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## Historical Criticism of the Hermeneutical Approach in the Interpretation of the Qur'an

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### **Abstract**

*Hermeneutics is a classic theme that remains relevant in Islamic scholarly discourse, particularly in the debate over its use in interpreting the Qur'an. There are three main views among Muslim scholars and ulama: those who reject it completely, those who accept it completely, and those who accept it with certain limitations. This debate is rooted in the origins of hermeneutics, a discipline developed by Western scholars to interpret biblical texts that raise issues of authority and authenticity. This study aims to explore the hermeneutic approach from a historical perspective through a literature study and thematic analysis, employing steps of comparison, contrast, and criticism. The results show that, from the perspective of Qur'anic interpretation, hermeneutics is viewed as a Western product originating from the Christian theological tradition and developed within a modern philosophical framework emphasizing the historicity and relativity of textual meaning. Therefore, this approach is not entirely in line with the principles of Islamic interpretation emphasizing the sanctity, absolute authority, and authenticity of divine revelation. Furthermore, hermeneutics is also considered contrary to the methodology of Ulumul Qur'an, which has clear procedures and hierarchies of interpretation based on Islamic sources. This study confirms the relevance of historical criticism of Qur'anic hermeneutics as a scholarly effort to restore Qur'anic interpretation to an authentic Islamic epistemological framework. Thus, this study makes a new contribution to strengthening the methodology of interpretation based on the principles of the sacredness of revelation, the integrity of divine meaning, and the scientific discipline of Ulumul Qur'an, originating from the Islamic tradition itself.*

**Keywords:** *Al-Qur'an; Hermeneutics; Historical Criticism; Interpretation; Text.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Hermeneutics is one of the classic themes remaining a topic of intense discussion among Muslim scholars. This discussion arose regarding whether hermeneutics can be used to interpret Qur'an verses (Haitomi, 2019, p. 46; Larasingtyas et al., 2024, p. 5). In this context, there are three main views among Muslim scholars: first, the group firmly rejecting hermeneutics; second, the group fully accepting it; and third, the group accepting it with certain conditions or can be said to be a group bridging the two parties (Arif, 2015, p. 85). This debate began with Western scientists' use of hermeneutics in interpreting biblical texts (Adhim, 2018, p. 141), sparking the emergence of hermeneutics as a study among Muslim scholars.

Adian Husaini, one of hermeneutic critics, stated that applying hermeneutics in Islam presents three serious problems. First, decisions made through a hermeneutic approach can be influenced by the specific interests of the hermeneutic person and the society's culture. Second, hermeneutics tends to overlook the transcendent (divine) dimension and focuses more on the human aspect. Third, truth in hermeneutics is relative, making it difficult to reach a consensus (Husaini, 2006, pp. 153–155; Reflita, 2016, p. 142). Ugi Suharto added that hermeneutics often contradicts Islamic principles. He links the philosophical basis of hermeneutics with Protestant Christian theology, Greek mythology, and problems in the Bible (Reflita, 2016, p. 144; Suharto, 2003, pp. 26–27). This view is also emphasized by Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, stating that hermeneutics is a threat to Islamic thought and civilization. According to him, hermeneutics originates from Greek mythology, which was later adopted into Jewish and Christian theology. When used within the framework of Christian theology, hermeneutics reflects philosophical problems that later became the basis for the development of Hermeneutic Philosophy. Hamid Fahmy also highlighted the extreme impact of hermeneutics on Islamic law. He argued that the application of hermeneutics could alter Islamic law, which is absolute, potentially leading to conflicts with the principles of sharia, including in issues such as LGBT rights, inheritance, Islamic criminal law (hudud), and adultery (Tangahu, 2017, pp. 272–275). This perspective reflects deep concerns about the implications of hermeneutics in the context of Islam.

On the other hand, Quraish Shihab, a prominent mufassir in Indonesia, has a different view regarding hermeneutics. According to him, several theories in hermeneutics can be applied

to interpreting the verses of the Qur'an (Haitomi, 2019, p. 46; Kojin, 2020, p. 62). Several other Muslim scholars, such as Hassan Hanafi, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Muhammad Syahrur, Fazlur Rahman, Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud, and Muhammad Arkoun, supported this view. Their studies often produced controversial conclusions in the realm of Islamic thought. For example, in his work, *Mafhum al-Nass*, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd argues that understanding the Qur'an is inseparable from the social, political, and cultural context in which the interpreter lives. According to him, the text of the Qur'an is passive and only gains meaning through interpretation influenced by certain conditions. He also emphasized that revelation must be understood within the context of the culture in which it emerged. In his view, the Qur'an is a cultural product (*al-Muntaj al-Tsaqafi*) because the language used in the Qur'an is a symbol of humans expressing their consciousness. This idea sparked significant controversy, including a report against him to the Egyptian High Court, considering him deviant and misleading (Franz Magnis-Suseno, 2016, pp. 95–97; Hardiman, 2015). On the other hand, Hassan Hanafi offers a hermeneutic interpretation method called *al-Manhaj al-Ijtima'i fi al-Tafsir*. He seeks to transform traditional theocentric theology into a more anthropocentric theology. This approach seeks to connect the interpretation of the Qur'an with social dynamics, making religion more relevant to contemporary reality (Badruzaman, 2005, p. 20; Faiz, 2003, p. 20; Faiz & Usman, 2019, p. 28). Thus, Hanafi and Abu Zayd contributed to the hermeneutical discourse that challenged traditional views in interpreting religious texts.

