



CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE REJECTION OF RICHARD BELL'S THOUGHTS ON THE TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'AN IN THE CONTEXT OF ORIENTALISM

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ABSTRACT

Richard Bell is a well-known English orientalist who focuses his research on the Qur'an with a critical academic approach. Bell's approach involves methods of historical, linguistic, and critical analysis to understand the Quran in historical and cultural contexts. However, this approach raises rejection from Muslim scholars who believe that the Bell method is inadequate to understanding the true meaning of the Quran as divine revelation. This study is to study the rejection of the approach of Richard Bell in the interpretation of the Qur'an by Muslim scholars and scientists. The main objective is to understand the basics of the arguments used in this denial and to evaluate its compatibility with the basic principles in interpreting the Quran according to the Islamic tradition. This research methodology uses a qualitative approach with methods of document analysis. Data is obtained from literature that deals with the works and approaches of Richard Bell, as well as texts that explain the views of Muslim scholars and academics on the interpretation of the Qur'an. The analysis was conducted to identify points of rejection of the Bell method and to evaluate the underlying arguments. Muslim scholars reject Richard Bell's approach to the Quran because they believe it doesn't fully respect the Quran as divine revelation. They think his methods are too focused on history and criticism, not capturing the Quran's true meaning. They prefer interpretations that consider the context of revelation, Prophet Muhammad's explanations, and see the Quran as a unified whole. They also doubt Bell's historical criticism and say Western academic methods have limits in understanding religious texts. Overall, they find Bell's approach doesn't fit Islamic principles of Quran interpretation. The rejection of Richard Bell's approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an is based on the belief that its historical and critical methods are insufficient to understand the true meaning of this sacred text.

Keywords: Orientalist, Qur'an, Authenticity

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INTRODUCTION

Orientalism, as a study of the East pioneered by Western scholars like Richard Bell, is often criticized for being seen as a tool in the project of colonialism. This view suggests that the knowledge produced by the Orientalists is not only aimed at understanding the cultures and religions of the East, but also to dominate and control the communities in the region. Colonialization includes not only physical conquest, but also intellectual colonization that uses study and knowledge as a tool to maintain power. Criticism of orientalism highlights that orientalist often view Eastern culture from a perspective co-opted by Western political and economic interests, leading to biases in their interpretation and representation. Stereotypes created by Orientalists, such as those criticized by Richard Bell's thinking, can influence the global perception of Islam and Muslims. Representations that simplify the complexity of culture and religion can lead to a superficial and inaccurate understanding of existing reality. Therefore, this criticism emphasizes the need for a more nuanced and balanced approach to studying different societies and religions, which recognizes their internal diversity and complexity ([Muzayyin, 2015](#)).

Richard Bell introduced a critical methodology in the study of the Qur'an that includes literary and historical analysis. His skeptical approach to the sacred text attempts to delineate the Quran through a textual method that emphasizes critical aspects, often considered controversial by Muslim scholars. They see that this approach can reduce the divine dimension of the Quran, which they regard as revelations that cannot be fully understood through the lens of historical and critical analysis alone ([Haqan A, 2011](#)).

A profound criticism of Orientalism, including Bell's contribution, is expressed in the work of Edward Said entitled "Orientalism". (1978). Said highlighted that orientalism, with its ethnocentric and reductionist tendencies, served as a legitimate tool for Western domination over the East. This criticism provides an important context in understanding how Orientalists like Bell can be seen as part of the intellectual framework that supports Western hegemony over the knowledge of the Islamic world. Furthermore, the rejection of Bell's thinking is also reflected in the works of scholars such as John Wansbrough, who offered an alternative approach to the study of the Qur'an by highlighting the sources and methods of Scriptural interpretation ([Syaifulah, 2020](#)). Critics of Muslim scholars such as Fazlur Rahman stressed the importance of adopting a more contextual approach and appreciating Islamic traditions in interpreting sacred texts, in response to the reductionism they saw in Bell's approach.

