

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**



## Critical Thinking of Muslim Societies: A Terror-Based Perspective

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### Abstract

After the declaration of war on terror, especially the events of September 2001 in the United States, we see that the terrorist organizations that made the Islamic religion a cover for them in their work have begun to reconfigure themselves intellectually based on the Islamic heritage, especially about the Qur'anic verses and the hadiths related to fighting. The organizations went to consolidate their fighting ideology by confronting the whole world, using a set of fatwas and rulings that were issued by Muslim religious scholars several centuries ago, especially during the era of the Mongolian invasion of the Islamic state and the accompanying calls for resistance by Muslim scholars, especially Ibn Taymiyyah. To facilitate their task of legislating the declaration of war on the whole world, they rejected any ideology opposing them. As the organizations resorted to strictness in adopting these fatwas and religious rulings, and in their explanation of texts, excluding any interpretation other than their objectives. Therefore, these organizations rejected critical thinking about religious texts, considering it a departure from Islam. The lack of maturity of this thinking approach among the general population of Muslims in the various countries made the task of the organizations in rejecting this approach easier. As we see that a critical approach to thinking in various scientific fields, including religion, does not exist in education in Islamic countries. That is why religious texts, including their interpretations, rulings, and fatwas, remained unchanged for centuries. Thus, it provided an appropriate environment for these organizations to expand within Islamic societies through thought related to the past that is not related to the present in anything except that it carried the same rulings, fatwas, and interpretations of religious texts.

Keywords: Critical thinking, terrorism

### 1 | INTRODUCTION

**T**errorist organizations try to exploit all loopholes in various fields to pass their ideas to

Muslim societies. The deterioration of the conditions for critical thinking in Islamic countries helps terrorist organizations to implement this. The war on terror is intellectual. So it must rely on critical thinking tools. But when critical thinking plays no role in this confrontation (Fazlur Rahman 1979, pp. 263-264). This confrontation will be fruitless in its intellectual consequences. Although there is space for critical thinking in the Islamic religion, as it gave the person freedom to contemplate various objects, and thus access to the facts of life and the universe through the mind (Al-Maaraj Magazine, 1997). However, this thinking approach is still weak in confronting terrorism, and the reason is due to the weakness of this scientific method in various areas of life in Islamic countries, so the issue is not limited to confronting terrorism. From here comes our study of this topic due to the great importance we get by using critical thinking, and the deterioration of religious discourse is one of the most important issues facing Muslims today, and we can fix it by adopting the scientific method. Despite the recognition of Muslim scholars that religious discourse needs a renewal process to keep pace with global developments, there are those who believe that this is a kind of courtship of Western civilization. Research objectives: To identify the concept of renewing religious discourse, and to uncover the ways and means by which Muslims reach the renewal of religious discourse. Study methodology: The analytical, descriptive, and comparative approach to reach valid and realistic results.

**The concept of critical thinking :** This term has many definitions that all agree that it is an unbiased sceptical, rational analysis or an evaluation of facts and evidence (Walters, 1994). So we can say that it is the ability to verify ideas, assumptions, or news, and to identify their validity. There is a close relationship that links critical thinking with the process of

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renewal in religious discourse, as we can only reach a correct religious speech through adopting a critical thinking approach to various matters related to the general understanding of the Islamic religion. Renewal is the revival of what was previously studied from the Qur'an and Sunnah, and the death of what came out of heresy (Ibn Manzur, 1958). Here we use the term renewal in the field of religious issues. As for religious discourse, it is what Islamic institutions raise about issues of Islam, whether it is through religious sermons, educational books, or through the media. Renewal, in its previous form, is rejected by large sectors of Muslim societies, whether religious or not. The reason for the rejection is multiple, which can be summarized in that they see it as a denial of the Prophet's Sunnah and that it contradicts the objectives of Islamic law because it is a change of facts in a way that suits Western civilization, it came because of Western pressure. And it leads to a break between the present and the past because it results in contempt for the companions of the Messenger, may peace and blessings be upon him. Their way of life and renewal will lead to open the door to Ijtihad (Diligence) for different people so that the ignorant are equal with the specialists in this work (Adam, 2017).