A literature review relevant to this study is needed to strengthen the above argument. Based on the author's observation, the study of hermeneutics has become a widespread concern among academics, as evidenced by undergraduate theses, dissertations, journals, proceedings, and other scientific articles. In general, research on hermeneutics can be classified into three large categories. The first is research examining supporters' thoughts on the application of hermeneutics. The second is research rejecting the adoption of hermeneutics in Islamic studies. The third is research attempting to reconcile or confront the thoughts between proponents and opponents of hermeneutics. Research in the first category has been widely conducted, including *Critical Hermeneutics: Critique of Religious Discourse in Understanding Religious Texts* (Review of the thoughts of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid) (Latief, 1998, 2003); *Islamic Hermeneutics: Building God's Civilization on the Global Stage* (Al-Jauhari, 1999); *Quranic Hermeneutics: between Text, Context and Contextualization* (Faiz, 2003; Faiz & Usman, 2019); *Hacking Critical Scholarship of the Qur'an: The Hermeneutic Theory of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid* (Ichwan,

2003); Methodology of Religious Text Criticism (Study of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid's Hermeneutic Thought) (Ridwan, 2006); Religious Hermeneutics of Ricoeur (1913-2005) and Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) (Hery, 2008); and Hermeneutics of Hadith (Study of the Theory of Understanding Hadith According to Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Syahrur) (Haris, 2011).

Research in the second category, examining the rejection of hermeneutics, includes works such as *Hermeneutics as a Method of Interpreting the Qur'an: An Analytical Study of Islamia Magazine* by Subhan Asshidiq, discussing INSISTS' criticism of hermeneutics in the journal *Islamia* (Asshidiq, 2009). Other works, such as *Al-Qur'an Dihujat* (Shalahuddin, 2007) and *Studi Al-Qur'an Islam Liberal* (Salim, 2010), criticize Muslim hermeneutics figures such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, Hassan Hanafi, and Muhammad Arkoun (Furqan & Sakdiah, 2022, p. 40). In "Kritik Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi tentang Hermeneutika dalam Islamisasi Ilmu," Rajendra Rahmat Ramadhan reveals two main conclusions. First, Hamid's framework of thought is influenced by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and the concept of the Islamic worldview, which is the basis of the Islamization of science (Islam, 2017, pp. 406–407). Second, Hamid criticized hermeneutics because it was considered incompatible with Islamic tradition, rooted in Western Christian theology, and could endanger the Islamic faith. As a solution, he offered the Islamic worldview as an epistemological alternative (Ramadhan, 2024). Other works, such as *Hermeneutics of the Qur'an: Controversial Themes* (Faiz, 2005) and *Theory of Understanding the Holy Book: Comparative Study between Hermeneutics and Tafsir of the Qur'an* (Shiddiq, 2006), discuss criticisms of hermeneutics and reveal differences in hermeneutic and tafsir methods. Although highlighting the controversy of hermeneutics, these studies show that the differences are more due to the difference of epistemological backgrounds between the Islamic and Christian traditions (Shiddiq, 2006).

The third category of hermeneutics research is research bridging the two, one example of which is Safrudin Edi Wibowo's dissertation, "Controversy over the Application of Hermeneutics in the Study of the Qur'an in Indonesia," finding that the application of hermeneutics in Indonesia developed through three stages: introduction, discourse by Liberal Islamic groups, and integration in academia. Massive rejection emerged in the second stage. The proponents of hermeneutics consider this method capable of answering the crisis in classical interpretation, while the opponents consider it inconsistent with Islamic tradition and rooting in Western Christianity. Socio-political dynamics also influenced this polemic after the 1998 reformation (Wibowo, 2017). Izza Rohman, in his thesis "Rethinking Approaches to

Interpreting the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesian Muslim Thoughts," identifies three new approaches to interpretation: thematic method, historicity theory, and hermeneutics. This study highlights the efforts to contextualize the Qur'an to answer contemporary issues (Rohman, 2006, 2007). Reflita, through his work "Hermeneutics Controversy as a Manhaj of Interpretation," concludes that hermeneutics is still a debate. Some scholars accept this method to understand modern issues, while others reject it because hermeneutics comes from the Christian-Western tradition. He emphasizes the importance of a selective and wise attitude in adopting new methods while still adhering to the rules of Islamic interpretation (Reflita, 2016).

Based on the data presented above, this research is interesting to examine in more depth because previous studies have generally been limited to debates regarding the permissibility of using hermeneutics in interpreting the Qur'an. This research offers novelty by not only discussing the normative aspects of the debate but also comprehensively describing the definition and scope of hermeneutics, historical schools of thought in its development, the contributions of Islamic thinkers to hermeneutical theory, and its application in interpreting the Qur'anic text. Furthermore, this study also presents a historical critique of the hermeneutical approach to Qur'anic interpretation. Thus, this research's scientific contribution lies in its effort to broaden the horizon of interpretation studies through a multidisciplinary approach combining philosophy, intellectual history, and interpretive methodology, thereby providing a new perspective for contemporary discourse on Qur'anic interpretation methodology.

Therefore, this study does not intend to reject hermeneutics outright or accept it entirely, but rather to conduct a critical and constructive synthesis from within the framework of traditional Islamic exegesis. This position is based on the understanding that although hermeneutics originates from Western theological and philosophical traditions, certain aspects, such as historical awareness, contextual interpretation, and interpretive dynamics, can serve as reflective tools in understanding Qur'anic texts. Hence, this research positions hermeneutics not as an alternative method to tafsir (interpret) but as a historical and epistemological object of study that should be critically examined to enrich Qur'anic interpretive methodology without compromising the sanctity, authority, and authenticity of divine revelation. In this way, the study aims to offer a balanced synthesis between the integrity of the Islamic tafsir paradigm and the intellectual challenges of modern hermeneutics.

