's hermeneutics, open scripture, objectivity, continuity, religious education

Introduction

The Quran is merely writings inscribed on a collection of sheets, it is unable to verbally express itself, and people are required to understand them (Abu Zayd 2014, 194). Therefore, the effort to understand this Holy Scripture is an important

task that Muslims must carry out at all times (al-Jabiri 2008, 9–10). In this context, Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri (d. 2010) said, "If we acknowledge that the Quran greets all generations at any given time and place, then we are obligated to seek new and dynamic understandings of the Quran according to changes in the conditions that we face in each period of time" (2008, 9). The revelation of the Quran gradually demands great efforts on our part to understand the stages through which it passed from its initial reveal until the *mushaf* (a written copy of the Quran) that it is today (al-Jabiri 2007, 20).

As an open text, the Quran can be freely interrogated by anyone wanting to reveal the truth; it even challenges those who doubt the truth of its contents. The steps of existence and formation process (*masâr al-kawn wa al-takwîn*) of the Quran during the time of revelation gradually became a strong argument for the openness of this Scripture as well as an indication that efforts to understand it was directed to formulate its prescription to be relevant to the context of its revelation and our current context (al-Jabiri 2007, 27–28; Khan and Ali 2017, 118). According to al-Jabiri, this is a proper way to interact with the Quran and contextualise it, while still appreciating the principle in which some Quranic verses provide explanations about other verses.

Regarding the discourse of how we should interact with the Quran, al-Jabiri's works are interesting to study because he presented many fundamental concepts, such as the Quran as an open text, some parts of the Quran explaining other parts, the need to understand the Quran in accordance with the chronology of revelation, the particular and universal contents of the Quran and the critical interpretation of the Quranic verses. However, since al-Jabiri has been known as a Muslim thinker who promoted the "critique of Arabic reason" project (see Abied-Shah 2001, 299–327), his academic work in Quranic studies remains to be overlooked, even though his works are loaded with fundamental and alternative ideas because they are a continuation of his grand project to overcome the decline of the Arabs and Muslims (Abu Rabi' 1996, 27). Al-Jabiri's critique of the Arabic reason project has been considered the most successful and widely accepted by all Muslim groups. With such a reputation, al-Jabiri's study of problems within the scope of Quranic studies is certainly worth discussing, given the consideration that: (1) his academic studies are always critical and enrich existing perspectives and (2) he contributed to clarifying various conceptual problems about the Quran, which are then elaborated with its significance for formulating educational interpretation. The need to elaborate on the significance of al-Jabiri's academic studies for education is quite reasonable considering that the more "philosophical" results of his studies

can be used as a conceptual basis. In addition, such an elaboration of significance is also affirmed by al-Jabiri's statement (1991a, 42) that the problems of education and pedagogy are included in various issues that must be examined critically and seriously.

Al-Jabiri's fundamental concepts are concise and expressive. As a reliable critic, he managed to dive into the recesses of fundamental issues that limit the religiousness of Muslims. He was well aware of how important it is to build the Muslim community's perspective and understanding of the Scripture, considering that what is needed today is not only "revival" (*al-shahwah*), but resurrection (*al-nahdlah*) and renewal (al-Jabiri 1996, 129). Renewal demands the Muslim community to have the ability to solve their fundamental problems, which include their perspective of the Quran. In line with other contemporary Muslim thinkers, al-Jabiri said that it is important to appreciate, criticise and contextualise the traditions of cultural heritage (*turâts*). Although the Quran is not part of the *turâts*, the various traditions brought about by interpretations of the Scripture are manifestations of *turâts* (al-Jabiri 2007, 26).

Therefore, critical interpretation in the study of Islamic *turâts* is not entirely similar to the critical interpretation of the Quran. This seems to be one of the unique attributes of al-Jabiri's critical interpretation in comparison to critical interpretations made by other contemporary Muslim thinkers. Yet, al-Jabiri's distinct interpretation of the Quran does not apparently draw the attention of contemporary Muslim thinkers. There are at least two reasons for this: (1) al-Jabiri was better known as a critique of Arabic reason, whose thoughts are more devoted to deconstructing the tradition of Islamic *turâts* and (2) al-Jabiri had just recently formulated a methodological framework and its application in understanding the Quran, after completing his serial work on the critique of Arabic reason. Given that his critical interpretation of the Quran remains unfamiliar in the scholarship and only a few scholars have raised this issue, then its significance on educational interpretation would be an even more unfamiliar subject. While in fact, efforts to develop a concept of Islamic education, undoubtedly, need to be initiated by exploring the educational meanings that can be mined from various Quranic prescriptive references.

Literature Review

The thoughts of al-Jabiri, a well-known critic, have been examined extensively and have a broad influence. This is indicated by the publication of various articles discussing his thoughts. First, a published article was written by Burhani (2015, 29–42), "Yellow Book and Scripture: The Influence of Al-Jabiri on Religious Thought

in NU and Muhammadiyah", In this article, al-Jabiri's idea on the need to perform a contemporary reading pertaining to the traditions of Islamic intellectual heritage (*turâts*) is considered quite distinct compared to ideas of other Muslim reformers. Al-Jabiri's thoughts have influenced the emergence of a post-traditionalist view of Islam that is intended to develop a rational and critical view of *turâts*. Second, Susanto (2011, 253–272) examined al-Jabiri's thoughts in "Democracy in Islam: Comparative Study of Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri and Abdoulkarim Soroush's Thoughts". This article comparatively analyses al-Jabiri and Soroush's views on democracy in Islam. The relationship between religion and state was one of the crucial issues that al-Jabiri widely discussed and it displayed the liberal side of his thoughts on democracy in Islam.