**The need for critical thinking in Islamic countries:** The problem facing Muslims is not coming from outside; that is, it is not related to countries that wish to control of Islamic countries, but in that exclusionary thinking that only sees its convictions while working to exclude others. This mentality fuels internal hatreds among Islamic societies themselves, as well as supporting various ideas that result in the rejection of others from non-Islamic societies, its mentality that leads to the decline of various human and cultural values (Mahfouz, 2019). When we look at the Arab countries, we see that they are full of many international conflicts in a way that makes them the highest in the world in terms of the rate of international conflicts, as there are 12 politically unstable countries out of 22 Arab countries (Ashour, 2019). Therefore, some Arab and Islamic countries called for a review of religious discourse because of the violence it produces. Renewal aims to show the universality of Islam for the various aspects of life, and renewal leads to a correct understanding

of the Islamic religion (Smik, 2020). The traditional discourse that relies on indoctrination to the listeners without involving them in the intellectual dimensions of religious texts is no longer acceptable, as it must be a discourse based on dialogue in a way that contributes to the existence of generations of people capable of correctly understanding religion. Critical thinking leads to progress and leads to making societies more mobile and vibrant instead of the stillness that they have lived through for centuries. Societies only develop using reason, which is necessary for growth and progress. The true delusion is by rejecting reason in the name of truth and accepting superstition in the name of faith (Al-Hafi, 2019). As for making the religious text the focus of judgment on all matters of life, this leads to disruption of the mind and thus away from progress and development. Critical thinking is important from the educational point of view in building ideas, theories, input processes, and the overall educational process. The process of renewal in the discourse highlights the flexibility that Islamic thought enjoys. It is also necessary because the discourse is a different and varied process according to the different societies in their culture. Also, renewal does not mean distorting or changing the thought, but rather related to the style of dialogue and address, which are the true mirror that highlights any thought. It reformulates rulings issued centuries ago and does not intend to abolish them, as it demands the opportunity for everyone to participate in trying to arrive at the truth of the religious message of Islam by recognizing texts and re-reading them in a deeply intellectual manner without the intention of deliberate intellectual distortion (Rashid bin Zaina, 2004, P. 13). The emergence of many customs and philosophies that led to changing people's perception of religion in a way that led to much delusion and distancing from the truth of religion, such as the emergence of terrorism. We also note that the clerics who advocate for guidance are unqualified people. Mosque preachers also focus on matters other than life and people's affairs. The issuance of many fatwas that indicate an unrealistic view of things without a correct reading of reality (Ibn Qayyim, 1973). The emergence of terrorism and its increasing threat to Islamic societies, and its use of the Islamic religion as a cover for it to pass its

extremist ideas and actions (Al-Labban, 2015). All of this justifies the need to reconsider the religious discourse in a manner based on critical thinking. This need became urgent after the emergence of ISIS, as the problem of religious discourse is not related to Muslims and their societies only, but extends outside Islamic societies, especially towards the West, in a way that increased intellectual extremism in various global societies as a result of the strict religious discourse carried by terrorist organizations (Future Center) For Research and Advanced Studies, 2015). Because of this, it is necessary to replace the traditional hardline discourse with a civilized one. Critical thinking eliminates intellectual ills (Jerwan, 1999). As the process of indoctrination and memorization only create societies based on the idea of obedience to everything, even if it is wrong (Kishaneh, 2019). It also leads to the closure of the mind on everything old. The prerequisite for the renewal process is through re-studying Islamic heritage (Abu Zeid, 2002). To achieve this, it requires a review of interpretations of religious texts in line with reality, with their important issues, especially in the field of human rights (Christian, 2007). Thus reducing the possibility of adopting false beliefs and this contributes to the increasing awareness among Muslims that the religion does not include acts of terror and violence against others emanating from terrorist organizations.

**The reality of critical thinking in Islamic countries:** Islamic countries lack the scientific approach in educational institutions. Where education goes against the global trend, in a way that it lacks clear goals that make us unable to know its success. Curricula in schools and universities do not encourage critical thinking (Qatami, 1990). The same applies to the religious phenomenon and the religious discourse, as we notice that public criticism of these matters is a new matter in Islamic societies, in a way that has made many accuse those calling for the renewal of being apostates from the Islamic religion. The religious hardliners demanded Islamization of modernity instead of modernizing the discourse (Abu Zeid, 1996). The weakness of critical thinking of religious sayings has led Islamic societies to turn towards inflammatory discourse based on religion, whether within an internal framework within Islamic sects or

towards other religions (Shabar, 2009).

