

HARD CORE, PROTECTIVE BELT, AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL RIGIDITY: A LAKATOSIAN FRAMEWORK FOR REASSESSING ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP

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Abstract

This article develops a conceptual framework for examining intellectual rigidity in selected strands of Islamic scholarship through Imre Lakatos's Research Programme framework. It addresses a recurring tendency to treat historically developed products of *ijtihād*, including legal methodologies, theological formulations, exegetical approaches, and historiographical narratives, as though they possessed the same non-revisable status as revelation. The article draws on Lakatos's writings, works by M. Amin Abdullah, Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, and Mohammed Arkoun, as well as relevant scholarship on Islamic epistemology, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, Qur'anic interpretation, and *kalām*. Its analysis focuses on epistemological propositions concerning the relationship between theological commitments and historically situated intellectual formulations. Lakatos's framework is employed as an analytical adaptation, not as a direct equivalence between revelation and scientific theory. Within this framework, *tawhīd*, the divine origin of revelation, and fundamental ethical commitments function as the limited hard core, whereas historically developed formulations in *fiqh*, *kalām*, Qur'anic interpretation, and religious historiography are examined as elements of a revisable protective belt. The article argues that intellectual rigidity may emerge when historically contingent formulations are treated as immune from critical reassessment. It proposes a Lakatosian model consisting of a limited hard core, an identifiable protective belt, and a positive heuristic guided by historical sensitivity, interdisciplinary engagement, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. The model is intended as a conceptual instrument for assessing whether inherited formulations remain responsive to changing intellectual and social conditions.

Keywords: Islamic Epistemology; Intellectual Rigidity; Lakatos's Research Programme; Protective Belt; *Ijtihād*

A. Introduction

Contemporary discussions of Islamic scholarship often move between two broad tendencies: the idealisation of inherited intellectual traditions and the uncritical adoption of modern Western epistemological models. Both tendencies may obscure a more fundamental question concerning the structure of knowledge in the Islamic sciences: how are foundational theological commitments distinguished from historically developed scholarly formulations, and under what conditions do those formulations become resistant

to revision? M. Amin Abdullah (1998) describes a related condition through the dominance of the context of justification over the context of discovery. In this situation, intellectual energy is directed primarily towards validating inherited structures of knowledge, while the capacity to formulate responses to emerging social, scientific, and ethical questions becomes limited (Abdullah, 1998). Historical accounts of the formative centuries of Islamic civilisation show that critical reasoning and engagement with Greek, Indian, and Persian intellectual traditions formed important parts of Muslim knowledge production, although the nature and extent of this openness varied across disciplines and regions (Irfan Habib, 2008).

One contributing factor to this condition concerns the difficulty of distinguishing the transcendent dimension of revelation from the historical products of human interpretation. Classical intellectual traditions in *fiqh*, *kalām*, and Qur’anic interpretation were developed through scholarly efforts undertaken within particular linguistic, political, and social contexts (Khir, 2007). These traditions possess enduring intellectual value, yet particular formulations may sometimes be treated as fixed religious norms beyond critical reconsideration. Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid argues that processes of sacralisation can transform interpretive traditions into closed systems that restrict the possibility of dialogue and reinterpretation (Zaid, 1990). Fazlur Rahman (1995) similarly identifies changes in the historical understanding of *sunnah*, especially the movement from a dynamic communal practice towards a more textually regulated conception of authority. These discussions suggest that methodological formulations may become increasingly resistant to reassessment when they are treated as inseparable from revelation itself. The issue is not that inherited traditions lack intellectual value, but that particular formulations may acquire an authority that makes their historical formation and contemporary adequacy difficult to examine. Islamic intellectual traditions should therefore not be treated as homogeneous or static bodies of knowledge, but as historically continuous fields of argument, interpretation, and institutional transmission (Asad, 1986).

Imre Lakatos’s Research Programme framework has previously been introduced into discussions of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia, especially through the work of M. Amin Abdullah (1998). Subsequent studies have employed related ideas in discussions of knowledge integration, higher education, multiculturalism, and contemporary Islamic thought (Naufala & Sudjatnika, 2025; Nurfadillah et al., 2025; Sutarto, 2017; Waston,

2016). These studies demonstrate the usefulness of Lakatosian language for discussing intellectual development, but they do not systematically focus on the distinction between foundational theological commitments and historically produced scholarly formulations. This article concentrates on that distinction. It examines how selected formulations in *fiqh*, *kalām*, Qur’anic interpretation, and religious historiography may be analysed as parts of a historical protective belt whose status remains open to scholarly reassessment.