This study uses a literature review method (literature review) (Fahrudin, 2020). A literature review is a systematic and straightforward method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing

works produced by previous researchers and practitioners (Okoli & Schabram, 2010, pp. 1–3). This study focuses on the historicity of contemporary hermeneutics, so the sources used include books, journals, proceedings, magazines, and articles related to the theme. In analyzing data, thematic analysis techniques were used. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify patterns or determine themes through data the researchers have collected. This analysis technique has three stages or steps. The first is compare, looking for similarities from several reading sources. The second is contrast, looking for differences between several reading sources and the conclusion. The third is criticism, giving opinions based on the results of the analysis of the readings that have been collected (Heriyanto, 2018, p. 317).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Definition of Scope of Hermeneutics

Linguistically, the term hermeneutics comes from Greek, namely *hermeneuein*, meaning “to interpret”, and the noun *hermeneia*, meaning “interpretation” (Palmer, 1969, p. 13). In Ancient Greek, the word *hermeneutic* has three main meanings: to say, to explain, and to translate (Palmer, 2005, pp. 14–16). These three meanings are then summarized in English to interpret, including three important elements: oral recitation, rational explanation, and translation from one language to another (Palmer, 1969, p. 23).

Meanwhile, terminologically, hermeneutics is often defined as “the art and science of interpreting especially authoritative writings; mainly in application to sacred scripture, and equivalent to exegesis” (the art and science of interpreting, especially authoritative writings such as scriptures, are often identical to interpretation). In addition, hermeneutics is also understood as a branch of philosophy focusing on the problem of “understanding of understanding,” especially related to sacred texts that come from different times, places, and social contexts than their readers (Susanto, 2016, p. 2).

The term hermeneutics has a historical connection with the name Hermes, a figure in Greek myth who acts as an intermediary between the God Zeus and humans. In Islamic tradition, Hermes is often identified with the Prophet Idris, known as a pioneer of writing, weaving technology, and medicine (Nasr, 1989, p. 71). In this context, the main challenge is how God’s message using the “heavenly” language can be translated into the “earthly” language that humans understand (Subir et al., 2024, p. 6097). The profession of the Prophet Idris as a weaver is then metaphorically analogized as the process of “spinning” or arranging God’s word

so that humans can understand it. Thus, hermeneutics can be defined as the art and science of text interpretation. As a science, hermeneutics relies on scientific methods that are rational, systematic, and testable. As an art, hermeneutics seeks beauty and clarity in interpretation so that the resulting meaning is not only logically correct but also aesthetically and communicatively (Ahmala, 2012, pp. 16–17; Islam, Rahma, et al., 2024, p. 19).

In the Ancient Egyptian tradition, Hermes was known as Thoth, which some equate with the Prophet Moses. In the Greek tradition, Hermes was known as Unukh, while in the Ancient Persian tradition, he was called Hushang. In its development, hermeneutics, which was initially understood as the science of interpretation, has expanded in meaning into a science related to various linguistic disciplines.

Classical and modern scholars have a consensus that hermeneutics is a transformation process from ignorance to understanding. This process involves moving from something abstract and vague to a clear and understandable expression in language. The use of the term hermeneutics is deeply rooted in the theological tradition (Trisnani et al., 2024, p. 40) and ancient literature, including in classical works such as Aristotle's *Organon*, especially in the section *Peri Hermeneias* (On Interpretation). In this work, Aristotle explains that spoken words are symbols of mental experience, while written words are symbols of spoken words (Palmer, 1969, p. 92, 2005, p. 14). In addition to Aristotle, the idea of hermeneutics is also found in the works of Plato, Xenophon, and Euripides, further strengthening the relevance of this concept in classical philosophy.

However, this linguistic and philosophical genealogy also reveals a fundamental epistemological divergence between Western and Islamic conceptions of Interpretation. In Western hermeneutics, the ontology of the text is historical mainly; texts are viewed as human constructs shaped by cultural and temporal contexts, and meaning is contingent upon the interpreter's horizon (Regan, 2012). By contrast, in Islamic thought, the Qur'anic text possesses a transcendent ontology as *kalam Allah* (the speech of God), eternal and immutable in its divine origin (Bakar, 2024). Consequently, the authority of meaning in Islam is not located in the reader's subjective horizon but grounded in the revealed source and transmitted interpretive tradition (*turāth*) (Elass & Bennoudi, 2023). This distinction underscores that hermeneutics, when applied to the Qur'an, must be critically reevaluated within the epistemological boundaries of Islamic revelation and its established science of Interpretation (*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*).

## **2. History of Hermeneutics in the Muslim Intellectual**

Substantively, the study of hermeneutics in Islamic sciences began to develop more systematically in the 19th century AD, marked by the thoughts of several Muslim scholars such as Hassan Hanafi, Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Riffat Hassan, Aminah Wadud, and Farid Esack (Ikmah, Al-am, et al., 2025; Islam, Azmi, et al., 2025; Mubarak, 2010, pp. 35–36). These thinkers attempted to introduce hermeneutics as an alternative interpretation of the Qur'an, arguing that classical interpretations needed to be reviewed to be more relevant to contemporary social and intellectual contexts (Muzairi, 2003, pp. 60–63).

In the Islamic world, Hassan Hanafi is one of the leading pioneers of the use of hermeneutics in Islamic studies, as reflected in his dissertation *Les Methodes d'Exegese sur la Science des fondament de la Comprehension 'Ilm Usul al-Fiqh*, which introduced hermeneutics as an alternative method of interpretation (Dianah et al., 2020; Noorhidayati & Rasyid, 2023, p. 442). Fazlur Rahman also made significant contributions through his approach to understanding the meaning of the Qur'an historically-contextually. At the same time, Muhammad Arkoun developed an applied Islamology approach that criticized the methodology of classical Islamology.

According to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (Abu Zayd, 2004, p. 3) hermeneutics is closely related to the study of text interpretation, both historical and religious texts, by emphasizing the relationship between the text and its interpreter. In the context of Islamic education, hermeneutics offers in-depth reflection, where the Qur'an can be likened to a mirror reflecting various interpretations according to the background, experience, and perspective of the individual interpreting it. Thus, the hermeneutical approach in Islamic studies opens up space for the dynamics of interpreting texts that are more contextual and multidimensional (Azmi et al., 2024, p. 446; Ikmah, Neni, et al., 2025; Islam & Fawaz, 2017, p. 28).