**Difficulties facing critical thinking in Islamic societies:** Religious discourse raises controversy between those who see that the secularists want to change and distort the constants related to the Islamic religion under the pretext of harmony with the circumstances of the age, and those who believe that the goal of renewal is to develop the means of advocating Islam and to renew the statement of the rulings of religion to people in a correct way, away from violence. Many opponents of critical thinking claim that critiquing religious statements is a criticism of Islam, and this makes criticism fraught with danger. Many also see the process of criticism as part of a campaign targeting religion coming from the West. (Yassin, 2015) says that the process of renewal in the Islamic religious discourse has coincided with Western demands for that so that it appears as a response to Western countries. At the beginning of the last century, the Western colonialist was. In this stage, we find that the war on terror made Muslims the first culprits in it, and therefore consideration of the issue of renewal becomes a mere response to the requirements of the West. Consequently, this leads to increased difficulties, especially with the opinion that religious statements are axioms that do not accept criticism and review. Many scholars of our time abandon the process of interpretation that does not agree with the old sayings for fear of being attacked by extremists.

There are fears by many that accepting criticism will lead to the distortion of the Islamic religion. They believe that the religious sciences produced by the early Muslims can be compatible with the current era. Likewise, critical thinking as a whole does not appeal to many Islamic regimes because it leads to a discussion of many matters that these regimes believe that discussing is the preserve of them only, especially about human rights. The implementation of the religious reform process difficult because of the double standards of the regimes' view of this matter. They call for a moderate religious discourse and at the same time reject any intellectual discussion based on criticism.

**Method of introducing critical thinking in Islamic societies:** In the educational process, critical

thinking is based on: the curriculum, the teacher, the school environment, the student. The curriculum should prompt the student to think critically (Gunn, 1993). In Islamic countries, we find that educational curricula support the process of memorization and indoctrination, not thinking and creativity. Also, the teacher in most these states suffers from problems related to his material reality and level of qualification, he does not know what is intended by critical thinking and does not know how to work with it. He does not have those skills that make him a critical thinker, as he adopts traditional thinking in a way that makes him a teacher Mimic in his various behaviors. Even if there is a teacher who encourages critical thinking, it is an exceptional work, not a general case. Yet, he will not be able to creativity because he adhered to the curriculum that does not encourage the mind (Fisher, 1990). The same is true for the educational environment that does not encourage critical thinking, as it is a traditional environment that belongs to the past. It is difficult to find educational leadership to stimulate critical thinking. All of these lead to the graduation of students who carry science and not innovators or participants in its development. In religious sayings, the scientific method requires opening the door for inquiries and a comprehensive review according to a modern critical process. Also, according to this thinking, nothing is immune to research and re-reading, and there is nothing excepted in scientific research. (See Nasr Hamid Abu Zeid, Al-Ahram Weekly, 2002). Religious speeches should be far from summoning the ready-made sermons that passed through long ages, as these speeches are historical. Therefore, they cannot be considered valid for different eras - thus disrupting the mind from any attempt to renew these discourses and interpretations of religious texts (Al-Shimi, AlDargami, 2017). The same applies to fatwas; review in an analytical manner consistent with reality (Nassar, 2015). The religious text is sacred. As for the interpretation, fatwas, and rulings issued by scholars, they need to be re-read again in a way that allows criticism of them. Qualifying and training religious leaders to play this role. Likewise, writing curricula for religious education in schools and universities in a way that supports the renewal of religious discourse, particularly discourse related

to the goals of Islamic law. Developing the work of those in charge of calling for guidance, by establishing specialized institutes, and not leaving this matter unattended because it is a door through which extremists pass through.

Here, the new religious discourse must encourage the fight against extremism in all its forms and on properly promoting the love of life. Should stay away from all forms of sectarian partisanship that contributed to the increase in the intensity of the religious discourse towards extremism (Nassar, 2016). To reach religious reform, there must be freedom not only in terms of criticism of religion but in all aspects of life.

**Rejection by terrorist organizations of critical thought:** The domination of the religious text leads to extremism and religious intolerance. It happened previously in Europe during the Middle Ages, and today we see it among Muslims. Such control based on what is permissible and forbidden over all matters of life will inevitably lead to deviation, and thus the ideological extremism that generates terrorism. Because of state of intellectual stagnation among Muslims and the closure of the door of Ijtihad (Diligence), there has been confusion between religion and social and historical heritage in negative images that lead to isolation and violence (Fadlallah, 2008). The threat of terrorism that we face today, and the possibility of it returning at any time, is due to the stagnation of religious thought, which ceased ijtihad (Diligence) since the first centuries of the emergence of Islam, in a way that makes it today not compatible with the requirements of the times. Hence, terrorist organizations' fight against any critical thinking because it will inevitably lead to the elimination of their ideological ideology based on religious fallacies based on explaining religious texts in the wrong way.