Research suggests that rejection of Bell is often driven by reactions to colonial bias in the study of orientalism. Bell's works are thought to reflect a Western view that humiliates Islamic culture, thus rejected by many Muslim scholars. Analysis shows that there is a fundamental difference between the historical-critical methodology

used by Bell and traditional approaches to Islamic studies. This rejection reflects the wider epistemological contradiction between Western academic methods and more conservative Islamic traditions ([Gade F, 2021](#))

METHODS

This research methodology uses a qualitative approach with methods of document analysis. Data is obtained from literature that deals with the works and approaches of Richard Bell, as well as texts that explain the views of Muslim scholars and academics on the interpretation of the Qur'an. The analysis was conducted to identify points of rejection of the Bell method and to evaluate the underlying arguments.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Concept Of Orientalist Interpretation Approach In Islam

Orientalism comes from the word "orient", which in Latin and some other Western languages means East. The term refers to various fields of study related to research on Eastern nations in all their aspects, including religion, language, science, literature, art, and others. In general, the term is used to describe the study of issues related to the existence and distinctiveness of Eastern nations. The Orient refers to the part of the world identified by Western Europeans as encompassing all nations located east of the European continent. Westerners divide this region into three main parts: Near East, Middle East, and Far East.

The roots of the Orientalist movement can be traced to the collecting and translation of texts from the Islamic intellectual heritage, particularly from Arabic to Latin, which began in the Middle Ages in Europe. This activity was generally initiated by Christian theologians. As a result of these collecting efforts, the Museum of London and the Mingana Collection in the UK are some of the institutions that hold the largest collections of Islamic manuscripts in the world. Orientalism then developed into an important tradition of scholarship in the Western world, resulting in the establishment of various Islamic, Middle Eastern, and Religious Studies programs in universities. For example, the University of London established SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), McGill University in Canada, Leiden University in the Netherlands with its Department of Islamic Studies, and the University of Chicago, University of Edinburgh, and University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, among many others, also contributed to the development of this academic field.

Orientalism is the viewpoint of Westerners towards non-Western nations, such as those of the Middle East and Asia, which are often viewed with racial prejudice. Westerners seek to study the cultures, histories and religions of these Eastern nations using Western methods and approaches. This article aims to describe, explore and critically analyze the thoughts of orientalists in the field of tafsir and hadith studies.

After Europe emerged from the dark ages of the Middle Ages, they directed their attention to the Eastern territories and colonized them. The aim of the colonizers was to control the countries and their people, and to eliminate the beliefs that had developed in the hearts of Muslims.

In an in-depth study of Orientalism, colonialism and its impact on Islam, we must start from the historical roots and basic conceptions of how the West views and understands the Eastern world. Orientalism, first introduced in the 18th century by European scholars, was not just an academic study of Eastern languages, literature and culture, but also an important political tool in justifying colonial domination. Along with the rise of European imperialism, Orientalism evolved into a discipline that not only described, but also reformulated the identity and role of the "Orient" in a global context.

Edward Said, in his influential work "Orientalism" (1978), criticized Orientalism as a product of colonial powers that sought to control knowledge about the Eastern world. Said highlighted how Orientalism was not only an intellectual tool, but also an ideological one in justifying Western domination of its colonized territories. Orientalist perspectives, according to Said, often portrayed Eastern societies as exotic, primitive and inferior, which justified inhumane colonial treatment.

In the context of colonialism, Orientalism played a key role in shaping and reinforcing the narrative of the need for a "civilizing mission" in the Eastern world. This concept holds that the West has a moral responsibility to bring civilization and modernity to "backward" societies in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. This idea was not only used to legitimize economic and political exploitation, but also to maintain hegemony over resources and political power in the colonies.

In the context of Islam, Orientalism not only studies religion as a religious phenomenon, but also as a political force that can be utilized or manipulated by colonial powers. One example of this is the misuse of the Wahdaniyah (one God) doctrine in Islam. Wahdaniyah is a basic principle in Islam that emphasizes the unity and divinity of God. However, in the hands of colonial Orientalism, this concept was often misused to claim that Muslims who did not submit to colonial rule were extremists or radicals.

