

DEVELOPING A MODULE FOR ISLAMIC FORESIGHT AS A TOOL FOR SHARED PROSPERITY AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

Futures studies and foresight play a critical role in enhancing one's capacity to 'use-the-future' in order to pursue both personal and institutional well-being and development. It is an emerging concept that is promoted as a necessary literacy skill by the United Nations under UNESCO, which corresponds with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Many countries have adopted this as a national agenda, but it is still underdeveloped in the Islamic world. This can be attributed to the scarcity of talents in the field, lack of public awareness and the level of effort to integrate it as part of the education process towards long term social transformation. This paper aims at introducing futures studies and foresight to the Islamic world, with an exploration of appropriate methods to allow deeper articulation of the Islamic context of futures. Apart from literature reviews, the approach applied for this article is qualitative observations from Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with Islamic scholars and Muslim youths. This is essential to garner feedback and interest in futures studies, and to relate it to Islamic texts and traditions. The trajectory of this study is geared towards shared prosperity and social well-being, to live in co-existence with other faiths, respond, revisit and adapt to cultures, enhance the empowerment of women and youth, as well as nation building.

Key words: Islamic foresight, Islamic education, futures studies, SDG, Muslims

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic world contributes more than 1.8 billion of the entire global population, which spreads over 49 major Muslim countries (Lipka M, and Hackett C., 2017). This is a significant number in the general world demography and is estimated to increase up until 2.2 billion in 2030 (26.4% of the world population) (Grim, B.J and Karim, M.D. (2011). Based on this projection, the future will see future youths originating from the Muslim population more commonly than others. This exponential growth is accompanied by an increase in educational attainments and achievements of Muslims, indicating a positive future for the Islamic world. However, if the current situation continues, in spite of many Muslim professionals, experts, scientists, social scientists, entrepreneurs and leaders being in the mainstream global development, there will expectedly be a large number of Muslims around the world who will be coping with sudden urbanization, social issues, deprivation of fundamental rights, poverty, and conflicts. A further challenge in the Islamic world is the hijacking of Islam by terrorist groups and the threat of Islamophobia (Muhammed, M. M. and Khuzaima, O., 2019).

This study focuses on Muslim communities with a view to develop a module on futures that encourage reference to Islamic sources. Futures literacy is now increasingly applied across the world, encouraging multiple perspectives as well as contribution of knowledge from diverse communities, including minority groups and indigenous peoples (Phichonsatcha, T., et. al, 2019). Muslim communities should take this opportunity, firstly in contributing to the corpus of knowledge in futures from the Islamic perspective, and secondly to apply as much as possible futures thinking as an ability to "use-the-future" among the Muslim communities in anticipating and navigating the uncertain future and towards achieving well-being and universal good. This is essential in order to act and plan what kind of future Muslim communities would want to create and how they would fit into the bigger cosmos. Sardar, Z. (2019) noted talks about the future as being absent in Muslim circles, despite how important the future is for the survival and development of Muslim communities. The past despairs of Muslim communities - from colonization to decolonization to occupation to conflicts - were partly due to the weaknesses with the communities, in that they consequently became subjugated to western visions and planning. In facing the challenges of the 21st century and the future that beckons, the fate of Muslim communities now depends on the will from within in order to carve their own future, before anyone else does it for them. Inayatullah S. (2005) highlighted how the future of Islam cannot be divorced from that the rest of the world. In his work, he explained the future of Islam to be either 'divided Islam, divided world', or as 'the linear ascent' or as 'a virtuous spiral'- all which showed that the images, survival and interaction of Islam with others are dependent on the way the Islamic world projects itself, either dormant and conservative, whether to 'follow the flow' or be 'fresh and reformed.' Futures consciousness should be imperative for Muslim communities to navigate the future.