Critical thinking in Islam: Islam as a way of life is considered a civilizational project that develops from within it a civilized heritage related to various aspects of social and cultural life (Ahmet, 2003, p109). If we examine the Islamic history, we will find it full of renewal and Ijtihad (Diligence) from the religious point of view. Where the era of the Companions of the prophet, may God bless him

and grant him peace, and their followers was full of renewal away from blind imitation. Those people understood the comprehensiveness and broadness of Islam, and they realized the validity of its texts for all eras, so that they understood them according to their age. The emergence of jurisprudence doctrines is part of the renewal process in a way that enables them to understand the religious text according to the reality in which they live. The Qur'an is considered the core of the Islamic faith, and it is a book revealed by God Almighty. Therefore, it is an eternal book, the form and content of which it is forbidden to change (AbouElFadl, 2003). The Qur'an encourages critical thinking that comes from examination and correct understanding of matters. God Almighty says in Surat Hood verse 118: (And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ). The meaning that we can understand from this verse in the subject of our study: The blameworthy is alienation and fighting, because they are a departure from the nature of human relations based on peace and cooperation. At the same time the difference in its natural limits leads to the enrichment of human relations. The Almighty Allah stated in the Quran:

”لِّلّٰهِ وَاللّٰمِ الْاَلْمَنَةُ فَـ اَوْسَلَ اُقِـ سَمُ بـ ” تعالى قال (القيامة:2)

Interpretation of this verse: Here, God swears by the human soul that practices the process of blame, accountability, review, and criticism to reach the ideal level in dealing with various matters (Journal of Contemporary Islamic Issues, 1999). And in verse No. 14 of Surat AlQiyama, we also find it encourages self-criticism by reminding us of human insight and the ability to understand things. The Qur'an invites us to review the stories of the prophets and learn about the behavior and stances of societies so that we can take lessons. The Qur'an also criticizes in surat Al-Zukhruf, verses 22 and 23, the tradition of fathers and grandfathers in their attitudes and choices. Also, the first word from the first verse revealed to the prophet, may blessings and peace be upon him, is the word Iqra (read), and it is not mean the literal meaning of reading. The prophet does not know how to read, rather it means thinking. Many scholars decide that the Qur'an text is an open concept, and therefore the possibility of many interpretations of it

in a way that makes it valid for every place and time. Many Quranic verses that call for critical thinking of man about various natural and human phenomena (Al-Awda, 2017). The prophet said blessings are upon him:

رأسكل عول الأمة لهذه بيعث هلا [إن والسالم: الصلاة عليه الن قال دينها] لها يجدد من سنة مائة

(Abu Dawood, Book of Epics, No. 4291). The meaning of this hadith transmitted from the Prophet, the call for renewal in accordance with the times.

## 2 | CONCLUSION:

The introduction of critical thinking into the human mind of Muslim societies is in itself a real crisis that reaches the point that we can consider it as a conflict between different sectors of society, not just between two parties, each of which questions the intentions of others, especially when the subject is related to religious texts and sayings. Despite the recognition of intellectuals, politicians, and clerics (except the ideological hardliners) of the need to start a real correction in various aspects of life regarding the introduction of intellectual criticism, we find that all these projects do not go beyond the limit of discussions and conferences, and result in nothing but confusion on this topic. The reason for the failure of this process is due to the conflict of interests and their differences between them, where we notice a near-consensus among these groups on the need to renew the religious discourse directed at the West, as for the renewal of the internal religious speech, it is not in the interest of many of them to activate this matter. Beneficiaries of the failure in the subject of intellectual criticism Terrorist movements and organizations that consider critical thinking a threat and a challenge to their ideological ideologies.

## 3 | RECOMMENDATIONS:

Religious discourse needs to re-read religious sayings and texts from a critical angle, and to activate critical thinking we need to include it in education and various areas of life, and it is not possible to

reach a point where we say that Islamic societies can advance in critical thinking without freedom and democracy. In the current state of ambiguity in terms of the introduction of critical thinking, extremism will increase in the number of its followers and the severity of its positions. Many in Islamic societies see this scene as nothing but a new picture and scene of the struggle against Islam and Muslims with attractive titles such as the renewal of religious discourse and the war on terror. Consequently, we cannot reduce the severity of extremism except by moving forward with critical thinking, provided that it is in the various areas of life, especially those related to political, economic, and social aspects, and not only in the religious and cultural fields.

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