Third, al-Jabiri's ideas are elaborated in Muhamad Rofiq's article (2017, 55–76), "Arab Political Reasoning: Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri's Contribution for Understanding Crisis of Politics in the Arab World". This article examines the third series of al-Jabiri's work, which was able to deconstructively uncover the roots of the political crisis of the contemporary Arab world and concurrently present historical facts that emphasise the influence of ideological-religious determinants, material economy and ethnicity-tribes on the political dynamics of the Islamic world. Fourth, the ideas of al-Jabiri are also articulated in Riady's article (2020, 203–224), "Epistemology Abed al-Jabiri and Its Relevance in the Context of Islamic Studies in Indonesia", which analyses three epistemologies of Islamic thought introduced by al-Jabiri, namely *bayâni* (textual reasoning), *irfâni* (mystical reasoning) and *burhâni* (logical reasoning). These three epistemologies are highly relevant for Islamic studies and for mapping out religious movements in Indonesia.

Fifth, relevant ideas of al-Jabiri's three epistemological aspects were analysed in the article of Utomo and Mu'ayanah (2020, 162–179), "Epistemology of Islamic Education Al-Jabiri Perspective of the Conservative-Modernist-Neo Modernist Flow and Burhani-Bayani-Irfani". The article examines the epistemology of al-Jabiri as an Islamic educational epistemology and its relevance with the epistemology of conservative, modernist and neo-modernist. However, the article lacks in articulating the critical-comparative analysis as it cannot uncover epistemological synthesis for Islamic education. Sixth, al-Jabiri's significant contribution to the study of *turâts* is seen through his series of works which was discussed in the article of Syafrin (2014), "New Approach in Religious Studies with Special Reference to Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri". The article further examines the view of al-Jabiri, confirming that the agenda of genuine reformation is to break stagnancies in the Arab-Islam world, which should start from our encouragement to implement the critical approach toward Islamic *turâts*.

Seventh, the methodology of exegesis of *tartib nuzûli* (based on the order of Quranic revelation) voiced by al-Jabiri was elaborated by Setiyawan (2016) in "Metodologi Penafsiran Tartib Nuzuli al-Jabiri" (Interpretation Methodology of al-Jabiri's Tartib Nuzuli). That article is still a first step in elaborating the methodology of the "new" exegesis of al-Jabiri, so it has not reached yet critical exegesis. Finally, the use of deconstructive hermeneutics of al-Jabiri to analyse school (*mazhab*) based Islamic education in Indonesia was discussed in the article of Wibowo and Naupal (2018) entitled "School-centric Islamic education in Indonesia: A deconstructive analysis of Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri". It underlines the importance of the deconstructive hermeneutics of al-Jabiri and it has become a basis for reforming Islamic education in Indonesia which for long has been under the school-based reasoning that produces extreme communities and triggers social conflicts.

Theoretical Framework

Hermeneutically, the interpretation of the Quran covers two aspects, namely objectivity and continuity (al-Jabiri 1991a, 31–33). The former requires that reading activity can get rid of subjectivity by taking several measures: (1) linguistic analysis so as not to infer any meanings without analysing the text first, (2) both diachronic and synchronic historical analysis and (3) critical analysis by revealing ideological content. Meanwhile, the latter, i.e., continuity, demands reading activity that can reveal contemporary relevance, either at the conceptual or praxes-transformative functional levels. Hermeneutics was initially a term in the study of "sacred texts", which referred to a basic principle and rule that interpreters of sacred texts need to establish so as to gain a correct understanding uninfluenced by subjective thought (Ma'rifah 2006, 153). As a study that primarily emphasises the relationship between interpreters and texts, hermeneutics is not only found in the Western tradition but also in classical and modern Islamic traditions (Abu Zayd 1994, 14–15). The relationship between interpreters and texts, especially sacred texts, is a dialogic perspective, considering that on the one hand, interpreters are facing the reality (context) that surrounds them, while on the other hand, they are also confronted by sacred texts with their complexity (in Hadari 2015, 262).

In relation to the interpretation of the holy book in the Islamic tradition, the *bi al-ma'tsûr* (traditionalist) and *bi al-ra'yi* (rationalist) schools of Quranic interpretation have long been recognised. These two views do not entirely oppose one another because "rationalisation" is found in the former, while the utilisation of historical and linguistic facts is found in the latter. These views face the complex problem of

how one can arrive at an objective or authentic meaning of the holy text, which is a fundamental issue in Quranic hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is intended to unravel the complexities of author, text and reader relationships by looking at the text in its interrelationship with context, both internal and external and also in its interrelation between the general and the particular.

The main concern of hermeneutics refers to understanding, hermeneutics is, thus, an interpretive understanding (Kneller 1984, 67), which is an attempt to reveal the meaning and significance of texts, especially historical texts and texts of scriptures (Hidayat 2004, 169). It is possible to reveal the meaning of various texts for education by having an interpretive understanding of the guidance provided by the Quran pertaining to Islam as a religion of peace, a religion that preserves human dignity and values, a religion that upholds knowledge, a religion that greatly appreciates diversity and solves all problems arising from these differences with fair and non-violent bases.

Methodology

As a literary study that attempts to formulate the ideas of al-Jabiri's hermeneutics, the implementation of the holistic method, which is a method of critical thinking to capture the complete meaning and not a mere "atomistic" meaning (Bakker and Zubair 1990), is based on content analysis using textual investigation on al-Jabiri's works as primary sources. It begins with the problems he sought the answers to and then the scientific efforts to delve deeper into the problems through the process of incubation, illumination through creating a dialogue between the problems and various concepts and actual phenomena, explication with analysing and clarifying the problems and creative synthesis with formulating new insights that are creatively combined from various theoretical and textual elements (Moutakas 1994).