The impact of Orientalism on human values cannot be ignored either. Distorted representations of Eastern societies, including Muslim societies, often lead to dehumanization that justifies inhumane treatment of them. This includes cultural oppression, the creation of racial and ethnic hierarchies, and the use of violence and repression to maintain colonial control.

Critiques of Orientalism have emerged from various perspectives, including postcolonial approaches that challenge Western domination of knowledge and representations of the East. This position emphasizes that Orientalism is not just a

neutral academic study, but a product of colonial ideologies that support and reinforce global inequalities.

Nonetheless, Orientalism is not entirely negative in its influence. It has also triggered reactions and resistance within Muslim societies to defend their religious identity and reclaim the correct interpretation of Islamic teachings from their own perspective. This includes efforts to rediscover the true values of monotheism, such as the Wahdaniyah school, and free themselves from the dominance of foreign interpretations that influence their understanding of their own religion and culture.

In the contemporary context, it is important to continue to explore how the legacies of Orientalism and colonialism continue to influence global relations between the West and the East, as well as their implications in today's political, social and cultural dynamics. By understanding the historical background and theoretical complexities of Orientalism, we can build a more critical and inclusive insight into cultural, religious, and identity differences in this increasingly connected world.

2. The Concept Of Science In Islamic And Orientalist Thought

Science is a collection of knowledge used to investigate, discover and improve understanding of various problems through the use of certain concepts and theories, and through the application of objective, methodological, systematic and universal scientific methods.

In Islamic thought, science is the Islamization of science, Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi is a famous figure with the idea of Islamization of science, which he sees as a solution to the dualism in the current Muslim education system. For Al-Faruqi, this dualism needs to be abolished and replaced with an integrated Islamic paradigm. This integration is not simply imitating the West or meeting practical economic or career needs, but rather a mission to apply the Islamic vision in the context of time and space.

Naquib Al-Attas also developed the concept of Islamization of contemporary science by highlighting the main challenge facing Muslims, namely the secularization of science. For Al-Attas, the Islamization of science stems from the overall concept of Islamization. This includes liberating humanity from all forms of magic, myth, animism, and national cultural traditions.

Other criticisms of the Islamization of science go beyond the issue of the neutrality of science itself, but also include a misunderstanding of the concept of Islamization itself. Critics often criticize Islamization approaches that are undertaken without a clear epistemological basis. They highlight that Islamization that only focuses on surface aspects, such as labeling or attaching Islamic instruments, is inadequate. Some frequently mentioned critics include Fazlur Rahman, Abdussalam, Muhsin Mahdi, Bassam Tibi, Abdul Karim Soroush, Pervez Hoodbhoy, and others. In general, these

critics argue that science involves the objective examination of facts independent of human, cultural, or religious influences, and should remain separate from such values.

There is an Islamization of science from the perspective of four main figures, namely Sayyed Hossein Nasr, Ismail Raji' Al-Faruqi, Seyyed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, and Ziauddin Sardar, is that they have diverse views on how the Islamization of science should be done and what impact it will have on Islamic society and the wider world. Sayyed Hossein Nasr, through his concept of Islamic science, emphasizes the importance of a Divine intellect and not merely human reason. For Nasr, science must be directed towards accessing the sacred, and sacred science (*scientia sacra*) must remain the main way to unite truth and happiness with reality. Ismail Raji' Al-Faruqi, in his work, suggested the Islamization of science by emphasizing the importance of creative synthesis between Islamic heritage and modern science. However, his approach has been sharply criticized by Ziauddin Sardar, who doubts the relevance of this approach as it seems to force modern science to become relevant to Islam, rather than the other way around. Seyyed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas views Islamization as an effort to liberate from secular control of reason and language, stressing the importance of Islamizing language as a first step. Al-Attas also highlighted the importance of filtering Western science to fit the Islamic worldview. Ziauddin Sardar, on the other hand, voiced a sharp criticism of the concept of Islamization of science, asserting that science is universal and should not be interfered with by religion or culture. For him, the paradigm of science must be based on universal empirical concepts and rationality, without religious interference in the scientific process.