This article revisits Lakatos’s (1968) framework as an analytical resource for examining the structure of Islamic scholarship. Lakatos distinguishes between a hard core, a protective belt, a negative heuristic, and a positive heuristic. In its original setting, the framework was developed to explain the development of scientific research programmes. Its use in this article is therefore adaptive and limited. Revelation is not treated as equivalent to a scientific theory. Instead, the framework is used to distinguish between theological commitments that function as non-revisable foundations and historically situated intellectual formulations that remain open to critical examination. On this basis, the article argues that intellectual rigidity may emerge when the boundary between these two domains becomes unclear. The proposed model does not seek to displace classical Islamic scholarship. It seeks to provide a conceptual basis for examining whether particular inherited formulations remain responsive to changing intellectual, social, and ethical conditions.

B. Methods

This article uses a conceptual library-based approach to examine intellectual rigidity in selected discussions of Islamic epistemology through Imre Lakatos’s (1968) Research Programme framework. The purpose is not to reconstruct the entire institutional history of Islamic scholarship or to measure the prevalence of particular intellectual positions across Muslim societies. Instead, the article develops an analytical model for distinguishing between foundational theological commitments and historically developed scholarly formulations.

The analysis draws on primary works by Imre Lakatos (1968; 1970), M. Amin Abdullah (1995, 1998, 2002), Fazlur Rahman (1980, 1995), Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (1990, 2002), and Mohammed Arkoun (1994, 2002, 2006), together with secondary scholarship on Islamic epistemology, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, Qur’anic interpretation, *kalām*, and the history of

Islamic intellectual traditions. Sources were selected on the basis of their relevance to three questions: how revelation is positioned within Islamic knowledge; how human interpretive products acquire authority; and how inherited formulations may be evaluated in relation to changing historical conditions. The unit of analysis is the epistemological proposition. Each proposition is examined according to four analytical questions. First, does it concern a foundational theological commitment or a historically developed scholarly formulation? Second, what historical and intellectual conditions contributed to its formation? Third, has the proposition been treated as open to reassessment or as immune from criticism? Fourth, does its continued use generate adequate explanatory, ethical, or practical responses to contemporary questions?

Lakatos's categories of hard core, protective belt, negative heuristic, and positive heuristic are used as heuristic instruments. The article does not assume that Islamic revelation and scientific theories possess the same epistemic status. The framework is used only to clarify the distinction between non-revisable theological commitments and revisable interpretive or methodological constructions. The analysis proceeds through close reading, conceptual comparison, and critical interpretation of the selected literature. Its validity depends on conceptual consistency, accurate use of primary texts, and the coherence of the proposed analytical model.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Conceptual and Historical Patterns of Epistemological Rigidity

Before examining selected historical and conceptual patterns, four terms in Lakatos's framework should be clarified. The hard core refers to the central assumptions of a research programme that its proponents seek to protect from direct revision. The negative heuristic directs criticism away from this core. The protective belt consists of auxiliary assumptions, methodological formulations, and supplementary explanations that may be modified when difficulties arise. Its development is guided by a positive heuristic. In Lakatos's original account, a research programme is considered progressive when changes in the protective belt generate theoretical growth and new problem-solving capacity, while it becomes degenerative when modifications only protect existing assumptions without producing further intellectual development (Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970).

These concepts are adapted in a limited way in this article. Lakatos developed them for the philosophy of science, whereas the present discussion concerns Islamic intellectual traditions. Revelation and *tawhīd* are therefore not equated with scientific theories. They are treated as theological commitments that function analogically as a limited hard core within the proposed model. By contrast, historically developed formulations in *fiqh*, *kalām*, Qur’anic interpretation, and historiography are examined as parts of a protective belt because they emerged through human processes of reasoning, interpretation, institutionalisation, and transmission.

From this perspective, certain historical developments in Islamic intellectual traditions may be read through the proposed Lakatosian model. During the formative centuries of Islamic civilisation, engagement with Greek, Indian, and Persian intellectual traditions formed an important part of Muslim knowledge production, although its intensity and character varied across disciplines, regions, and institutions (Irfan Habib, 2008). Within the analytical language adopted in this article, this period may be interpreted as one in which the protective belt of Islamic scholarship retained substantial capacity for intellectual adaptation. This interpretation does not imply that all fields developed in the same manner or that later Islamic scholarship ceased to produce intellectual innovation.