In a hermeneutic analysis, there are at least three interlinked functions in the efforts of understanding the contents of a holy text, namely: (1) The historical function, which is oriented to revealing textual meaning according to its historical context, (2) The meaning function, which attempts to explore its contextual meaning and (3) The implicative meaning, which aims to elaborate the intended requirement for the current context (Gracia 1995). Such hermeneutic analysis was utilised to observe the methodological steps of al-Jabiri in integrating the necessities of text meanings, the contexts and the contextualisation.

Brief Biography of al-Jabiri

M. Abid al-Jabiri was born in Figuig, Morocco on 27th December 1935 and died on 3rd May 2010 in Rabat, Morocco. He was a professor of philosophy and Islamic thoughts at the University of Mohammed V in Rabat and is considered one of the renowned intellectuals in the contemporary Arab world (Netter, Mahmoud and Cooper 2000; Hegasy 2009; Hegasy 2010). Al-Jabiri studied at Damascus University in Syria for a year to obtain a diploma in philosophy studies. He then returned to Morocco to pursue his studies at the University of Mohammed V in Rabat and earned his doctorate in 1970 with a dissertation on Ibn Khaldun, which is one of the most important scientific papers out of the more than 30 academic articles he wrote.

Since the 1970s, al-Jabiri had been actively involved in various movements in the Arab world, such as being a member of the Union Nationale des Forces (UNFP), a left wing of the Independence Party that broke apart from the main party in 1959. When UNFP was banned in Morocco in 1973, he joined the Union Socialiste de Forces Populaires (USFP) and was assigned to the political bureau. As an academic, as well as a teacher and lecturer, he was co-author of philosophy textbooks published by the Ministry of Education. In this case, he significantly contributed to establishing the discourse on Arab identity by striving to introduce the scientific knowledge and philosophy that he engaged in, along with political and teaching activities, to the wider community. In 2008, al-Jabiri received the prestigious award of Ibn Rushd Prize for Freedom of Thought in Berlin, Germany.

Al-Jabiri's expertise in Arabic literature, Islamic studies and philosophy are widely recognised and his conceptual contributions that have enriched the traditions of contemporary Islamic thoughts have succeeded to uplift the spirit of improvement and revival of the ummah (Abied-Shah 2001). His magnum opus "Critique of Arabic Reason" (*Naqdu al-'Aql al-'Arabi*) created a critical discourse that received extensive responses, with numerous pros and cons even among scholars of Islamic *turâts*. George Tharabisyi critically questioned the discourse of the "Critique of Arabic Reason" voiced by al-Jabiri, in his book *Critique of the Critique of Arabic Reason* (1996). He questioned al-Jabiri's theory of reason as it contains several confusing arguments. Meanwhile, Moustakin (2021) and several other authors greatly appreciate al-Jabiri's thoughts by considering it as a valuable legacy that has a huge influence in various fields.

According to al-Jabiri, before moving forward to build the future, we must first deal with problems inherited from the past by criticising the set of principles and rules that underlie the knowledge acquisition and production process. In the early

2000s, after writing the *Arabic Moral Reason*, al-Jabiri's attention (2007, 14–15) began to focus on the "study of the Quran" which is the central text of Muslims. Nevertheless, his spirit remains the same, making what is studied or read relevant to the context and relevant to our current context (al-Jabiri 2007, 16). This spirit has long been fostered since the writing of *Nahnu wa al-Turâts* (Us and Our Cultural Heritage) in response to the conditions of Arab decadence in the 1970s.

Al-Jabiri was a prolific writer who produced many of the writings presented in scientific forums and serialised books that present his critical reflections on Islamic intellectual traditions and their contextualisation in the present era, the contemporary Arab world and the Islamic world at large. As a contemporary Muslim philosopher, on the one hand, he did not hesitate to criticise the mainstream of Islamic thought, including great figures of the Islamic world, such as al-Syafi'i (d. 820) and al-Ghazali (d. 1111), yet, on the other hand, he appreciated alternative Islamic thoughts which he still considered promising to kick-start a Muslim revival, such as the thoughts of Ibn Rusyd (d. 1198), al-Syathibi (d. 1388) and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406).

In general, al-Jabiri aimed to idealise *turâts* of the western Islamic world centred in Andalusia than that of the eastern Islamic world that had been successful in the Umayah and Abbasid eras, with cultural centres in Damascus and Baghdad. His serial work *Critique of Arabic Reason* received extensive responses from academics, both pros and cons and provoked lengthy discussion. In his serial work, al-Jabiri dissected the epistemological structure underlying the process of forming Islamic *turâts*, with its advantages and disadvantages. He realised that the models of thought in the Golden Age of Islam had a huge effect on Islamic cultural movement and thoughts in the following periods, even today. Nowadays the direction of al-Jabiri's critical studies and reflections is addressed to Quranic studies upon the consideration that the Quran holds an extremely central position and Muslims are constantly in need of clearer understanding and interpretations for responding to socio-cultural dynamics.

The Concept of al-Jabiri's Hermeneutics

The Quran is a linguistic text (*nash lughawî*) that serves as the central text in the history of Islamic Arab culture and the central text of Muslims and their cultural formations (Fa'ali et al. 2011, 7). Accordingly, the culture develops as a result of human dialectics with empirical reality and texts (Abu Zayd 2000, 9), particularly with Quranic texts (al-Jabiri 2007, 28). Thus, the approach to reading the text (*takwil*) is the main epistemological instrument in producing knowledge (Abu Zayd 2000, 9–10). Hermeneutics is one of the approaches used for textual interpretation,

including the contextual interpretation of sacred texts (al-Jabiri 2007, 27; 2009, 34). According to al-Jabiri, as quoted by al-Thahiri (2016, 151), hermeneutics in Islamic thoughts establishes Quranic discourses as a foundation to establish basic principles and boundaries.

