



MUSLIM MINORITIES THROUGH THE LENS OF HASAN HANAFI'S LIBERATION THEOLOGY: A CRITICAL STUDY OF ISLAMIC LEFTIST DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study examines Hasan Hanafi's theological framework for Muslim minorities through the concepts of "Islamic Leftism" and his liberation theology. Using critical discourse analysis of Hanafi's key works, the study explores how his revolutionary hermeneutics addresses the issue of marginalization of Muslim communities globally. Hanafi's deconstruction of traditional Islamic theology reveals how religious discourse has historically legitimized power structures that marginalize minority voices. His "Islamic Leftism" paradigm offers a transformative approach that prioritizes social justice and solidarity with the oppressed. The findings demonstrate that Hanafi's liberation theology provides both a theoretical foundation and a practical framework for understanding contemporary Muslim minority struggles. This study contributes to Islamic studies by presenting a new theoretical lens for analyzing the experiences of Muslim minorities in a postcolonial context. It uncovers important implications for contemporary Muslim minority movements seeking theological legitimacy for their social justice campaigns.

Keywords: Hasan Hanafi; Islam kiri; Liberation theology; Muslim minorities; Postcolonial.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji kerangka teologis Hasan Hanafi mengenai minoritas Muslim melalui konsep "Islam Kiri" dan teologi pembebasannya. Dengan menggunakan analisis wacana kritis terhadap karya-karya utama Hanafi, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana hermeneutika revolusionernya menjawab masalah marginalisasi komunitas Muslim secara global. Dekonstruksi Hanafi terhadap teologi Islam tradisional mengungkapkan bagaimana wacana agama secara historis melegitimasi struktur kekuasaan yang meminggirkan suara minoritas. Paradigma "Islam Kiri"-nya menawarkan pendekatan transformatif yang mengutamakan keadilan sosial dan solidaritas dengan kaum tertindas. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa teologi pembebasan Hanafi memberikan landasan teoretis sekaligus kerangka praktis untuk memahami perjuangan minoritas Muslim kontemporer. Kajian ini berkontribusi pada studi Islam dengan menyajikan lensa teoretis baru untuk menganalisis pengalaman minoritas Muslim dalam konteks pascakolonial. Studi ini mengungkap implikasi penting bagi gerakan minoritas Muslim kontemporer yang mencari legitimasi teologis untuk kampanye keadilan sosial mereka.

Kata Kunci: Hasan Hanafi; Islam kiri; Teologi pembebasan; Minoritas muslim; Pasca-kolonial.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary discussions about Muslim minorities in a global context face increasingly complex issues that demand creative theological solutions. The structural marginalization faced by Muslim communities in various parts of the world cannot always be adequately addressed by traditional Islamic knowledge systems. The Rise of Islamic Thought: A Simple Proposal by Hasan Hanafi (1935-2021) (from the book *Il Jihad*), an Egyptian-born Islamic philosopher and thinker, offers a revolutionary theological perspective that changed the relationship between Islamic

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thought and social justice. Discourse on the condition of today's Muslim minorities demands the presence of a fresh and innovative theological response, given that the classical Islamic science tradition is often unable to answer the question of structural marginalization faced by the Muslim community globally¹. In this context, an Egyptian Islamic thinker, formulated a radical approach that transformed relations².

Hanafi's theoretical thinking stems from his awareness that traditional Islamic theology often serves as a tool of legitimacy for established power structures, rather than a means of resistance to systemic forms of oppression³. The significance of his contribution is seen in the shift in Islamic hermeneutics—from a purely text-focused approach to an understanding grounded in actual social conditions (Hanafi, 1992), thus enabling a more contextual and responsive response to the realities faced by marginalized Muslim communities⁴.