There are several hermeneutic models developed by Islamic thinkers who support this method. As mentioned earlier, Fazlur Rahman formed a method known as Double Movement Hermeneutics. There is also a hermeneutic with a gender approach by Amina wadud. In Indonesia Sahiron Syamsuddin developed the Ma'na-cum'Maghza method. There are several other models. The author will briefly explain this model below:

## 2.1. Double Movement Hermeneutics

The approach to the Quran cannot be made atomistically, but it must be understood as an interrelated unity to form a complete and coherent weltanschauung (Islam, Baqi, et al., 2025). Fazlur Rahman criticized classical interpretations tending to be trapped in a literal-textual approach due to the limitations of the methodology used (Ulya, 2011, p. 112). According to him, this weakness is caused by the inaccuracy and imperfection of the interpretative tools stemming from the stagnation of the methods applied (Syamsuddin, 2010, pp. 69–70).

In response to this problem, Rahman proposed the double movement hermeneutic method, a logical, critical, and comprehensive approach. This method allows for a systematic and contextual understanding of the Qur'an and produces an interpretation that is not atomistic, literalist, or textualist. Instead, this method aims to produce an understanding that is relevant to contemporary problems (Mufid, 2011, p. 32). The concept of double movement in Rahman's hermeneutics includes two main stages: moving from the present situation to the time of the revelation of the Qur'an and then returning to the present (Rahman, 1982, p. 6).

The urgency to understand the socio-historical context of the revelation of the Qur'an is based on the assumption that revelation is a divine response to the moral and social conditions of Arab society during the time of the Prophet (Islam, Amelia, et al., 2025; Rahman, 1982, p. 6). In this case, there is a dialectical process between the Qur'an and reality, including three primary forms: *tahmīl* (accepting and continuing traditions that are by Islamic values), *tahrīm* (prohibiting traditions that are contrary to Islamic teachings), and *taghyīr* (accepting and reconstructing traditions to be in line with Islamic values) (Sodiqin, 2008, pp. 116–117).

The first movement in the double movement method starts from contemporary reality towards the era of revelation. This stage aims to understand the meaning of a statement in the Qur'an by tracing its historical situation. In other words, every statement in the Qur'an must be understood about the response to the specific conditions at that time. Furthermore, from the study of these specific texts, universal moral principles can be extracted. In this process, interpretation must not be separated from the overall framework of the teachings of the Qur'an so that every law, value, and goal formulated remains continuous (Islam & Nasution, 2024; Sholeh, 2007, p. 132; Syukri, 2005, p. 54).

The second movement in this method is the application of principles that have been discovered from historical studies to the current situation. Considering existing social, cultural, and economic dynamics, these principles must be contextualized in a specific social reality. This stage also functions as a corrective mechanism for the results of understanding obtained from

the first movement. If an interpretation result cannot be applied in the current context, it indicates an error in assessing the current situation or an inaccuracy in understanding the Qur'an. Therefore, a critical analysis of the differences in social conditions between the past and the present is needed to ensure the relevance of the teachings of the Qur'an in modern life (Sholeh, 2007, p. 132; Syukri, 2005, p. 55).

According to Rahman, the double movement method's success will keep the Qur'an's teachings alive and effective in guiding Muslims. The smoothness of the first stage in this method is highly dependent on the contribution of historians examining the context of revelation. Meanwhile, the second stage requires the active role of social scientists, such as sociologists and anthropologists, to analyze contemporary conditions, and scholars responsible for formulating moral orientation and ethical engineering based on Islamic principles (Islam, Qodari, et al., 2024; Sholeh, 2007, p. 133).

In Rahman's view, this methodology offers a systematic and comprehensive approach to understanding the Qur'an. He believes that Islamic principles are specifically and uniquely designed to create a just and stable social order. Rahman also emphasized that a correct understanding of the needs of modern society and Islamic principles will not cause contradictions. Therefore, the main goal of this method is not simply to rebuild the Islamic tradition in the form that once existed in the past but to rediscover the fundamental principles of Islam that are relevant throughout history and can be applied in the contemporary context (Sholeh, 2007, p. 154).

In line with that, Rahman emphasized that revelation must be studied critically by referring to the history of the Qur'an as a source of inspiration for Islamic reform, not only partially or limited to certain aspects. Thus, the legacy of Islamic tradition and its institutions need to be re-examined about the inspiration of the Quran. Rahman argued that only with this kind of approach can Islamic society free itself from dogmatism that hinders intellectual progress and build a more just social order by the actual values of Islam. The methodology developed by Fazlur Rahman shows his concern for Islam and its society. He believes Islam remains relevant to its adherents in every era. Through his approach, Rahman offers a holistic understanding of Islam, in which theological, legal, and ethical dimensions are integrated with each other. This is Rahman's main contribution to the discourse on the renewal of Islamic thought, maintaining the authenticity of Islamic teachings and ensuring that Islam remains an applicable guideline in responding to the challenges of the times (Sholeh, 2007, p. 155).

## 2.2. Gender Hermeneutics

Amina Wadud classifies the interpretation of the Qur'an into three main categories: (1) traditional interpretation, (2) reactive interpretation, and (3) holistic interpretation (Jailani, 2024, p. 238). The first category is the traditional interpretation. This interpretation model focuses on the expertise of the interpreter in specific fields, such as law (fiqh), nahwu, Sharaf, history, and tasawuf. The approach is partial, interpreting verses separately without considering the thematic relationship between verses. This approach tends to ignore the application of hermeneutics in interpretation, so it does not connect ideas, syntactic structures, or similar discussions in the Qur'an. As a result, readers may have difficulty in understanding the worldview (*weltanschauung*) of the Qur'an (Wadud, 2003). In addition, traditional interpretation is generally dominated by the male perspective, so it does not consider women's experiences, visions, and perspectives. To avoid patriarchal bias that can cause gender injustice, the perspectives of men and women should complement each other in interpretation (Abubakar & Mutawali, 2020, p. 15).