In modern hermeneutics, interpretation is conceived differently. Some experts state that it is a "reconstruction of the author's mind" whereby the orientation of interpretation is to reveal the meaning of the text as intended by the author. Some others suggest that hermeneutics refers to explanations based on the psychological state and life history of the author, while others assert that interpretation is a better understanding (of the text) than the author's interpretation of the text (Hoed 2011, 93; Hidayat 2004, 141). Is it possible for us to understand the text better than even the author's interpretation? It seems plausible to those who have such an understanding of hermeneutics, considering that writers with socio-historical settings have "limitations" in which there are certainly things that are thinkable and unthinkable in certain socio-historical settings. Therefore, one of the principles when reading a text is to pay attention to what the author expresses in the text, how it is expressed, what is not expressed in the text and how is it not expressed (al-Jabiri 1991b, 65–66).

Text is the embodiment of what is known as speech (spoken language) and a derivative of speech. The text has a different reference system than speech. Speech is bound to contexts (I, here, now) and once transformed into text, it belongs to the reader and is not bound by a single-spaced context (Hoed 2011, 93–94). The text should be understood in relation to the author, his environment and other texts. So, what if a sacred text is reinterpreted? In this case, al-Jabiri distinguishes between the text as part of the *turâts* and the sacred text originating from God's revelation (al-Jabiri 2007, 26). The Quran as a holy text is not a *turâts*, but all sorts of understanding or study results of the Quran are called *turâts* because they are cultural products. Cultural products of the Quran are extremely abundant but they often restrict our efforts in uncovering the true meaning of the Holy Book.

One of the most important things we need is the scientific awareness (*al-wa'y al-ilmi*) of *turâts* in order to recognise the underlying basic principles and to ask various critical questions (Abu Zayd 2000, 17), so as not to be fixated on the production of long-standing issues within the framework of a traditional understanding of *turâts* (al-Jabiri 1991a, 15). The traditional understanding was essentially due to the unification of "religion" and *turâts*, which was initiated by efforts to incorporate the Prophet's tradition and practices (*sunnah*) into religion,

in which at the period of *tadwîn* (scientific codification occurring from the second to the third century of Hijra) rules in various fields, such as *ushûluddin* (Islamic theology) and *ushûl fiqh* (methodology of Islamic jurisprudence), were formulated (al-Jabiri 1991b, 65).

These rules, underlying the production of knowledge in Arab culture, are based on the supremacy of the text (Abu Zayd 2006, 19–20). These rules, which were widely formulated during the *tadwîn* period, are characterised by notable achievements in the advancement of the field of language and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). Furthermore, the process had an impact on the development of *turâts*, which is always in the shadow of religious *turâts*. Islamic heritage (*turâts*), which were supposed to cover a very broad scope of cultural achievements, subsequently tended to be narrowed down and limited to religious thoughts, especially *fiqh* (al-Jabiri 1991b, 96). Even when Islamic reason of orthodoxy was dominant, the tradition of Islamic thoughts that are now inherited as *turâts* eventually become rigid and inaccessible (Arkoun 1986, 73–74).

It is ironic that the spirit of reason still influences the mindset and behaviour of some Muslims (al-Jabiri 1991b, 96; Nasution 1998, 98). Nuances of such a cultural and intellectual climate create religious and intellectual communities that occupy authoritative positions in the scope of religion and science. They are the Muslim scholars, *bayaniyyûn*. According to al-Jabiri, they collegially play a role in establishing Islamic scholastic sciences, such as *nahwu* (Arabic grammar), *balaghah* (rhetoric), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *kalam* (scholastic theology) (al-Jabiri 1993, 13), which serve as drivers for formulating religious fields of knowledge, deemed as the main achievement of Islamic *turâts*.

The Quranic text is an Islamic text in which one of the purposes of studying it is to gain an "objective" understanding of Islam. The Quranic text is both a "cultural product" and a "cultural producer" (Abu Zayd 2000, 24) and it brings about changes in the meaning of some words from its commonly known meaning in the language toward a *syar'iyah* (religious) meaning (Abu Zayd 2006, 215). The study of the text of the Quran is intended to reveal the various relationships between the text and the culture and between the culture and the text. For that reason, we are not only interacting with the Quran, the collection of sheets by sheets of *mushaf*, but we also engage with the text that has undergone a "formation" process in a period spanning over twenty years (al-Jabiri 2008, 10).

The revelation of the Quran in seven letters (*sab'atu ahruf*) may very likely mean that the Quran was revealed several times with differing contexts, such as Surah al-Fatihah and Surah al-Ikhlāṣ, in which, apart from responding to *musyrikûn* (the

polytheistic group), various narrations mention that both surahs are also a response to *ahl al-kitâb* (people of the Book) (Abu Zayd 2000, 188). The seven letters indicate the meaning of the revelation of the Quran, which is highly accommodative to the variety of dialects in the society as the recipient of the revelation at that time (al-Jabiri 2007, 176; al-Asymawi 2004, 85). This means that although the phenomenon of the Quran was the Prophet's spiritual experience when receiving revelation, it was also an "Arabic phenomenon" considering that it is inseparable from the context of the Arabic language, society and culture (al-Jabiri 2007, 27). The Quran possesses a dual characteristic: Arabic language (*'arabiyyat al-lisân*) and transcendental divine content (*ilâhiyyat al-madlmûn*) (al-Jabiri 2007, 197).