Hanafi's contribution is a methodological revolution: a shift from textual interpretation to the analysis of reality in the field of Islamic hermeneutics. This shift allows for a more dynamic and contextual view of Islamic principles that can be related to the lived realities of marginalized Muslim communities today. His thinking bridges classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary social justice activism, providing a theological foundation for social justice work within Muslim communities. This study investigates the relevance of Hanafi's liberation theology approach to the marginalization of Muslim minorities and how this approach can counteract the exclusion they experience. This article examines the logic behind his concept of the Islamic Left and its significance for contemporary Muslim minority movements.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs critical discourse analysis of Hasan Hanafi's major works, particularly *Min al-Aqidah ila al-Thawrah* (From Dogma to Revolution) and *al-Yasar al-Islami* (the Islamic left). The aim is to uncover Hanafi's key ideas on marginality, minorities, and social justice embedded in his theological constructs. The method employed is textual analysis with contextual interpretation to understand how Hanafi's theoretical constructs respond to the challenges facing contemporary Muslim minorities. Primary sources are examined in their original Arabic, taking into account their socio-historical context, supported by secondary studies in the fields of liberation theology and minority studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Hanafi's Liberation Theology

The Crisis of Traditional

Islamic Theology Hanafi's critique of traditional Islamic theology is not its role in social control, but rather its failure to bring about social liberation. He asserts that classical theological statements generally represent the perspectives of the ruling elite and marginalize the voices of the oppressed. This critique goes beyond doctrinal examination to the socio-political role of religious

¹ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

² Achmad Faisol Haq, "Pemikiran Teologi Teosentris Menuju Antroposentris Hasan Hanafi," *Jurnal Ilmiah Spiritualis: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Tasawuf* 6, no. 2 (December 29, 2020): 159–90, <https://doi.org/10.53429/spiritualis.v6i2.132>.

³ Syafieh Syafieh, "Islamic Renewal Project: Hassan Hanafi and Indonesian Intellectual Muslims," *Al-Lubb: Journal of Islamic Thought and Muslim Culture (JITMC)* 2, no. 2 (December 30, 2020): 115, <https://doi.org/10.51900/lubb.v2i2.8596>.

⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226387024.001.0001>.

rhetoric. For Hanafi, the Islamic theological tradition operates through what he calls "ideological theology"—a belief system that uses religious language to legitimize existing power structures. This critique is particularly relevant in examining how Muslim minority groups are marginalized in mainstream Islamic discourse through theological constructs that privilege certain interpretations over others⁵.

The Islamic Left Paradigm

Hanafi's concept of "Islamic Left" marks a radical shift in Islamic thought—toward social justice and liberation. It also challenges the conventional dichotomy between secular left versus religious conservatism by positioning Islam as a revolutionary vehicle for social change. The main concerns of the Islamic Left framework include: Solidarity with the Oppressed (marginalized): The mark of true Islamic piety is measured not through religious rituals but solidarity with the oppressed. This principle addresses the problem of Muslim minorities who are often not accepted in mainstream mosques because of their background. Critique of Economic Inequality: Hanafi's Islamic Left includes a sharp analysis of the economic formula that reproduces marginalization. This critique goes beyond individual deeds to a systemic critique of capitalist and imperialist structures that have a more severe impact on Muslim minorities. Revolutionary Hermeneutics: Islamic Left uses an interpretive approach that emphasizes actual social conditions rather than past events. This method allows Muslim minorities to respond to new forms of marginalization in the contemporary context.

The idea of "Leftist Islam," introduced by Hassan Hanafi, represents a profound transformation in Islamic thought, oriented toward the struggle for social justice and openness to the oppressed. The core of this approach lies in the importance of building solidarity with marginalized groups, emphasizing that the measure of piety in Islam is not only determined by the performance of ritual worship, but also by a real commitment to those on the margins. In one of his speeches, Hanafi emphasized that social solidarity should be an integral part of daily religious life, as a form of recognition for those often marginalized from the mainstream Muslim community due to their socio-economic conditions. This thinking also serves as a critique of the neglect of traditional Islamic discourse on issues of social injustice⁶.