Subsequent centuries witnessed important transformations in the intellectual authority of theological, legal, and philosophical traditions. The marginalisation of Mu‘tazilite theology, the institutional consolidation of Ash‘arite traditions, and the enduring influence of al-Ghazālī’s critique of the philosophers are frequently discussed in accounts of Islamic intellectual history. These developments should not be interpreted as evidence of a uniform or total decline of rational inquiry. Legal creativity, theological debate, philosophical activity, and interpretive innovation continued across different regions and periods. Hallaq’s critique of the “closed gate of *ijtihād*” thesis cautions against describing post-classical Islamic legal history as a period of complete intellectual closure (Hallaq, 1984). At the same time, legal authority historically operated not only as a mechanism of preservation but also as a means through which continuity and controlled adaptation were negotiated within Islamic law (Hallaq, 2001). The issue addressed here is therefore more limited: particular methodological and doctrinal formulations could acquire a status that made their reassessment increasingly difficult. In Lakatosian terms,

this may be understood as a situation in which elements of the protective belt were treated as though they belonged to the hard core.

One illustration may be found in classical debates concerning the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'an. These debates involved complex theological, political, and institutional struggles and should not be reduced to a simple movement from intellectual openness to closure. The present article does not classify either theological position as inherently illegitimate. Instead, the example shows how a position that emerged through historical debate could later become strongly associated with communal orthodoxy and religious identity. Once this occurs, critical engagement with the historical formation of the doctrine may become difficult because theological, political, and institutional authority become closely interconnected.

A further illustration concerns legal methodology. Fazlur Rahman argues that sunnah in the early period could function as a dynamic communal practice through which Muslims responded to changing contexts (Rahman, 1995). The methodological system associated with al-Shāfi'ī's *al-Risālah* gave *uṣūl al-fiqh* a more systematic structure by clarifying the relationship between the Qur'an, Prophetic reports, consensus, and reasoning (Al-Syāfi'ī, 1940). In its historical context, this formulation may be understood as an intellectually productive development because it provided legal reasoning with a more coherent methodological orientation. The question raised in this article concerns later uses of such formulations. When a methodological arrangement is treated as permanently closed to reconsideration, even in contexts substantially different from those in which it emerged, its capacity to generate new legal and ethical responses may become limited. The issue, therefore, is not the validity of al-Shāfi'ī's contribution, but the possibility that later reception may transform a historically developed methodology into an untouchable intellectual boundary.

M. Amin Abdullah identifies the long-term consequence of this tendency as a crisis of relevance within contemporary *'ulūm al-dīn*. Many religious studies continue to rely on scholarly consensus formed within premodern intellectual settings and therefore encounter difficulties in engaging with developments in modern knowledge (Abdullah, 2014). This condition is reinforced by linear patterns of education. When the Islamic sciences are taught separately from the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences, historical-empirical approaches are easily misinterpreted as attacks on faith. Yet what

such approaches seek to examine is not the hard core itself, but the historical protective belt that has come to surround it.

These conceptual and historical patterns support the central argument of the article: intellectual rigidity may emerge when the boundary between the hard core and the protective belt becomes unclear. When historically conditioned formulations are treated as equivalent to transcendent commitments, their critical evaluation may become difficult. Approaches that seek to move beyond literalist readings of scripture, such as Sahiron Syamsuddin's *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach (Syamsuddin, 2018), depend on the possibility of treating interpretive methods as open to reassessment. The relevant question is not whether inherited formulations should be discarded, but whether they continue to generate adequate explanatory, ethical, and practical responses under changed historical conditions. The following section considers how interpretive narratives may acquire authority within collective memory and scholarly tradition.

2. Interpretive Narratives, Collective Memory, and Historical Authority

The issue of epistemological rigidity also concerns the authority of interpretive narratives that circulate within Muslim intellectual traditions. Reports related to *asbāb al-nuzūl*, early religious history, and symbolic descriptions of the unseen may become influential because they provide communities with interpretive continuity and collective memory. Drawing on symbolic anthropology, Bassam al-Jamal discusses aspects of *asbāb al-nuzūl* as historical and interpretive constructions through which early Muslim communities represented religious experience in forms accessible to human understanding (Bassam al-Jamal, 2005). This perspective does not concern revelation itself. It concerns transmitted reports, interpretive traditions, and later exegetical uses of those reports.