The second category is reactive interpretation, an interpretation emerging as a response to the obstacles experienced by women. This interpretation developed as a reaction to the ideas put forward by feminists and rationalists, with a more analytical approach to related verses. Although it aims to free women from various forms of injustice (liberation), this interpretation still does not show a strong connection with the sources of Islamic ideology and theology (A. A. Ridho, 2010). The third category is holistic interpretation, combining various approaches comprehensively. This interpretation considers linguistic and textual aspects and relates them to social, moral, economic, political, and women's issues in a modern context. This interpretation model is the basis for Amina Wadud's interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an (Wadud, 2003).

In holistic interpretation, Amina Wadud applies several main approaches: (1) philological analysis, including the study of linguistics, the meaning of words, and expressions in the text of the Qur'an; (2) thematic analysis (*maudhu'i*), examining verses that have similar themes both in terms of wording and law, then interpreting them in an integrated manner; (3) social analysis, considering the social context in understanding the verses of the Qur'an; and (4) analysis with a female perspective, highlighting the patriarchal bias in interpretation that has developed so far (Muhsin, 2006, p. 21).

In her efforts to uphold substantial equality between men and women, Amina Wadud

uses seven main principles in her interpretation: first, the Principle of Tawhid: All humans have the same position before God without distinguishing between social class, race, gender, ethnicity, religious tradition, or country of origin. The only aspect distinguishing humans from God is piety. Second, the Principle of Khalifah: Humans have a divine mandate as caliphs on earth, including obedience to God's will and responsibility in carrying out this role in the world (Muhsin, 2006, p. 32). Third, the Principle of Ethics: states that The Qur'an teaches ethical principles that are the basis of life. However, differences in the interpretation of ethical values cause variations in the meaning of the Qur'an (Muhsin, 2006, p. 38). Fourth, the Principle of Taqwa: A person's spirituality develops from birth. The Qur'an defines taqwa as piety encompassing all moral and religious aspects (Muhsin, 2006, p. 40). Fifth, the Principle of Justice: The principle of justice in Islam is universal and must continue to be contextualized to remain relevant to the development of the times (Muhsin, 2006, p. 46). Sixth, the Principle of Sharia and Fiqh; According to Amina Wadud, sharia is a law originating from the Qur'an and hadith, while fiqh is the result of human understanding of sharia (Muhsin, 2006, p. 49). The differences in methodology in fiqh must be understood as part of the intellectual dynamics of Islam (Muhsin, 2006, p. 50). Seventh, the Principle of Power and Authority: Wadud distinguishes two concepts of power: power over (dominative power) and to (constructive power). In the context of women, power is needed so that they can play an active role in society, get fair public services, and get equal opportunities in politics and leadership. However, to achieve this, it is necessary to increase women's intellectual and social capacity (Muhsin, 2006, p. 53). With these methods and principles, Amina Wadud seeks to present a more inclusive, relevant, and contextual interpretation of the Qur'an so that it can uphold gender justice and contribute to the reform of Islamic thought.

### **2.3. Hermeneutics Ma'na-cum'Maghza**

Sahiron Syamsuddin divides hermeneutics schools based on the meaning of the object of interpretation into three categories: objectivist school, subjectivist school, and objectivist-cum-subjectivist school (Setiawan, 2016, p. 232). He argues that these schools in hermeneutics have similarities with contemporary models of Qur'anic interpretation. Therefore, he classifies the typology of modern Qur'anic interpretation into three categories: traditionalist quasi-objectivist views, modernist quasi-objectivist views, and subjectivist views (Syamsuddin, 2020, pp. 4–6).

According to Sahiron, among the three categories, the modernist quasi-objectivist view is

the most acceptable one because it can present a hermeneutical balance (Syamsuddin, 2020, p. 7). This approach emphasizes the balance between the literal meaning (*al-ma'na al-asli*) and the main message (significance: *maghza*) contained in the text (Syamsuddin, 2007, pp. 201–202, 2017b, p. 132). By adding significance analysis, Sahiron formulated an interpretation theory called *ma'na-cum-maghza* reading (Syamsuddin, 2017a, p. 85). In this approach, the literal meaning of the text (explicit historical meaning) is used as the initial basis for understanding the central message of the text (significance, more profound meaning) (Syamsuddin, 2007, p. 202).

Sahiron emphasized that the *ma'na-cum-maghza* interpretation theory elaborates on the application concept (*Anwendung*) developed by Gadamer (Syamsuddin, 2017a, p. 85). He juxtaposes this concept with al-Ghazali's idea that distinguishing between *al-ma'na al-zahir* (outward meaning) and *al-ma'na al-batin* (inward meaning). Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd also developed a similar concept with the terms *ma'na* and *maghza*, while Hirsch calls it meaning and significance. In his thinking, Gadamer formulated the concept of *Sinn* (meaning) and *sinnese-gema* (deeper meaning). Interpretation in this approach is carried out by considering the textual context through language analysis and the historical background of the text using the historical analysis method (Syamsuddin, 2017a, pp. 86–87).

However, the classification of typologies of Qur'anic interpretation carried out by Sahiron tends to be generalized and too simple. His assumption of fundamental similarities between general hermeneutical schools and the Qur'anic interpretation model is incorrect. The approach used in this categorization seems to adopt a dichotomous and partial orientalist perspective. In addition, terminology such as quasi, objective, and subjective is closely related to the Western scientific tradition in hermeneutic studies, which is not entirely in line with Islamic epistemology.

From an epistemological perspective (Armas, 2004, p. 39), hermeneutics is based on reason. It is generally applied to Biblical texts with a long history of textual problems and a background of resistance to church authority (Husaini et al., 2003, pp. 7–9). Therefore, the hermeneutic approach often involves conjecture, doubt, and subjective interpretation (Armas, 2004, p. 39). Meanwhile, the interpretation of the Qur'an has a different epistemological source, namely the final revelation, and its authenticity is maintained (Wan Daud, 2004, p. 55). Interpretation is bound by the explanation of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, his companions, *tabi'in*, *tabi' al-tabi'in*, and the *muktabar* scholars.