Hermeneutical Innovation

The Hanafi hermeneutical method contrasts with conventional Islamic interpretation. It focuses on a shift "from text to reality" (*min al-nass ila al-waqi'*), arguing that authentic Islamic interpretation must begin from the context of contemporary social life, not from the abstraction of texts. This hermeneutical development is particularly relevant for minority Muslim communities whose traditional interpretations are unable to address the challenges they face. The Hanafi approach allows for the formulation of a contextual theology that addresses the specific situations of Muslims living on the margins of society.

Muslim Minorities in Hanafi's Framework

Reconceptualizing Minority Status

Hanafi's understanding of minority status flips the usual picture. Instead of counting people or noting skin color, he examines who holds power and who is excluded. Through this lens,

⁵ Sayuti Sayuti and Inayatillah Inayatillah, "Islamic Left Manifesto: Hasan Hanafi and Interpretation of Materialism on Islamic Tradition," *International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities* 4, no. 1 (May 27, 2025): 175–89, <https://doi.org/10.54298/ijith.v4i1.438>; Mohammed Arkoun and Robert D. Lee, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Routledge, 2019).

⁶ DR. Maqbool Hassan, "The Concept of Collective Ijtihad, Its Need and Role in the Development of Islamic Law and Legislation in Modern Era," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4905704>.

ordinary Muslims can see how a sect, tribe, or even a thin wallet can suddenly mark them as second-class. The Islamic Left aligned with Hanafi urged building real solidarity across and across religious lines rather than simply tolerating differences. For Hanafi, true Islam calls for standing, hand in hand, with everyone excluded from the circle—whether they fast or not. This demand reshapes how Muslim and non-Muslim outsiders meet, speak, and act together when neighbors in power turn them all into strangers.

Theological Legitimacy for Resistance

Hanafi made a significant mark by giving a powerful religious stamp to grassroots resistance among the marginalized. He revitalized the core ideas of Islam—jihad, ummah, caliphate—so that they spoke to the daily struggle against Muslim marginalization. Jihad as Social Struggle: for him, jihad was not a holy war, but a social struggle for dignity, not simply a military victory. This reading became a theological backup card when minority Muslims resisted unjust rule without taking up arms. Ummah as Common Humanity: Hanafi expanded the ummah beyond the Muslim circle and argued that it encompassed every oppressed person. This larger vision enabled minority Muslims to join hands with victims of non-Muslim rule, without having to wrap their struggle in the banner of Islam. Caliphate as Collective Responsibility: he envisioned the caliphate as a shared duty to improve the situation, not as a crown to be worn. This framing invited minority Muslims to step forward and help build the greater justice that their families and neighbors longed for.

Responding to Today's Challenges

The model of thought developed by Hanafi is highly relevant in addressing various contemporary issues faced by minority Muslims, such as religious discrimination (Islamophobia), pressure to abandon cultural identities, and economic inequality. His liberation theology approach not only provides an analytical framework for understanding these problems but also equips Muslims with practical strategies for action. The "Islamic Left" paradigm he offers offers an attractive alternative for shaping a Muslim identity that is neither steeped in extreme secularism nor trapped in conservative exclusivism. This approach enables Muslim communities to remain steadfast in practicing their religious values while actively contributing to the struggle for social justice⁷.

Implications and Applications

Theoretical Contributions

Hanafi's liberation theology demonstrates that local and contextual Islamic responses to modern issues can be developed without sacrificing fundamental religious values. Through the framework of Left Islam, he broadens the discourse of liberation theology by demonstrating that religious traditions outside of Christianity have the capacity to formulate their own emancipatory approaches⁸.

Practical Applications

Hanafi's ideas are not only conceptual but also highly applicable. He provides a theological foundation that strengthens the moral legitimacy of the struggle against injustice. This creates space for minority Muslims to collaborate with other groups in a common struggle, without losing

⁷ Sayuti and Inayatillah, "Islamic Left Manifesto: Hasan Hanafi and Interpretation of Materialism on Islamic Tradition."

⁸ Wahyudi Akmaliah, "Islam Transformatif: Conceptualizing Liberation Theology for Indonesian Muslim Society," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 1 (June 18, 2024): 188–210, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2024.14.1.188-210>.

their religious identity. Such coalitions have proven effective in many contexts, where cross-community solidarity is key to achieving the shared goal of social justice.