Within the three-layer distinction employed in this article, revelation occupies the theological level, the Qur'anic text functions as a linguistic medium, and reports, interpretations, and historiographical narratives constitute historically produced intellectual layers. Reports of *asbāb al-nuzūl* therefore belong to the domain of interpretive history. Their scholarly authority may be substantial, but their historical formation and methodological use remain open to examination. The problem emerges when this layer is read literally and treated as immune to criticism. In Lakatosian terms,

the negative heuristic again extends beyond the hard core, reducing the space for the creative imagination needed to connect previously separate intellectual possibilities.

Classical Islamic scholarship was not uniform in its treatment of reports concerning *asbāb al-nuzūl*. The legal maxim *al-‘ibrah bi-‘umūm al-lafẓ lā bi-khuṣūṣ al-sabab* indicates that interpretive authority may rest on the generality of Qur’anic wording rather than being confined to a particular occasion of revelation. Research on the function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in Qur’anic exegesis further indicates that these reports have operated within specific exegetical and legal procedures, rather than functioning as self-evident determinants of meaning in every interpretive setting (Rippin, 1988a, 1988b). Their authority depends on the status of transmission, the interpretive method employed, and the legal or exegetical context in which they are used. The issue raised here is therefore not that transmitted reports necessarily become intellectually restrictive. Rather, particular reports may acquire a level of authority that discourages examination of their transmission, historical setting, or interpretive function. In such cases, the report may operate as part of a protective belt that has become difficult to reassess. This possibility requires investigation through specific examples in *tafsir* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* rather than broad generalisation across the Islamic tradition.

Difficulties may arise when interpretive arrangements formed within particular historical settings continue to be applied without sufficient attention to changed intellectual, social, and institutional conditions. In such circumstances, a protective belt may become less capable of generating new questions or responses. The Lakatosian model proposed in this article does not assume that every inherited formulation has become degenerative. It provides a conceptual basis for examining whether a particular formulation remains intellectually productive or has become primarily defensive in function.

The task of contemporary Islamic scholarship is therefore to restore this distinction. Revelation, together with the foundational commitments of *tawḥīd* and justice, should remain within the hard core, while particular methodological treatments of hadith, symbolic exegetical narratives, and juristic formulations within *fiqh* should be approached as historically situated human constructions open to evaluation. Such evaluation does not entail Popperian instantaneous falsification of religious commitments, nor does it seek to diminish their sacred significance. Rather, it provides a

means of ensuring that the hard core remains relevant and intellectually productive in relation to global scientific developments. Once *asbāb al-nuzūl* and Qur'anic interpretation are recognised as historical layers, the next question concerns the status of the text itself as a linguistic medium. This issue leads to the following discussion on the deconstruction of textual sacrality and the challenge of historicity.

3. Textual Mediation, Interpretive Authority, and the Question of Historicity

Evaluating the protective belt ultimately raises one of the most sensitive questions in Islamic scholarship: the status of textual sacrality and narratives of early Islamic history. The position of this article must therefore be stated clearly. The object of evaluation is not revelation as a transcendent source, but the layers of interpretation and historical writing constructed by human beings around revelation. The distinction used in this article requires clarification. Revelation in its divine origin belongs to the theological hard core. The Qur'anic text is received by Muslims as the authoritative linguistic manifestation of that revelation and is not treated as an object of methodological revision. What remains open to critical examination is the human process of accessing, interpreting, contextualising, and institutionalising the meaning of the text. Tafsir, legal reasoning, theological argument, and historiographical narration therefore belong to the historical protective belt.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid's thesis that the Qur'an is a *muntaj thaqāfi*, or cultural product, is often treated as a major point of departure in debates on textual historicity. Abu Zaid argues that the Qur'an entered human history through the linguistic, social, and cultural conditions of seventh-century Arabia. For him, this historical dimension does not negate the divine origin of revelation; instead, it makes possible an ascending dialectic (*ṣā'id*) towards more substantive meaning (Zaid, 1990). This position remains controversial because it may be understood as reducing revelation to a merely human cultural construction. The present article does not adopt that ontological claim. It draws only on the narrower methodological proposition that human interpretations of the Qur'anic text are historically situated and therefore remain open to critical reassessment.