Therefore, the application of hermeneutical classification to the interpretation of the Qur'an is not entirely relevant. In addition, Sahiron's criticism of scholars, whom he categorizes

as quasi-objective traditionalists, is considered too general and not supported by adequate evidence (Syamsuddin, 2020, p. 7). His view that this group is a literalist and pays little attention to maqasid al-shari'ah is an assumption that is not entirely accurate. The study of maqasid al-shari'ah has been an integral part of the Islamic scientific tradition since classical times (Syafirin, 2004, p. 92). Ahmad Rasyuni noted that this study began in the era of Imam Tirmidhi through his work *al-Salah wa Maqasiduha*, discussing the wisdom behind prayer. The concept of maqasid was then further developed by scholars such as Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, Abu Bakar al-Qaffal al-Syasyi, Abu Bakar al-Abhari, Imam al-Baqilani, Imam al-Juwaini, Husayn al-Basri, Imam al-Ghazali, al-Syatibi, and Ibn 'Asyur (*Al-Raysūniy*, 1995, p. 57).

In the context of the theory of interpretation of ma'na-cum-maghza, this idea is an elaboration of various hermeneutic theories developed by figures such as Gadamer, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Hirsch, and Fazlur Rahman. All these theories assume that literal meaning is the starting point in understanding the central message of the text. Therefore, criticism of the hermeneutic theory that is the basis of the concept of ma'na-cum-maghza needs to be studied further to assess the extent to which this approach can be applied in studying Qur'anic interpretation without ignoring Islamic epistemology.

### 3. Contextualized Hermeneutics

Abdullah Saeed is a Muslim thinker offering a contextual hermeneutic approach to studying the Qur'an. He calls this method "contextual Qur'anic hermeneutics." Etymologically, the word "context" in the Encarta dictionary means "surrounding condition," while "contextualize" means "to place a word, phrase, or idea in the appropriate context" (Saeed, 2006, p. 25). Thus, contextualization of the Qur'an can be interpreted as an effort to interpret the Qur'an by considering the social, historical, and cultural conditions at the time of revelation and its relevance to the modern era (Rachmawan, 2013, p. 152).

Saeed identifies himself as a "contextualist," defining contextualization as a process that allows revelations that were revealed 15 centuries ago to still provide relevant meaning for contemporary Muslims. He explains, "I will refer to this approach as 'Contextualist.' The thrust of my argument, therefore, is toward a more flexible approach to the interpretation of these texts by taking into consideration both the socio-historical context of the Qur'an at the time of revelation in the first/seventh century and the contemporary concerns and needs of Muslims today" (Saeed, 2006, p. 1).

Saeed applies this method consistently in his various works. The example is, among others, his book *Islamic Banking and Interest: A Study of the Prohibition of Riba and Its Contemporary Interpretation* (1997). In discussing the concept of *riba*, he relates it to the socio-economic context of the Hijaz at the time of revelation. In his interpretation of Surah Ali Imran verse 130, he emphasizes that the verse appeared to warn Muslims after the Battle of Uhud, where a potential victory turned into a fatal defeat. According to him, this situation demanded that aid be given to needy people based on generosity, not *riba* transactions (Saeed, 1996, p. 27).

In addition, in his work *Muslim Communities in Australia* (2002), Saeed emphasized the need for contextualization in understanding Muslim identity in Australia. He emphasized that Muslim communities in Australia have different experiences compared to Muslims in other countries, so adaptation to the local social environment is a must. This is reflected in his statement that Muslims in Australia must be able to explain the meaning of Islam in the context of life in the country, including in demystifying concepts such as *jihad* and *hijab* so that they are understood by the wider community (Saeed, 2003, p. v).

Saeed's thoughts on contextualizing the Qur'an are increasingly systematic in his book entitled *Interpreting the Qur'an: Toward a Contemporary Approach* (2006). According to him, contextualization is a must because, in the last 150 years, the world has experienced significant changes that have influenced the way of viewing and practicing religion, both among Muslims and non-Muslims (Azmi et al., 2025; Islam & Syaifudin, 2024). Globalization, migration, technological and scientific revolutions, space exploration, archaeological discoveries, and developments in education and literacy have brought about significant changes in human life. Therefore, contextualization aims to keep religious teachings relevant to the development of the times (Saeed, 2006, p. 2; Zuhri et al., 2024).

The idea of contextualizing the Qur'an developed by Saeed has its roots in the thinking of Fazlur Rahman, an intellectual from Pakistan who introduced the theory of "double movement." According to Fazlur Rahman, in understanding the Qur'an, one must return to the time of revelation to understand its historical context and then bring these values into contemporary life. This approach differs from the *qiyas* method, only focusing on the similarity of events without considering the broader context (Wahid, 2011, p. 178). One of Saeed's advantages is his ability to compile systematic and operational steps for contextualizing the Qur'an. In his thinking, he not only offers theory but also provides a methodology that can be applied in the practice of interpretation. This approach will be discussed further in the following

discussion.

#### 4. Pros and Cons of Hermeneutics in the Qur'an

The emergence of hermeneutics in the study of the Qur'an has caused controversy among Muslims. In this context, there are differences of opinion between groups that accept and reject the use of hermeneutics as a method of interpreting the Qur'an (Malik, 2019, p. 57). For those who reject, there are several fundamental reasons behind their attitude, including (A. R. Ridho, 2017, pp. 284–285):

First, historically, hermeneutics is rooted in the interpretation of Greek mythology, which later developed in the Christian tradition, especially in understanding the Bible (Rachmawan, 2013, p. 151). In the view of some Muslims, hermeneutics is a response to texts considered inauthentic because they have undergone human interpolation and redaction (Habibie, 2016, p. 236). Therefore, this method is considered irrelevant to the Qur'an, which is believed to have absolute authenticity as a divine revelation. Second, Hermeneutics is an interpretation theory generally used to interpret human texts. Meanwhile, the concept of the Qur'an in Islam emphasizes that its text comes directly from Allah SWT, both in terms of wording and meaning (*lafẓan wa ma'nan*) (Fauzan, 2015, pp. 80–81). Thus, applying hermeneutics to the Qur'an is inappropriate because it contradicts the basic principles of transcendent revelation. Third, in the traditional interpretation method, the Qur'an is believed to have a structured interpretation system and disciplines that maintain its authenticity, such as the science of *asbāb an-nuzūl*, the science of *nasikh-mansukh*, and the science of *qirā'āt* (Kaharuddin & Jauhari, 2021, p. 57).