In orientalist thought, science is viewed from a very different perspective to the modern Western approach. They emphasize the historicity and contextuality of science, paying attention to how intellectual development in the East, especially in the context of Islam and other cultures, was influenced by factors such as religion, scholarly traditions, literature, and philosophy. Orientalists also explore the influence of Eastern religions and philosophies on science, highlighting how religious thought influences the understanding and reception of science within local cultural frameworks.

Classical studies and textual studies of ancient texts in Arabic and other languages are an important focus for orientalists, who seek to translate and interpret Eastern contributions in fields such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine and more. They also often compare the development of science in the East with Western scientific traditions, considering methodologies, scientific discoveries, and epistemological concepts in an attempt to determine the interaction and mutual influence between the two regions in the development of global science.

In addition, orientalists examine cultural interactions between the East and the West as well as the role of trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange in the transmission of knowledge. This approach illustrates science as an integral part of the intellectual ~~heritage of the East, understood within their own historical, religious and cultural~~

contexts. This perspective often differs and even contradicts the modern Western paradigm which is more universal and based on the epistemology dominant in the West.

Orientalist thinking about science reflects a complex and profound view of the role of Eastern cultures in the development of human knowledge. They not only see science as a collection of facts and theories, but also as a reflection of the values, beliefs and traditions that exist in the societies that produce it. In contrast to Western approaches that tend to claim universality and objectivity, orientalists offer a more contextual and relative point of view, recognizing that science is inseparable from the social, cultural and historical conditions in which it emerges.

Orientalists' historical approach to science allowed them to explore the conceptual and practical evolution of science in various Eastern intellectual traditions. They understood that the development of science in the East was often closely linked to advances in specific scientific disciplines such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine and alchemy, all of which were influenced by local cultural and religious contexts. For example, the significant advances of Arab mathematics in the Middle Ages in algebra and geometry, or the contributions of Persian astronomy in stargazing and the positioning of celestial bodies. Orientalists are also interested in highlighting how science in the East, particularly in the Islamic tradition, gained legitimacy and support from local religious and intellectual institutions. They studied how Islamic scholars and intellectuals such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina not only made intellectual breakthroughs in science, but also unified knowledge based on reason and revelation in their systems of thought.

The influence of religion in orientalist thought on science is significant. They showed how Islamic religious values, doctrines and theology influenced their views and approaches to science. An example is the idea that the universe was created by God and that humans are given the responsibility to explore knowledge and truth in the universe as a form of worship and submission.

Classical studies and textual studies are also important aspects of the orientalist approach to science. They investigated classical texts in Arabic and Persian to understand the intellectual contributions of the East in various fields of knowledge. For example, the works of Ibn Sina in philosophy and medicine, or Al-Biruni in geography and astronomy, are examples of how orientalists try to explore and interpret the intellectual heritage of the East.

Comparison with Western scientific traditions is also an important focus in orientalist studies of science. They not only evaluate scientific advances and methodologies, but also try to understand the dynamic interaction between East and West in the exchange of knowledge. The epistemological shift from East to West, especially during the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment, is often a focal point to see how ideas and

knowledge from the Eastern world are accepted, adapted or rejected in an increasingly secular and empirical Western context.

Cultural interaction between East and West is another important element in orientalist studies of science. They examine how trade, diplomacy and cultural exchange facilitated the transfer of knowledge between these two regions. For example, the introduction of Arabic alchemy and medicine to Europe through the intercession of Muslim Spain, or the transmission of astronomy from India to the Islamic world and then to Europe.

Overall, orientalists offer a rich and detailed perspective on the role of science in Eastern civilization. They appreciate the historical and contextual complexities in the development of science in the East, as well as how religious, cultural, and social values formed the foundation for this intellectual knowledge. Thus, orientalist studies are not only about understanding science as an accumulation of facts and theories, but also as a mirror of the long journey of human intellect in various cultures and traditions around the world.