This distinction becomes particularly important in the interpretation of Qur'anic ethico-legal passages. Contextual approaches to the Qur'an examine the relationship between the text, its historical circumstances of communication, its ethical orientation,

and the conditions in which contemporary interpretation takes place. Such approaches do not require a revision of revelation itself; they concern the human methods used to understand and apply Qur'anic guidance in changing circumstances (Saeed, 2006). Within the present framework, contextual interpretation may therefore be treated as part of the protective belt: it is a revisable methodological approach to interpretation rather than a revision of the theological status of revelation.

Mohammed Arkoun extends this diagnosis through the concepts of the unthought and the unthinkable, which refer to intellectual domains closed off by the dominance of orthodoxy (Arkoun, 1994). For Arkoun, the formation of official religious corpora often suppresses historical contingency in favour of stable and rigid systems of meaning. His approach calls for reopening such closed intellectual spaces. Arkoun's approach remains contested, particularly because its post-structuralist orientation raises questions about its compatibility with categories internal to the Islamic intellectual tradition. The present article therefore adopts only its diagnostic value: interpretive corpora may become frozen into domains that cannot be questioned, without endorsing the entirety of Arkoun's theoretical conclusions.

A more radical challenge to established historical narratives appears in revisionist approaches to early Islam, including the work of Koren and Nevo (1991). Their arguments raise important questions about the formation of religious identity, the transmission of historical memory, and the political consolidation of religious authority. These approaches remain highly contested and should not be treated as a sufficient basis for reconstructing early Islamic history. The argument advanced in this article does not depend on strong revisionist conclusions. It relies on a more limited proposition: religious historiography, like other forms of human scholarship, develops through processes of transmission, selection, interpretation, and institutional authorisation. These processes may shape the authority of particular narratives and can therefore be examined as part of the historical protective belt.

Recognising the historicity of interpretive layers may understandably generate theological concerns. If the explanatory instruments of religion are historically situated, how can the hard core of *tawhīd* be preserved? M. Amin Abdullah's integrative-interconnective paradigm offers one possible response. The truth of *tawhīd* as the hard core does not collapse when its historical forms of expression are re-examined; instead,

it may acquire renewed relevance when released from narrow interpretive restrictions (Abdullah, 2014). The evaluation proposed here is therefore not a form of Popperian instantaneous falsification that rejects the entire religious structure. It is a Lakatosian assessment of the protective belt while the hard core remains intact.

Accordingly, reassessing the authority of interpretive and historiographical layers should not be understood as an attempt to undermine faith. It concerns the examination of human scholarly constructions that may have acquired an authority exceeding their historical and methodological status. Treating interpretation and historiography as historically produced forms of knowledge while preserving revelation in its transcendent position represents a distinction between theological commitment and scholarly mediation. The remaining task is to translate this distinction into a more systematic reconstruction model.

4. Lakatosian Reconstruction Model

In adapting Lakatos's framework to Islamic intellectual inquiry, progressiveness cannot be assessed through empirical prediction in the same manner as in the natural sciences. It is therefore evaluated through three modified indicators: explanatory adequacy, ethical coherence with foundational commitments, and the capacity to generate workable responses to defined contemporary problems. The preceding discussion raises a constructive question: how can Islamic scholarship move from a restrictive pattern of knowledge production towards a more productive research programme? Within Lakatos's framework, a research programme is progressive when revisions to its protective belt produce new explanatory possibilities, research questions, or practical responses. It becomes degenerative when revisions merely preserve inherited assumptions without generating further intellectual development (Lakatos, 1970). Building on this distinction, this section proposes a reconstruction model composed of three interconnected components: defining a limited hard core, identifying the revisable protective belt, and developing a positive heuristic for scholarly renewal.

The first component concerns the careful delimitation of the hard core. Within the analytical framework proposed here, the hard core consists of theological commitments that function as the identity of the programme and are not subjected to internal methodological revision. These commitments include *tawhīd*, belief in the Qur'an as

revelation in its divine origin, and foundational ethical orientations such as justice and human dignity. The negative heuristic serves to protect these commitments from being displaced by the evaluation of historical formulations. However, the hard core should remain limited. Its expansion through the incorporation of historically produced legal, theological, or exegetical formulations is precisely what creates epistemological rigidity. A limited hard core enables Islamic scholarship to preserve its theological orientation without treating every inherited formulation as equally non-revisable.