Given the two characteristics mentioned earlier, the Quran maintains both historical and normative senses in parallel. The normative sense is denoted by the phenomenon of spirituality and *tawqîfî* (taken for granted), while the historical is signified by the ijtihad phenomenon such as the systematisation of surah and developments in their writing order. Such normative and historical senses are linked to the process of the "formation of the Quran". The Quran is both editorially and meaningfully derived from the revelation of Allah, which was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) through the intercession of the Angel Gabriel. It was then delivered by the Prophet to the companions, to be memorised, recorded and practised. Following the death of the Prophet, the Quran went through a process of compilation during the time of Caliphs Abu Bakr and Uthman, it was subsequently systemised, made into a book and interpreted. Given the Quran's dual attribute, it has its own uniqueness since it is not part of the Islamic *turâts*, while it, concurrently, has a significant correlation with *turâts* and even becomes the source of the emergence of various dimensions of culture.

In the book *al-Turâts wa al-Hadâtsah*, al-Jabiri identified two orientations in studying the *al-turâts*, namely: objectivity and continuity (al-Jabiri 1991a, 30). The former is aimed at revealing its relevance with the historical context (*mu'âshirah li nafsih*), while the latter is aimed at revealing its relevance with the current context (*mu'âshirah lanâ*). In general, *turâts* include all that we have inherited from the past, either in terms of meaning or material (al-Jabiri 1991a, 45). However, in a specific context, *turâts* is more intended to be in the form of aspects (heritage) of Islamic culture, such as those relating to creed, sharia, language, Sufism, philosophy and art literature. There are several steps required to meet both orientations, which include: First, structural-linguistic analysis as the heritage observed is revealed in the text (al-Jabiri 1991a, 32). By implementing this step, drawing meaningful conclusions before reading the text is prohibited to strengthening presuppositions or contemporary demands. These two things need to be placed in parentheses to

extract the objective meaning of the text; Second, historical analysis by linking between text and context. This is significantly required to reveal the historical meaning of the text (the author's thoughts) which correlates with its socio-cultural and genealogical settings and the plausibility of what the text expresses in the context of history; Third, the disclosure of the ideological view, such as the conceptual framework and fundamental values.

The second orientation demands our ability to uncover the relevance of the current context, i.e., the understanding of *turâts* fulfilling plausibility and practical application (al-Jabiri 1991a, 33). The application of the hermeneutic methodology is clearly apparent, for example, in al-Jabiri's study on al-Ghazali's thought as an example of the manifestation of *turâts*. The results of this study are stated in chapter VII of the book *al-Turâts wa al-Hadâtsah* entitled "Al-Ghazali's Thought: Determinant Factors that Influence and Its Contradictions". Three of al-Ghazali's significant works were analysed: *Ihyâ Ulûm al-Dîn*, *Tahâfut al-Falâsifah* and *Mi'yâr al-'Ilm*. By employing historical analysis, al-Jabiri argued that in terms of the historical setting, there were at least three main elements that influenced al-Ghazali's thinking: Islam, Neoplatonism and the Christian view (al-Jabiri 1991a). As al-Jabiri mentioned at the end of his study, contextualisation refers to "not unlike al-Ghazali who was found to be in a vortex of ideological-political contestations, contemporary Islamic thought will constantly be under such circumstances".

According to al-Jabiri (2008, 13), some parts of the Quran elucidate some of its other parts. How is this principle applied? Two things need to be methodologically classified: (1) The Quran as a collection of verses/surah in the *mushaf* and (2) The Quran as a series of verses/surah that were gradually revealed. In terms of history, we need to revisit the chronology of the revelation, while regarding absolutism and matters unrelated to specific contexts, we consider them an entirety of the Quran, in which some of its parts expound some others and the basis for that is *maqshûd al-syâri'* (God's intention) (al-Jabiri, 2007, 29). Undoubtedly, interacting with the Quran based on the chronology of the revelation is not an easy feat. Al-Jabiri (2007, 233) referred to certain opinions because he considered them more argumentative. In relation to the sequence of verses in the surahs, he regarded it as *tawqîfî* (taken for granted), while in terms of the order of the surahs, he saw it as a result of *ijtihâd* and agreement reached by the team assigned by the Caliph Uthman to compile the *mushaf*.

The Quran is an open text because it is composed of several gradually formed "autonomous" surahs (al-Jabiri 2007, 234). In fact, the surahs comprise several verses that are often related to diverse contexts. They originate from revelations that were passed down in response to a variety of ever-evolving (dynamic) situations.

This is what makes the Quran an open text (Arif 2020, 3392) because it is highly possible to understand and interpret the Quran without any strict attachment to "certain plots". It is a living text that progressed along with the *sîrah nabawiyah* (the story of the prophet). The sequence or chronology is indeed necessary, but this is actually not enough. Logic or reasoning is required to "synchronise" the motion/ flow of the *sîrah nabawiyah* with the formative sequence of the Quran. Al-Jabiri often criticised various narratives about the revelation of Quranic verses because it was considered not in line with the sequence of the formation of the Quran. As an example, he criticised the narrative stating that Surah al-Muzammil ranks third in the chronology of revelation, which was believed by many groups.

Al-Jabiri (2007, 248–249) classified the *sîrah nabawiyah* into several phases. During the *da'wah* (prophetic mission) period in Mecca, there were at least three important phases, namely: the secret phase—open *da'wah*—and the opposition to the idols of the Quraish and the Quraish's strong reaction against Muslims. It is certainly not easy to harmonise our understanding of the Quran with the flow of the events of the *sîrah nabawiyah* because not only are there many verses in a chapter revealed in different phases, but there are also various narratives that even frequently contradict one another (al-Jabiri 2007, 254; al-Thahiri 2016, 25). Thus, it is important to have not only a partial (*al-naz'ah al-tajzî'iyah*) understanding of *asbâb al-nuzûl* (background of Quranic revelation) but also a "contextual" understanding as a pillar of the rationality of religious law within the framework of public benefit considerations (al-Jabiri 2004, 61).