3. Richard Bell's Thinking and His Difference To The Translation Of Al-Kur'an In The Contact Of Orientalism

Richard Bell was a well-known English orientalist who focused his research on the Qur'an with a critical academic approach. Born in 1876 and studying at the University of Oxford, Bell is known as an academic who specializes in the study of Islam and the Qur'an. Bell's approach to the Qur'an is very different from the previous Islamic interpretation tradition, in that he uses methods of historical, linguistic, and critical analysis. Bell sought to understand the Qur'an objectively in the historical and cultural context, seeing it not only as a sacred book, but also as a cultural phenomenon that has significant historical value.

One of the main features of Bell's approach is the use of historical and critical methods in the interpretation of the Qur'an. He tried to identify historical events that might affect the revelation of the Quran. According to Bell, understanding the historical context in which the Quran was revealed is the key to understanding the meaning of the text. In this case, Bell positioned the Quran as an object of study to be analyzed in the same way as other ancient texts, without treating the text exclusively as divine revelations.

Bell's linguistic approach is also very significant. He analyzed the classical Arabic language used in the Qur'an, studying the structure of the language, the style of writing, and the use of words. Bell believed that an in-depth understanding of classic Arabic was essential to interpreting the Quran accurately. Through linguistic analysis, Bell tries to uncover the nuances and meanings that may be hidden behind the texts of the Qur'an, which are often difficult to understand by modern readers.

In addition, Bell used a critical approach in his interpretation, aimed at eliminating religious bias and achieving a more neutral and objective understanding of the text. This approach often raises controversy, especially amongst Muslim scholars and academics, who may not agree with Bell's methods and conclusions. However, for Bell, it is important to look at the Qur'an from a broader perspective and not limited to a purely religious perspective.

One of Bell's major works is his book "Introduction to the Qur'an", published in 1953. In this book, Bell presents an in-depth analysis of the structure of the Qur'an, examines its verses, and discusses the historical and cultural context around the time of the revelation. Bell describes the Qur'an as a literary work rich in cultural and historical values, which is important to be studied in the context of universal culture. Bell's view of the Qur'an often sparked debate and controversy. Criticism of his approach usually revolves around disagreement in understanding the meaning of sacred texts considered divine revelations in Islam. Many Muslim scholars may feel that Bell's approach is too focused on historical and critical analysis, thus ignoring the religious and spiritual dimensions of the Qur'an. However, Bell argues that this approach is important for achieving a more comprehensive and objective understanding of the text.

In general, Richard Bell's contribution to the study of the Qur'an provides a foundation for the development of Islamic studies in the West. His approach focused on academic and historical analysis has opened up new insights for researchers and academics. Although often debated, Bell's thinking about the Qur'an continues to be a relevant topic in discussions about the relationship between Western science and the understanding of Islam in the contemporary era. Bell's contributions show that a critical and historical approach to sacred texts can provide valuable insights and enrich our understanding of humanity's cultural and religious heritage.

In this context, it is important to understand that Bell does not intend to degrade or underestimate the religious values contained in the Qur'an. Instead, he sought to explore the text from different perspectives to obtain a more comprehensive and in-depth view. His approach reflects an effort to unify scientific and academic methods with the study of religious texts, which can ultimately enrich intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

In conclusion, Richard Bell is a controversial yet important figure in the study of the Qur'an. His work has opened the door to new approaches to understanding religious texts, emphasizing the importance of historical, linguistic, and critical analysis. Though Bell's views and methods often differ from the more conventional traditions of Islamic interpretation, his contribution remains an integral part of the study of Islam in the West. Through his work, Bell has made significant contributions to shaping Western understanding of the Qur'an, highlighting the importance of a more objective and comprehensive approach to the studies of sacred texts.