Meanwhile, in hermeneutics, interpretation is dynamic and influenced by various subjective factors, such as the social context, the interpreter's psychology, and the text's historical conditions. It is feared that this will result in an interpretation that is too relative and has the potential to distort the original meaning of the Qur'an (Inayati, 2019, p. 77). Fourth, most scholars agree that the authenticity of the Qur'an has been maintained since it was revealed, unlike the Bible, which has undergone various revisions throughout its history (Djalal, 2016, p. 5). In the Christian tradition, hermeneutics is used to maintain the Bible's status as a holy book, although it actually dismantles its sacredness (Maranatha, 2024, pp. 138–139). Schleiermacher's thinking, for example, equates the text of the Bible with ancient Greek and Roman texts, which has implications for reducing the sacredness of religious texts (Titus, 2021, p. 35). Therefore, Muslims who reject hermeneutics are worried that applying this method to the Qur'an will have

similar consequences, namely the loss of its sacred value as a book of revelation. The four reasons above are the basis for some Muslims to reject hermeneutics as a method of interpreting the Qur'an. They assume that hermeneutics can threaten the authority of classical interpretation and result in the deconstruction of established Islamic understanding. Therefore, they prefer to continue using the interpretation methods formulated by previous scholars without adopting new methods considered risky (Islam, Nasution, et al., 2025; Trisnani et al., 2025).

On the other hand, those supporting hermeneutics see this method as a solution to the decline of Muslims in understanding Qur'an and hadith. They argue that various social and intellectual problems in Muslim society today are inseparable from stagnation in interpretation methods (Izzah, 2021, p. 98). Therefore, new tools and approaches are needed so that the Qur'an can be interpreted more contextually and relevantly to the development of the times. Proponents of hermeneutics emphasize that this method does not aim to change or desacralize the Qur'an but rather to provide a refresher in interpretation so that the messages of the Qur'an remain meaningful in every era (Ulum, 2022, p. 180).

Although the term hermeneutics is not known in the classical Islamic scientific tradition, the practice of hermeneutics in certain forms has long been applied in the study of Qur'anic interpretation (Ulum, 2022, p. 184). Farid Esack in *Memlibkan yang Tertiwang: Al-Qur'an, Liberalisme, Pluralisme* reveals that the problematic of hermeneutics has been studied in various aspects even though it is not explicitly called so (Essack, 2000; Sudarman, 2015, p. 83). This can be seen in three main aspects:

First, the study of *asbāb an-nuzūl* and *nasikh-mansukh* shows that there is attention to the historical context of the revelation of the verses of the Qur'an (Zuhdi et al., 2021, p. 10). Second, the difference between actual interpretation and the principles and methodology governing it has long been recognized in classical interpretation literature (Muallifah et al., 2022, p. 316). Third, the categorization of interpretations in various schools, such as Shia, Mu'tazilah, and Ash'ariyah, reflects the relationship between ideology, historical period, and social affiliation of the interpreter with the results of his interpretation (Imadudin & Ain, 2022, p. 382).

Although the Islamic tradition has recognized aspects resembling hermeneutics, historical-critical studies of interpretation regarding the relationship between the interpreter's social aspects and his interpretation are still limited. Esack emphasized that hermeneutics is not merely a product of Western science but has roots in the Islamic tradition itself (Padlan et al., 2022, pp. 191–192). Therefore, the rejection of hermeneutics simply because it is considered a

foreign method is considered inappropriate and tends to be excessive.

In addition, the concern that applying hermeneutics will equate the Qur'an with other religious texts is also not entirely justified. Each religion has its hermeneutics according to the characteristics of its holy book. For example, there are Qur'anic hermeneutics, Bible hermeneutics, and Upanishadic hermeneutics, each of which has its characteristics based on its historical, theological, and linguistic aspects (Arrasyid et al., 2024, pp. 495–496). Thus, hermeneutics does not necessarily eliminate a holy book's sacred dimension but functions as a methodological approach to understanding its meaning. In studying the Qur'an, hermeneutics does not deal with the process of revelation or the relationship between God and His Messenger. Instead, hermeneutics focuses on the linguistic and historical aspects of the text after the revelation was revealed, namely how the words of the Qur'an are understood, interpreted, and conveyed to humanity (A. R. Ridho, 2017, p. 286). Thus, hermeneutics does not view the Qur'an in its vertical dimension as a revelation but in its horizontal dimension as a text that has a specific social and historical context.

##### **5. Critique of Hermeneutics in the Interpretation of the Qur'an**

The hermeneutical approach significantly impacts thought patterns, especially in prioritizing an anthropocentric perspective. Therefore, this approach is often considered an anthropocentric *ta'wil*, which differs from the traditional approach to God-centered sacred texts (Abu Zayd, 2014, pp. 252–267). Many religious circles often reject this anthropocentric mindset because it is considered to ignore the dimensions of sacredness and absolute submission to Divine authority, as is usually associated with religious teachings, including the Qur'an. According to this critique, the hermeneutical approach can erode the sacredness of sacred texts by placing interpretation as a product of human subjectivity bound by space and time (Inayati, 2019, p. 75).