DEVELOPMENT OF A MODULE ON ISLAMIC FORESIGHT

Futures studies as a discipline is the study of postulating possible, probable, and preferable futures and the worldviews and myths that underlie them. Miller, R (2013), Inayatullah, S (2008), Bell, W. (1997) and Dator, J. (2002) are among scholars who have contributed significantly to the field. Futures studies is made accessible for the society to understand changes to help them design their own social future, whether it be workplace futures, public futures and community futures (Cope and Klantzis, 2000). Futures studies and literacy enhances the society's capacity to cope with the shocks in change. In relation to this, the capacity to build resilience is a necessary skill (Cork, 2010). It is the manifestation of the capability approach that enables people to do valuable acts

to reach valuable states, which will determine the freedom to lead different types of lives and the courage to choose (Amartya Sen, 1993). In futures studies, the methodology of action learning is a plausible approach as it can connect the desired future to the present (Inayatullah, 2008) (R. Burke, 2002).

On the theory of futures and the study of change in the Islamic world, one can find guidance in the classical sociological work of Ibn Khaldun (1332 – 1406). Ibnu Khaldun (2015) provides references on the dynamic changes of Arab-Muslim cultures and civilizations in general, as well as the general rules regulating the transitions of human society.

Transformation and change have long been heralded to be the necessary impetus for the advancement of the Islamic world for centuries. Muslim intellectuals have propagated the need to reevaluate current practices to give birth to new mindsets. Abu Sulayman. A.A. (1993) analysed the crisis of the Muslim ummah and the importance to understand the root causes of its shortcomings. In addressing the future, Abu Sulayman placed emphasis on the reform of the Muslim thought and the clarification of its vision for the Ummah and its leadership. Hasan M.K (2011) named key agendas for reform in many of his writings, competitiveness, global mindedness, *ummatic* unity, compassion and love of knowledge and wisdom, to name a few. Sardar, Z., Inayatullah, S., and Boxwell, G. (2003) underlined the importance of Muslims contributing to the pool of contemporary knowledge, connection, and acknowledging the diversity of the current reality. Bennabi. M (1994) highlights the importance of the psychological will to transform, that will later bring to the surface the social, economic and political transformations in the Islamic world. Earlier scholars such as Iqbal. M (1982) warned against the ignorance of the modern mind that would result in Muslims being absolutely incapable of receiving any fresh inspiration from modern thought and experience. Along this line, Rauf. M.A. (1994) in his book, the 'Muslim Mind' writes about the malevolent effect of long stagnation that has its toll on intellectual complexities, rigidity and improper understanding of Islamic wisdom and ideals. He further noted however, that there are encouraging signs of recovery with renewed confidence and resources. In furtherance of this concept, Asad M. (1985) underlined Muslims' capacity to contribute to knowledge and progress by viewing progress as a means to an aim rather than an end in itself.

The development of this module on Islamic foresight aims at achieving shared prosperity and improved social well-being. Achieving a high level of social well-being is an important goal for governments (Diener, E., et. al., 2009). This is in line with the world shift, moving away from merely focusing on the rate of income growth of the population towards shared participation and equality (Dang, H. A. H. and Lanjouw, P. F., 2016). These ideals are well incorporated in Islamic thoughts in its notion of social justice, as explained by Muslim scholar Syed Qutb in his *magna corpus* Social Justice in Islam (*al-'adalah al-ijtima'iyyah fi'l-Islam*). The module seeks to achieve shared prosperity and better social well-being from the following aspects:

- i) *Islamic Foresight and Family Institution* - Family well-being and societal well-being are closely interrelated. There are many roles, rulings, duties and obligations relating to marriages, involving a lot of decision making. Islamic foresight allows each family member to play a more elevated and consequential role. It encourages the determination of the preferred futures of family institutions as indicated in Islamic law. This approach also provides room to reevaluate the used futures, the customs that push and pull from and to the desired goals, as well as the possible future scenarios.
- ii) *Islamic Foresight, Conflict Resolution & Peace* - Conflict resolution and peace are central components in Islamic teaching. Understanding signs of conflicts, underlying reasons and reactions are important to curb the acceleration of conflicts and to promote peace building. Islamic foresight helps to build and encourage understanding of the reasons and consequences of conflicts and the objectionable effects of extremism. Consequently, it encourages appreciation of virtues in a society.
- iii) *Islamic Foresight, Environment & Health* - Islamic foresight allows for reflection on the role of each individual and society as a whole to preserve the environment and health, as well as the reaction of the Islamic world to the concerns of climate change and health hazards. Islamic foresight includes discussions of whether the Islamic world has and will learn from the past, and will be more participative in the global effort towards better environment and health. The discussions are supported by Islamic insights in the texts and traditions on the preservation of environment and health.
- iv) *Islamic Foresight, Education and Scholarship* - Islamic foresight addresses important questions on the role of Islamic education in the future, the changes that are needed, and it also encourages reassessment of the relevance of certain current practices. It discusses about the traits of Islamic scholarship, for example, the level of devotion of Muslims scholars to scholarly pursuits, whether they are on the leading-edge in their area of expertise, responsive towards real societal issues, possess leadership qualities, are able to serve as public intellectuals and are living examples of what constitutes a good Muslim, all of which necessary inquiries that need to be addressed in order to pave for a better future for Islamic education.
- v) *Islamic Foresight, Governance, Economy & Technology* - Islamic foresight recognises the evaluation of current systems in governance and economy to be instrumental and treats the upholding of justice (*'adalah*) as a paramount consideration. Islam acknowledges the right of personal ownership, which is not absolute and is subject to bounds and limitations. It provides reconciliation on how this concept should be approached, along with how to steward such ownership on the basis of public interest. Islamic foresight also allows for the exploration of the use and overuse of technology, its potentials and damages, and how it can be used for universal good.

THE CORE COMPONENTS OF A MODULE FOR ISLAMIC FORESIGHT

The module for Islamic foresight comprises the following components:

- i) *The Foundation of Islamic Foresight*- Islamic foresight is based on the principle that futures can only have value when they are placed within the context of the total meaning of life and human existence. The Quran provides a framework of thought that recognizes the observation of the physical world as well as the reflection of Islamic faith. This is the foundation of Islamic foresight, that encompasses both revelation (*al-naql*) and reason (*al-'aql*). The Prophet's s.a.w role in shaping the mind and society, as well as directing the understanding of Quranic teachings, is critical in Islamic foresight. Much may be learned from

significant events in Islamic history (*seerah*) that point towards rigorous preparation and strategy, such as the migration to Madinah (the *hijrah*) and the Constitution of Madinah as the cornerstone of a newly established Islamic state. The module should make it clear that any exercise in futures does not entail areas of the unseen ('alam al'ghayb), but rather actual future scenarios on which human behavior today may have an effect. Futures studies are concerned with the realm of time known to humans, in its restricted past, present, and future dimensions. The visible world ('alam al-shahadah) is defined as what can be physically observed and is specifically related to actual observation, common sense, and measurement. This does not present a contradiction, but rather part of the ethics of Islamic foresight where matters of the unseen are ingrained in a Muslim's belief, giving spiritual meaning to one's deeds. Other areas of discussion are the concepts of pre-destination (*qada' wa al-qadar*) and the ethics in dealing with Islamic prophecies about the end of time (*al-fitān/ malahim*). In terms of Islamic law (*Shari'ah*), the concentration of public interest (*maslahah*) and the higher purposes of the Shariah have never been more vital, especially in facing the challenges of the twenty-first century. Futures thinking through the consideration of the consequences of action (*i'tibar al- ma'alat*) in deriving rulings in Islamic law has practical impact before a ruling is implemented in real situations (Raysuni A., 2006). It is undeniably an acknowledgment of the Shariah's flexibility and practicality that changes in reality can influence the implementation of Islamic rules.