Al-Jabiri's Hermeneutical Approach and Its Application

Muslims believe that the Quran is the main source of Islamic sharia (tenets) which contains universal and particular teachings (al-Jabiri 1994a, 174), basic principles and practical applications. Basically, the provisions of particular laws are an implementation of universal principles. In accordance with legal rationale, if the provisions of particular laws seem to violate universal principles, then this is certainly due to a "reason" that may be contextual or a demand for the realisation of the main objective. There are three pillars for understanding the rationale of *syar'î* (Islamic) law, namely the universal principles of sharia, the provisions of particular laws, *al-maqâshîd* (ultimate goals) or *asbâb an-nuzûl* (al-Jabiri 1994a, 174).

Referring to the opinion of al-Syathibi, al-Jabiri affirmed two important principles: *kulliyyât al-syarî'ah* (universal principles of sharia) and *maqâshîd al-syari'ah* (the main purpose of sharia). *Kulliyât al-syari'ah* is general, fixed and binding, while *maqâshîd al-syari'ah*, which is the main objective includes: (1) Sharia is

established to provide human benefit, (2) Sharia is regulated to be understood, (3) Sharia is enacted for *taklîf* (religious duties) and (4) Sharia is established to prevent humans from being mired in their passions (al-Jabiri 1991a, 2011). In this case, what al-Jabiri highlighted is the need to establish a rational framework in *fiqh* and other religious thoughts. Such a rational framework was clearly applied by al-Jabiri, when interpreting human concepts and their human rights from an Islamic perspective. This also becomes a basis of hermeneutics in understanding and interpreting the "universal" verses of the Quran as a whole, in which some parts explain others and the legal determination refers to *maqshûd al-syâri'* (al-Jabiri 2007, 29).

Efforts to understand the Quran are recognised as an important task and a demand that needs to be carried out and satisfied in all periods of time (al-Jabiri 2008, 9). If we accept the view that the Quran is in dialogue with every ummah at all times, then this means that a new understanding of the Quran is needed in accordance with the demands of the times. The Quran is a text that has gone through a long process of revelation, so understanding it must be done by "separation" (*al-fashl*), which is to classify it from various products of interpretations and our "connection" (*al-washl*) to the current context with the authenticity of the Quranic text, once the various existing interpretations have been sterilised (al-Jabiri 2008, 10).

Referring to al-Syathibi's opinion in the book of *al-Muwâfaqât* (2009, 53), al-Jabiri (2008, 12) expressed the urgency of understanding the Quran based on the chronology of revelation. By doing so, we can read the Quran along with the *sîrah nabawiyah* and read the *sîrah nabawiyah* along with the Quran, in order to synchronise between the chronology of revelation and the process of the Prophet's preaching journey, both during the Mecca period and the Medina period. The importance of reading the Quran along with the *sîrah nabawiyah* has been strongly affirmed by other figures, such as M. Quraish Shihab (2011, xii), who says that one of the conditions for exploring the interpretation of the Quran is to properly understand the Prophet's tradition. Reading the Quran along with *sîrah nabawiyah* is intended to be able to appropriately interpret the verses of the Quran according to its historical context, as a stage of reading before contextualisation.

A brief overview of the application of al-Jabiri's hermeneutics approach can be observed in the discussions of the human concept in the Quran. Al-Jabiri mentioned several verses, such as al-Isrâ' (17:61–62, 70), al-Baqarah (2:30–32, 34–37), Hûd (11:61), ar-Rûm (30:9), Yûnus (10:14), al-A'raf (7:22–23), at-Tîn (95:4) and Ghâfir (40:64). Some of these verses are classified into the Mecca category and some are in the Medina category. Based on the principle that verses mutually interpret one another, al-Jabiri revealed a point that should be underlined, i.e.,

based on the mentioned verses, glorification of the human being is indicated as a comprehensive and integrated matter between glorifying the physical and spiritual aspects of the human being (al-Jabiri 2004, 206). According to descriptions given by *mufassir* (commentator) pertaining to Surah al-Isrâ' (17:70), the human concept covers at least two aspects: the intellectual and the cultural (al-Jabiri 1994a, 202). In addition, Allah ennobles humankind more than any other creation, including angels. Last but not least, humans are considered to be His caliph (vicegerent) responsible for preserving the earth's wealth and prosperity, they were taught His names and ways of repenting to Him (al-Jabiri 2004, 205; Esack 1997, 95–96).

Based on the description, the Quran does not dichotomise humans into a spiritual form and physical form at all, since according to the Quran the human concept considers a human being a fusion of body and soul, hence it can be observed that not a single verse underestimates the human body. The physical form, according to al-Zamakhsyari (d. 1144), is a manifestation of God's appreciation of man (al-Jabiri 2004, 206). Thus, the body (physical form) has rights and the soul also has rights. Human appreciation must include the recognition of human rights embedded within both body and soul. The human concept above can be analysed by reading Surah al-Isrâ' (17:70), "Indeed, we have dignified the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, granted them good and lawful provisions and privileged them far above many of Our creatures".