Criticism of hermeneutics by some Muslim scholars can be summarized as follows: First, the historical origins of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is rooted in the Christian, Western, and Philosophical traditions, considered to carry specific ideological values not in line with Islam. Initially, hermeneutics developed in the Biblical tradition, which faced the text's problem of historicity and authority (Husaini, 2004, pp. 7–15). Hermeneutics attempts to understand the Biblical texts of many authors in a specific historical context. However, the shift of hermeneutics to the realm of philosophy created a more secular method, making hermeneutics considered to

have the potential to disrupt the foundations of religion, mainly because of the subordination of religion to philosophy. As a philosophical method, hermeneutics ignores the metaphysical, cosmological, and ontological dimensions essential in the Islamic tradition (Zarkasyi, 2004, pp. 16–29).

Second, the Existence of the Islamic Interpretation Method. Muslims have a well-established tradition of using the Ulumul Qur'an as a methodology for interpreting the Qur'an. This method is considered more relevant and profound than hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, initially developed for the Bible and considered inauthentic and changeable, is not necessary for the Qur'an, which is final, authentic, and unchanging (Armas, 2004, pp. 38–45). This fundamental difference makes hermeneutics unsuitable for application to the Qur'an, which is unique in its structure and authority (Wan Daud, 2004, p. 55).

Third, the Etymological Roots of Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is often associated with the mythological figure of Hermes, a Greek god tasked with conveying messages from the gods to humans. In this context, Hermes can adjust the message according to his interpretation. However, in Islam, the role of the Prophet is very different because he did not have the authority to change or manipulate the revelation, which was always under the direct supervision of Allah (Baidan, 2001, pp. 165–180).

Fourth, Differences in Interpretation Procedures and Hierarchies. The tradition of the scholars of the Qur'an emphasizes authenticity and systematic interpretation procedures. The process of interpretation in Islam has a clear hierarchy, such as using verses to interpret other verses, referring to hadith, the opinions of companions, and so on. In contrast, hermeneutics tends not to pay attention to the procedural sequence but emphasizes mastery of the text and historical context (Kusroni, 2019, p. 87).

Fifth, Limitations of Hermeneutics in Religious Interpretation. Hermeneutics is considered too simple because it only focuses on three main elements: text, reader, and context. This approach is considered insufficient to provide detailed guidelines for interpreters to find the correct and representative meaning. In addition, hermeneutics assumes that an interpreter can understand the text better than its author, which is contrary to the belief in Islam that some aspects of the Qur'an (such as the supernatural) cannot be fully reached by human reason, even by the most brilliant individual (Victoria & Kelib, 2017, pp. 3–4).

In conclusion, the hermeneutical approach to interpreting the Qur'an has faced significant criticism from Muslim scholars, primarily because it is perceived as being less in line with Islamic

principles. The main criticism lies in the origins of hermeneutics, which are rooted in Christian, Western, and philosophical traditions and are feared to bring secular values and foreign ideologies. In addition, hermeneutics is viewed as inconsistent with the established methodology of Qur'anic scholars, particularly in its approach to maintaining the sacredness, authority, and authenticity of the Qur'an.

Hermeneutics, emerging from Christian, Western, and philosophical traditions, is built upon a secular and historicist view of textual meaning. This orientation stands in contrast to the Qur'anic epistemology, regarding revelation (wahyu) as a transcendent and authoritative source of knowledge. Consequently, the application of hermeneutics to the Qur'an raises a problem of epistemic inconsistency: it attempts to analyze a divine, timeless text through a framework designed for historically contingent and human-authored scriptures.

While some critics express ideological apprehensions, fearing that hermeneutics might import secular or foreign values into Islamic thought, the deeper issue lies in the methodological incompatibility between the two paradigms. Hermeneutics' anthropocentric orientation, its tendency to prioritize the interpreter over the text, and its procedural ambiguity weaken its suitability for preserving the sacred, authoritative, and authentic essence of Qur'anic interpretation.

Therefore, this study affirms that the critique of the hermeneutical approach in Qur'anic interpretation is primarily methodological rather than ideological in nature. It seeks to safeguard epistemological coherence within Islamic scholarship, ensuring that interpretive efforts remain faithful to the divine ontology of the Qur'an while encouraging the development of interpretive methodologies that are contextually relevant yet epistemically rooted in revelation.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

From the perspective of Qur'anic interpretation, hermeneutics is considered a Western product because it originated from the context of Christian theology, aiming to interpret the biblical text, facing problems of authority and authenticity. Hermeneutics developed within the secular Western philosophical tradition, emphasizing the historicity and relativity of a text's meaning. As a result, this method is not considered fully in accordance with the principles of Islamic interpretation, prioritizing the sacredness, absolute authority of the Qur'anic text, and the authenticity of unchangeable divine revelation. Hermeneutics is also seen as contradicting the methodology of the *ulumul Qur'an*, having clear procedures and hierarchies of interpretation

based on Islamic tradition.

Theoretically, this study contributes to strengthening the epistemological foundation of Qur'anic interpretation by reaffirming the distinction between tafsir, a discipline rooted in revelation and tradition, and hermeneutics, a product of Western philosophical reflection. By tracing the historical and methodological differences between the two, this analysis enriches the theoretical discourse of Qur'anic studies, especially in understanding how interpretive authority and textual meaning operate within the framework of divine revelation. It also encourages the development of a critical-comparative approach not merely rejects or adopts Western methods, but also contextualizes them within the Islamic intellectual paradigm, thereby opening up a more dialogical and integrative space for contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.

Practically, the findings of this study have implications for the teaching of tafsir and Islamic hermeneutics in higher education. Educators are encouraged to design learning models that help students critically distinguish between Islamic and Western interpretive frameworks, emphasizing the theological, linguistic, and historical bases of the *ulumul Qur'an*. Such a pedagogical orientation will not only strengthen students' methodological literacy but also cultivate epistemic awareness, enabling them to engage with modern hermeneutical theories while maintaining fidelity to Islamic interpretive principles. Consequently, Islamic higher education can produce interpreters who are both intellectually open and theologically grounded.

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