- ii) *Futures Thinking Characteristics Found in the Quran* - The elements highlighted in the module are visioning, continuity and change, significance of events and the use of metaphors. These are not exhaustive, but they are important indicators of futures thinking which are intrinsically included in the Quran. The Quran has provided a number of descriptions on preferred futures for different circumstances. In the context of a society, it states that the Muslim ummah should be a justly balanced society (*ummatan wasata*) (Quran 2:143), a good society (*khayra ummah*) (Quran 3:110), and an exemplary society (*shuhada' al-al-nas*) (Quran 2:143). In terms of change, there are many Quranic concepts, among which, are the call to change from vice to virtue (*munkar to ma'ruf*), repentance (*al-tawbah*), supplications (*du'a*) and re-evaluating the past and current actions (*muhasabah*). At the societal level, the concept of mutual consultation (*shura*) is a practical methodology for the society to collectively reflect and make decisions for a better community. This notion is imbued in governance, which can be found in many modern democratic systems, as it enables collective intelligence to shape a society's future. Futures thinking in the Quran is also facilitated by its rich parables and metaphors. The purpose of a parable is to deepen comprehension and to allow for contemplation. Images of goodness and good words are described like a good tree, with firm roots and branches that spread and reach out to the sky (Quran 14: 24-26), and the image of stubbornness of human behaviour who follow their desires and reject truth is described as 'a dog and its protruding tongue, attack or leave it alone, it will still protrude its tongue' (Quran 7: 176). Other metaphors are for instance, 'light' to describe a human's state of awakening: "from darkness to light" (Quran 14:1). The Quran also emphasizes the importance of dignity (*izzah*) and triumph (*nasr*) as the ultimate outcomes for individuals who submit their individual wills to the revealed truth, and devastation (*ihlak*) and defeat (*khuzlan*) as ultimate consequences of pursuing personal interests and desires without regard to the principle of truth (Safi L.M, 1998). The purpose of studying the stories in the Quran is to help people draw lessons (*ibrah*) and to achieve a reformed state of the society (*islah*) when the forces of truth have the upper hand, as compared to the state of chaos and destruction when the forces of corruption take over (Safi L.M, 1998). The Quran also acknowledges that introducing change is not easy. There are various verses that talk about the mindset of the people that are wired to the past and the reluctance to depart from the ways of their forefathers (Quran 2:170; 43:22-25).
- iii) *Ethics in Islamic Foresight* - The understanding of the substratum of Islamic foresight forms the framework of the Muslim worldview in extrapolating futures. Most importantly, is God consciousness (Quran 31:34) and the ethics in dealing with matters of the unknown as mentioned in various hadith. In practising futures, Islam lays down the guidelines of work ethics, which include the pursuit of wisdom and good judgment (*hikmah*), determination, reference to experts, consultation (*shura*) and devotion in knowledge (*tafakkur*). It encourages openness in views about the future, ethical dealings in differences of opinion (*adab al-ikhtilaf*) and in introducing the right interventions for change. Lessons can be derived from the concept of graduality (*tadarruj*) in the revelation of the Quran and the preaching of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. The contribution of his 23-years of prophethood to the transformation of society, which left a huge and indelible presence in world history, demonstrates what has been recognised as an effective global societal transformation on a macro-historical level. This can also be regarded as a radical change since it transpired within a short span of time that has left a lasting impact more than 1400 years later.

CONCLUSION

The future is not unilinear, and even in the context of the muslim societies, it has to accommodate the universal nature of Islam that transcends culture and communities. Thus, any initiative towards social transformation for well-being must mirror such multiplicity for a practical and sustainable impact. The core components discussed above form the basic framework of Islamic foresight. The complementarity of revealed knowledge (*al-naql*) and reason (*al-'aql*) in the technical processes of foresighting, with the aid of scientific methodologies to track seeds of change, emerging trends and scenario buildings, would lead to a comprehensive extrapolation of the future with the essence of natural and moral order. For Muslims, this pursuit will lead to the achievement of God's pleasure (*mardhatillah*). Futures thinking therefore has a profound basis in Islam. The active participation of Muslim communities in futures has a huge potential to improve society at every level, as it contains ethical grounds that could potentially contribute to the general corpus of knowledge in futures studies, and forms a powerful literacy tool for the mass population of Muslim communities for shared prosperity and social well-being.

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