Contemporary Relevance

Hanafi's work resonates strongly with the contemporary situation of minority Muslims. His principles have been widely adopted by movements fighting for civil rights and justice around the world, including in conflict zones. Liberation theology is no longer exclusive to one tradition but has become a crucial lens in contemporary studies, including in understanding the socio-political dynamics of Muslims living as minorities. Hanafi's influence is evident in how this discourse now occupies a central place in global academic literature.

Critical Assessment

Hanafi's thought offers an adaptive and contextual approach to addressing the challenges faced by minority Muslim communities. With a flexible interpretive approach, his teachings can be applied to a variety of changing socio-political conditions. His focus on social justice provides strong moral legitimacy for Muslim involvement in the struggle for civil rights. His Left-wing Islamic paradigm also opens up space for progressive religious activism, while avoiding apathy and ideological alienation from mainstream social movements. The liberation theology developed by Hanafi is able to combine steadfastness in religious teachings with active involvement in social movements, while also providing a middle ground between secular leftist ideology and religious conservatism. His hermeneutic approach provides space for adaptive responses to the dynamics of ever-changing social situations⁹.

Although offering much that is new, Hanafi's approach is not without criticism. Some believe that his emphasis on interpretive flexibility can blur the boundaries of traditional Islamic teachings. This risks generating resistance from conservative Muslim groups, whose role is crucial in building the collective power of minorities. Furthermore, some theoretical aspects of this model are considered too conceptual and difficult to translate into concrete actions on the ground. Because much of Hanafi's work is rooted in the Arab experience, its application is not always appropriate in non-Arab Muslim communities with different social and historical dynamics. Some critics argue that Hanafi's approach has the potential to blur the boundaries of traditional Islamic orthodoxy and exhibits Arab-centric tendencies that raise doubts about its relevance and universal applicability among the diversity of minority Muslim communities¹⁰.

Muslim scholars are beginning to adopt new approaches by interpreting Hanafi's concepts more specifically and contextually, according to the local characteristics of minority communities. They are not only reinterpreting his ideas but also testing them in social practice through cross-cultural and interfaith collaborations. This step is crucial for establishing liberation theology as an inclusive and globally relevant discourse, and not limited to the Arab context or a single universal model.

CONCLUSION

Hasan Hanafi offers a transformative approach to addressing the marginalization of minority Muslims. Through his concept of liberation theology, particularly within the Islamic Left model, he equips minority Muslims with the tools of thought and action to resist oppressive systems without having to abandon their religious identities. The main strength of his thought lies in his successful bridging of Islamic spirituality with the spirit of political progressivism. He

⁹ Sayuti and Inayatillah, "Islamic Left Manifesto: Hasan Hanafi and Interpretation of Materialism on Islamic Tradition."

¹⁰ Salman Abdullah Rahmad, "Pemikiran Muhammad Hashim Kamali Dalam 'Principle of Islamic Jurisprudence,'" *Falah: Jurnal Ekonomi Syariah* 2, no. 2 (December 11, 2017): 236, <https://doi.org/10.22219/jes.v2i2.5109>.

demonstrates that religiosity is no barrier to engaging in just and equitable social struggles. Using innovative methods, Hanafi creates a space for Muslims to confront contemporary issues while remaining rooted in authentic Islamic teachings. For Muslim communities in minority situations, Hanafi's legacy is crucial: it provides theological legitimacy for resistance, strategies for building cross-group solidarity, and a model of Islamic identity capable of resisting pressures of assimilation and isolation. His works serve as ideological fuel for many contemporary Muslim movements. Future studies should focus on the contextual application of Hanafi's ideas within various minority Muslim communities, while still considering the limitations and specificities of each. Such studies will strengthen academic Islamic discourse while providing direct benefits to those in need. As long as issues of injustice and marginalization persist, the relevance of Hanafi theology will remain. His ideas lay the foundation for a more open, just, and contextual future for Islam.

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