The second component is the identification of the protective belt. This category includes the methodological and interpretive formulations through which the hard core has been articulated in specific historical contexts. It may include constructions of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, particular schools of *kalām*, models of Qur'anic interpretation, literal readings of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and historiographical narratives that have acquired doctrinal authority. These elements should not be dismissed simply because they are historically situated. Many were intellectually productive in their original contexts. They should, however, remain open to critical examination, reformulation, and contextual reassessment. This distinction permits the evaluation of inherited scholarly structures without framing such evaluation as a challenge to revelation itself.

The third component is the development of a positive heuristic. In Lakatos's terms, a positive heuristic provides a set of directions for extending and revising the protective belt. Three working principles may be proposed. First, each element of the protective belt should be examined in relation to the historical conditions that shaped it and the contemporary conditions in which it is applied. Second, such examination should employ interdisciplinary triangulation by reading *fiqh*, Qur'anic interpretation, and theology alongside the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. This approach is consistent with M. Amin Abdullah's integrative-interconnective paradigm (Abdullah, 2014). Third, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* should function as a mediating framework through which theological and ethical commitments may be translated into responses to changing empirical conditions. A *maqāṣid*-oriented approach evaluates legal reasoning in relation to its purposes, consequences, interconnections, and capacity to address complex contemporary conditions (Auda, 2008). Within the present model, *maqāṣid* should not be placed uncritically within the hard core, because its conceptual formulation and methodological application have developed through historical processes of juristic

reasoning. It is more appropriately positioned within the positive heuristic as a methodological guide for reassessing elements of the protective belt while remaining oriented towards the theological commitments that define the framework. A proposed reformulation should then be assessed through a Lakatosian question: does it generate new explanatory and practical possibilities, or does it merely preserve an inherited arrangement?

For analytical purposes, a proposed reformulation may be assessed through four questions. First, what historical conditions shaped the original formulation? Second, which elements of the formulation are directly connected to foundational theological commitments, and which elements reflect historical methods of interpretation, legal reasoning, or institutional authority? Third, does the inherited formulation still provide an adequate explanation of the contemporary issue under examination? Fourth, does the proposed reformulation generate clearer ethical guidance, stronger explanatory capacity, or more workable responses to present conditions? A reformulation should not be regarded as progressive simply because it is new. It should demonstrate a more adequate capacity to address a defined intellectual, ethical, or practical problem while preserving the theological orientation of the proposed hard core.

The operation of this model may be illustrated through environmental jurisprudence. The ethical commitments associated with human responsibility towards nature and justice remain within the hard core. What becomes subject to review are legal formulations developed under ecological conditions substantially different from those of the present. By bringing classical legal reasoning into dialogue with environmental science and the social sciences, and by guiding this process through *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, scholars may formulate responses more adequate to contemporary ecological crises. Such a reformulation would be progressive in Lakatosian terms when it enables Islamic jurisprudence to address questions and problems that inherited formulations could not adequately resolve. The same procedure may be applied to other fields, provided that the distinction between theological commitments and historically conditioned formulations is maintained.

D. Conclusion

This article has proposed a conceptual framework for examining intellectual rigidity in selected strands of Islamic scholarship through Lakatos's Research Programme framework. Its central argument is that difficulties may arise when historically developed formulations in law, theology, Qur'anic interpretation, and religious historiography are treated as though they possess the same non-revisable status as revelation. In the analytical model proposed here, this condition can be described as an expansion of the negative heuristic beyond the limited hard core into the protective belt.

The article distinguishes between theological commitments that function as a limited hard core and historically situated intellectual formulations that remain open to reassessment. *Tawhīd*, the divine origin of revelation, and fundamental ethical commitments such as justice and human dignity are positioned within the hard core. Methodological formulations in *fiqh*, *kalām*, Qur'anic interpretation, and religious historiography are positioned within the protective belt because they emerged through human processes of interpretation, reasoning, institutionalisation, and transmission.

The proposed positive heuristic directs reassessment through historical sensitivity, interdisciplinary engagement, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Its purpose is not to dismiss classical Islamic scholarship or to weaken theological commitments. It is to provide an analytical basis for examining whether particular inherited formulations remain responsive to changing intellectual, ethical, and social conditions. This article remains conceptual and does not establish that all classical formulations have become intellectually restrictive. It also does not claim that the Lakatosian model can resolve every disagreement within the Islamic sciences.

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