~~The rejection of Richard Bell's thought about the interpretation of the Qur'an is based~~

on several arguments involving a traditional Islamic approach to the sacred text. Here are some of the reasons used by Muslim scholars in rejecting Bell's orientalist approach:

1. One of the main reasons for denial of Bell's thinking is that he tends to see the Qur'an as a historical and cultural text, not as a divine revelation that Allah has sent down to Muhammad SAW. In the Islamic tradition, the Quran is believed as the perfect and unimaginable Word of Allah, which is sent down through direct revelation. Every word and verse in the Qur'an is considered to have a profound meaning and cannot be separated from its divine context.

2. Inadequate Linguistic Approach Bell uses linguistic analysis to understand classical Arabic in the Qur'an. However, Muslim scholars argue that Bell's linguistic approach is not sufficient to understand the depth of the meaning of the Quran. The Arabic language in the Qur'an has its own uniqueness that encompasses the literary beauty, the clarity of the law, and the spiritual depth. This understanding often requires in-depth knowledge of the Nahwu (Tata language), Balaghah (rhetoric), and other knowledge related to the Arabic Qur'an. Bell's technical and historical approach is thought to ignore this scientific and spiritual dimension.

3. The context of Revelation and the Nabawi Tafsir Bell tries to understand the Qur'an by placing it in a particular historical context. However, the traditional Islamic interpretation teaches that the true understanding of the Quran must always be associated with the context of the revelation and explanation of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. (tafsir nabawi). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the first to receive the revelation and interpretation of the Qur'an, so his interpretation and his associates were very important in understanding the true meaning of the Quran.

4. Bell's Text Unit sees the Qur'an as a separate set of texts and tries to understand each section based on its respective historical context. However, in the view of Islam, the Qur'an is a perfect unity, in which each part is interrelated and complementary. The Qur'an cannot be understood in such a way as to separate its verses from its entire context. This understanding requires a holistic approach, which considers the relationship between verses and suras in the Qur'an. The historical critical approach used by Bell involves an attempt to identify the sources and historical context of the verses of the Qur'an. These methods often rely on assumptions and speculations that are not supported by strong evidence. Muslim scholars argue that this approach tends to question the authenticity of the Qur'an as divine revelation. They affirm that the Qur'an has been preserved since it was revealed and attempts to question its authenticity through historical criticism are considered unfounded.

6. The Spiritual Dimension and Law of the Qur'an is not only a historical or literary

text, but also a guideline of life that encompasses the spiritual and legal teachings of the Muslims. Traditional Islamic texts seek to dig into these spiritual and lawful meanings, which are often incomprehensible through a mere academic approach. Islam teaches that the Qur'an has a profound inner dimension, which requires deep understanding and reflection. Bell's rationalist and historical approach is considered inadequate to reveal these dimensions.

Bell's approach to the Qur'an is heavily influenced by Western academic traditions, which tend to take precedence over rational and empirical methods. However, Muslim scholars argue that this approach has limits in understanding religious texts that have spiritual and metaphysical dimensions. They stressed that the Qur'an should be understood through a balanced approach between reason and revelation, taking into account the scientific, spiritual, and ethical aspects contained in the text. From the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW to the present day, the tradition of interpreting the Qur'an has been inherited through generations of scholars who have devoted their lives to studying and understanding this sacred text. The rejection of Bell's approach is also based on respect for this intellectual and spiritual heritage. Muslims believe that the correct interpretation of the Qur'an must always be associated with the scientific tradition that has been acknowledged and accepted by the Muslim community for centuries.

The rejection of Richard Bell's thinking about the interpretation of the Qur'an is based on the belief that his critical and historical approach is insufficient to understand the true meaning of this sacred text. Muslim scholars emphasize the importance of understanding the Qur'an as a perfect divine revelation, taking into account the context of the Revelation, the interpretation and the tradition of Islamic science. They also reject the methods of historical criticism that are considered to question the authenticity of the Quran and ignore the spiritual dimensions and laws contained therein. Thus, Bell's approach is considered to be inconsistent with the basic principles in the interpretation of the Qur'an according to the Islamic tradition.

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