The word *karramnâ* (we have dignified) implies the meaning that He has afforded humans with inner respect and strength, which He did not extend to His other creations (Shihab, 2007, 522). In the books of *fiqh* it is mentioned that due to God's glorification of human beings, human corpses are considered not unclean (*najs*) even if they had been infidels, they must still be respected and buried properly. According to al-Zamakhsyari's interpretation in his book, *al-Kasysyâf*, al-Jabiri (1994a, 202) noted that the "unthinkable" concept of human strength in the verse includes two aspects, namely the intellectual and the cultural aspect (establishing culture). Even human potency, according to the majority of *mufassir*, outweighs all other creatures of God, including angels, because a human has been given the mandate of the caliphate (*istikhlâf*) as a vicegerent. Given such an understanding, according to al-Jabiri (1994a, 206), the Quran has never looked at the dualistic dichotomy between body and soul, so human respect basically refers to respecting both body and soul at once. Therefore, establishing basic human rights is most plausible; basic human rights such as the right to life, freedom and equality. From the Islamic perspective, human rights are all things material and immaterial that humans "possess" as a result of Allah's glorification of man above and beyond His other creatures (al-Jabiri 1994a, 209).

Religion was essentially revealed and bestowed unto humankind to complement the glorification of a human being (*takrîm al-insân*) so that people would not easily sacrifice the values of humanity in the name of religion. Religion is supposed to uphold human dignity, standards and values. However, due to different religious beliefs, people are fighting, hurting, or even killing one another (al-Jabiri 2004, 50), keeping in mind that this is clearly contrary to the principle of human glorification (Arif 2015, 49–50). In response to the wave of violence perpetrated in the name of religion, which embraces the ideology of "the battle for God" or "establishing God's rule" (in Meijer 2009, 260), some people actively encourage the religion of humanity that promotes the ideology of the God of Love (Hidayat 2004, 232–234), which is a call to reaffirm one's religious self-identity by having an active involvement in humanitarian missions, such as those relating to poverty, fraternity and justice.

Hermeneutics for Religious Education

In a broad sense, in an attempt to interpret, hermeneutics includes human actions and the products they bring into being, such as learning activities (Kneller 1984, 66), especially learning activities derived from the interpretation of sacred texts or canonical texts. In this context, religious education is a manifestation of learning activities that are obtained from the interpretation of sacred texts or canonical texts. Sacred texts and canonical texts are generated from the hegemony of reproductive-textual reason (*taulîd al-nushûsh*), which has constructed epistemological rules underlying the earlier texts, wherein the Quran is the first and main text (Abu Zayd 2006, 19–20) as well as the sacred text. When *taqlîd* (blind following) became more prominent, the opinions of Muslim scholars in their various works also became canonical texts that continued to be explained, interpreted and explored deeper into contents, they were even recognised as sacred *turâts* that increasingly promote the strengthening of textual production and reproduction.

The existing dominance of school-based religious education in Indonesia (Wibowo and Naupal 2018) is relevant to the critique of al-Jabiri which supports his stance adhering to the hermeneutic approach. In this context, at least there are two schools exist: (1) The school-based religious education which is related to a strong culture of *taqlîd* in religion and (2) The centric school and the culture of *taqlîd* causing the rise of various exclusive attitudes, such as traditional attitudes toward *turats* and leaning attitudes toward Salafi (al-Jabiri 1991a, 29–42). These two kinds of attitudes are the main reasons for the acceptance of the hermeneutical approach of al-Jabiri as it is needed. Relevant to the first school, the hermeneutic approach requires that religious education is responsive to reality and context, such as a

plurality of schools that require tolerance and citizenship, keeping in mind an education should be contextual (Barnes 2014, 4). Meanwhile, related to the second school, the hermeneutic approach requires the need for dynamic and critical understanding so one is not fettered by the rigid and static exegesis or "religionism" that is overwhelmed with rejection and exclusion of "others" (Barnet 2014, 130).

Based on that discussion, the hermeneutics of religious education is an attempt to interpret sacred or canonical texts and serve as a basis for the contextualisation of educational activity. Hermeneutics of religious education comes from an understanding of "humanistic" attitudes toward religion, which is to understand religious teachings as pivotal aspects needed by humans for self-development and the realisation of the public good (Sabasytari 2014, 5). According to the interpretation of the mentioned verses, religious education is expected to play a substantial role in fostering the self-awareness learners regarding "the glorification of a human being" (*takrîm al-insân*), so that they are able to humanise themselves and others despite different beliefs, ethnicities and cultures (al-Jabiri 1994a, 202; al-Daghasyi 2017, 48–50). Humanising oneself and others is one of the basic values of morality that are set as a parameter for assessing the ideal human being. At this point, educational activities strengthen the role of humanisation and hominization. Therefore, humanising human being set as the sole purpose of every educational activity is most reasonable (Bagir 2019, 34–36). Given the role of humanisation, education is required to be able to develop all human potentials that learners have, be it physical, intellectual, emotional or spiritual. Meanwhile, regarding its hominization role, education is expected to be able to enhance the human side of learners so that the individual's actualisation of their self-potential is conducted within the framework of participation in mutual respect, such as justice, care and tolerance.

In line with such a purpose, the concept of knowing self and others, introduced by John Valk (in Sporre and Mannberg 2010, 108), is interesting to discuss and elaborate on. This concept requires learners to explore various worldviews and also reflect on their own worldview in order to improve their understanding of interdependent relationships in life. In the context of religiousness, faith is the most fundamental worldview, in which one often only wishes to know one's own worldview and turns a blind eye to the worldviews of others, which more likely leads to intolerance and exclusiveness. Thus, religious education is expected to be able to develop and simultaneously foster two attitudes in learners, i.e., a strong belief in the truth of their own religion and respect for the other's beliefs (Suseno 2021, 46). In this case, it is important to note that tolerance is of utmost importance as one of the noble qualities of human beings, which enables us to accept diversities and respect them.

Considering that tolerance is of utmost importance, al-Jabiri (2003, 19) argued that tolerance is a positive value to strongly counter intolerant and radical attitudes and behaviours in the name of religion, which has, as of late, been a hot issue, especially in Indonesia (Sarwono 2012, 124). The Quran affirms the inevitable reality of diversity and difference. Accordingly, tolerance is needed to appreciate the positive meaning of diversity and difference (al-Jabiri 1994a, 216). Tolerance, fundamentally, acknowledges the inherent value of diversity and sets a moral demand to learn from that diversity (Turner 2011, 16). Tolerance is a crucial aspect of a plural society at both individual and community levels to accept, appreciate and appreciate diversity (Hjerm et al. 2020). However, in terms of relations between majority and minority groups, it is a fact that the minority as a target of tolerance often still considers the majority has not been fully committed in showing tolerance (Verkuyten, Yogeeswaran and Adelman 2020).

In the Living Values Education Programme, tolerance is a part of the universal values incorporated into the education curriculum and instilled through various learning activities (Lovat and Toomey 2009, 131). Some countries view the importance of tolerance as a "small virtue" that people need to realise living together in harmony (Zajda and Daun 2009, 21; Aspin and Chapman 2007, 243). In short, aside from being instilled through the education of values, tolerance is also fostered in civil and character education, as well as religious education. This shows that tolerance is a contributing factor to establishing civilised human life because extremism and religious radicalism have always been a serious threat and a latent danger to the diversity of the ummah since the early history of Islam until today (al-Jabiri 2004, 50–52), hence fundamental reform is required in ijtihad that does not merely discuss trivial issues. Similarly, fundamental reform is required in the education and learning model as one of the crucial issues that we need to respond intelligently (al-Jabiri 1991a, 42).

Once tolerance is considered a rule in one's action and behaviour, it would subsequently become a basic and preferential rule. A basic rule is, essentially, one of the rules of the game, while a preferential rule refers to the choices of attitude and action that a person takes within the framework of the basic rules (Apple 2004, 80). Tolerance introduces basic rules of behaving and taking action in various aspects of life, such as political, economic, social and religious. It is worth noting that with preferences and rules, people often display different attitudes and actions, such as in the field of religion and politics. Readiness to accept diversity and differences as a basic rule under tolerance is differently appreciated when it comes to political and religious issues. Thus, to wholly appreciate tolerance requires a person's ability to integrate the basic and preferential rules of tolerance in all aspects of life. This is relevant to al-Jabiri's affirmation (2003, 31) stating that in

order for tolerance to become an added value of justice, it is necessary for us to be willing to prioritise fulfilling the rights of others, which underlies the integration of basic and preferential rules.

Based on that, the vision of religious education should be to strengthen intellectual capabilities within the conceptual sphere and reinforce the principles of justice and equality within the scope of social relations. This vision is in line with the views of al-Jabiri (1991a, 15; 1994b, 86) who emphasised the importance of criticism on a traditional understanding of *turâts*, democratic principles based on human rights, freedom and equality, and tolerance and moderation. Through his critical view of traditional understanding, he proposed a hermeneutic approach to analysing *turâts*, so the ability to contextualise the readings of *turâts*, in general, and scriptures (revelation texts), in particular, is required. Considering the significance of democratic principles, he affirmed the universality of postulation and the main purpose of sharia in the frame of hermeneutic interpretation in various legal provisions of the revealed texts in order to be able to adapt and respond to the dynamics of human life issues (al-Jabiri 2004, 64). Meanwhile, by indicating the importance of tolerance and moderation, he reminded the latent danger of radicalisation and violent extremism, including those found in religion (Ali 2007, 315), which we constantly need to be aware of and are one of the serious problems for the ummah and global peace (Dauda 2020, 257–292). Conclusively, religious education activities are tasked with the mission of promoting an inclusive-tolerant attitude.

Conclusion

The Quran is an open text that embraces humankind throughout all the ages. As such, al-Jabiri was of the view that every generation of Muslims must initiate the production of a dynamic new understanding of this holy book in response to changing conditions. The revelation of the Quran, which transpired gradually with the "seven letters" (*sab'ati aḥruf*) model, indicates strong evidence pertaining to the openness of this scripture, which should be appreciated by applying the hermeneutic approach, i.e., uncovering the meaning and significance of Quranic verses based on the principle of "some verses elaborating other verses" (intertextual) and the chronology of revelation in order to produce interpretations that are contextual and in line with the context. The application of the hermeneutic approach is also needed in studying Islamic *turâts* to avoid traditional understandings that failed to meet the demands of objectivity (*al-maudlû'iyah*) and continuity (*al-istimrâriyah*).

The rational framework of sharia universality and the main purpose of sharia serve as the basis for applying the hermeneutic approach. This was used by al-Jabiri as an interpretive paradigm to contextualise the messages of the Quran

so that they can always be in constant dialogue with humans of all ages. Before the contextualisation process, it is necessary to first interpret the verses of the Quran according to the context and chronology of revelation by utilising the *sîrah nabawiyah*. Al-Jabiri conducted contextualised interpretation when attempting to formulate the concept of human rights based on the Quran. He identified various verses that reveal human dignity and basic rights. As an educational activity that underlies the understanding of sacred texts or canonical texts, religious education needs to apply a hermeneutic approach. One of the steps of contextualisation is the implementation of human dignity-based religious education by manifesting the role of humanisation and hominization. In the context of a plural society, in line with the role of humanisation and hominization, the educational process should be able to foster the learners' readiness in knowing the self and others so that they become critical, moderate and tolerant characters, society members and citizens.

Acknowledgements

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