

PRESERVING THE PURITY OF REVELATION: The Challenge of Hermeneutics to Qur'anic Da'Wah

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the intersection of hermeneutics and the authority of the Qur'an, specifically focusing on its implications for interpreting sacred texts. It explores whether the hermeneutic method, which emphasizes historical context, textual dynamics, and reader subjectivity, poses a challenge to the Qur'an's divine authority or whether it contributes positively to the tafsir tradition. The study contrasts the perspectives of classical scholars, such as Al-Suyuti, who adhered to a revelation-based tafsir methodology, with the views of modern scholars like Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who introduced a more contextualized approach to Qur'anic interpretation. By delving into the dynamics of meaning within hermeneutics, this paper investigates the potential risks of distortion (*tahrif*) that arise when the text is reinterpreted beyond its traditional exegesis. Furthermore, the article examines the role of hermeneutics in shaping contemporary interpretations of the Qur'an in the Indonesian context, particularly regarding sensitive issues such as gender and legal rulings. This exploration sheds light on the ongoing debate between maintaining the purity of the Qur'an's meaning and adapting its teachings to meet the demands of modernity. Through a balanced approach, the study aims to provide recommendations for integrating hermeneutics into the tafsir tradition while ensuring that the Qur'an's divine essence is preserved. In doing so, it underscores the importance of preserving the sacred text's authority while making its teachings relevant to contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: hermeneutics, Qur'anic interpretation, tafsir tradition, Islamic authority, gender studies, legal interpretation, Indonesia



Introduction

The Qur'an is the holy text that serves as the primary guide for Muslims worldwide. As a divine revelation believed to have been sent to Prophet Muhammad SAW through the Angel Gabriel, the Qur'an holds absolute authority in determining the values, laws, and morality of Muslims. The authenticity and purity of the Qur'an are guaranteed by Allah SWT as stated in Surah Al-Hijr: 9,

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾

It means: 'Indeed, it is We who have sent down the Qur'an, and indeed, We will be its guardian.' (Q.S. Al-Hijr: 9)

This verse serves as the theological foundation that the Qur'an is protected from any change, deviation, or distortion, both in its text and its meaning. However, challenges in understanding and interpreting the Qur'an always arise with the development of time, especially when new interpretive methods are introduced.

The tradition of interpreting the Qur'an, known as tafsir, has developed since the time of the companions to the modern era. Tafsir aims to explain the meanings of the Qur'anic verses in a way that remains relevant to the context of Muslim life. According to Imam Al-Suyuti, tafsir is the science focused on understanding the meaning of the Qur'an based on the text, context, and authentic Arabic grammar rules¹. Approaches like tafsir bil ma'tsur, which relies on the Qur'an, Hadith, and the views of the companions, or tafsir bil ra'yi, which uses reasoning within certain limits, have become the main pillars in preserving the authority of the Qur'an. Tafsir works by scholars like Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir are respected references due to their methodological accuracy and respect for revelation.

However, in the modern era, a new approach to understanding the Qur'an has emerged, known as hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, initially developed in the tradition of interpreting Christian texts in the West, emphasizes the role of historical context, the subjectivity of the reader, and the dynamics of meaning in understanding sacred texts. Scholars like Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and Fazlur Rahman applied the principles of hermeneutics to interpret the Qur'an, viewing the sacred text not only as divine revelation but also as a cultural product (muntaj al-tsaqafi) that can be reinterpreted according to the needs of the time. This approach has sparked controversy, as it is seen to shift the authority of the Qur'an from its divine source to a relatively human interpretation.

Tahrif refers to the deviation or distortion of the meaning of sacred texts, which has become a major concern in this discourse. Historically, tahrif occurred in the texts of other religions, such as the Torah and the Gospel, as alluded to in Surah Al-Baqarah: 75,

﴿ أَفَنظَمُونَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِالْكِتَابِ وَقَدْ كَانُوا مِنْهُمْ يُرْسِلُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾
كَلِمَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ يُحَرِّفُونَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ
يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

¹ Al-Suyuti, Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1985), 4:180

It means: 'Do you (Muslims) hope that they will believe you, while a group of them used to hear the word of Allah, then they changed it after they understood it, although they knew it?'

However, in the modern context, some scholars are concerned that the hermeneutic approach may become a new form of tahrif, not in the Qur'anic text itself, but in its meaning and authority. For instance, Quraish Shihab emphasizes that interpretations that disregard the principles of faith and the methodology of scholars risk corrupting the purity of understanding the Qur'an².

In Indonesia, this phenomenon is also evident in academic and religious discourse. Local tafsir, such as Tafsir Al-Azhar by Hamka, shows efforts to integrate cultural values without sacrificing the authority of the Qur'an. However, when the hermeneutic approach is introduced by Indonesian scholars, such as in the study of legal or gender-related verses, it often triggers resistance from Muslim intellectuals who view it as a threat to faith.

The debate between tafsir and modern hermeneutics reflects the tension between respect for the authority of the Qur'an and the need to make the sacred text relevant to contemporary times. The fundamental question that arises is: can hermeneutics be integrated into the tafsir tradition without undermining the authority of the Qur'an, or does it instead pave the way for tahrif? This background serves as a foundation to further analyze the implications of hermeneutics on the understanding of the Qur'an, considering the perspectives of the salaf, modern, and local.

Literature Review

The introduction of hermeneutics as a method of interpreting the Qur'an in the modern era has raised a number of complex issues, particularly regarding the authority of the sacred text. Hermeneutics, which is rooted in the Western tradition of understanding texts through historical context and the subjectivity of the reader, offers a new approach to viewing the Qur'an as a dynamic text³. However, this approach often contradicts the principles of tafsir established by the Salafi scholars, who emphasize the divine authority of the Qur'an as a revelation that is absolute and cannot be relativized. This contradiction raises a fundamental question: does hermeneutics enrich the understanding of the Qur'an or does it lead to tahrif, which is the distortion of meaning that could undermine the purity of the sacred text?

One of the main issues is the relativism of meaning brought by hermeneutics. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, the understanding of a text is always influenced by the historical horizon of the reader, so the meaning of the text can change according to the context of the time⁴. When applied to the Qur'an, this approach allows for the reinterpretation of verses, such as those on inheritance laws or polygamy, which may no longer seem relevant to modern values. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, for example, views the Qur'an as a cultural product that must be interpreted according to contemporary social realities⁵. This view has been strongly

² Shihab, Quraish, "Menangkal Tahrif dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Ulumul Qur'an* 5, no. 2 (1994): 15.

³ Ricoeur, P., *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 22.

⁴ Gadamer, H.-G., *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 302.

⁵ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini* (Cairo: Sina li al-Nashr, 1992)

criticized by Islamic scholars, who argue that hermeneutics ignores the universal and eternal nature of the Qur'an as a divine guide.

In Indonesia, this issue is even more pronounced in academic and religious discussions. The hermeneutic approach adopted by some scholars, such as in gender or pluralism studies, is often seen as weakening the authority of tafsir, which is the reference for the Muslim community. For example, the reinterpretation of verses regarding male leadership (Q.S. An-Nisa: 34) through a hermeneutic lens has triggered resistance because it is considered contrary to the opinions of the mufassirun.

Moreover, this issue is complicated by the accusation that hermeneutics may serve as a gateway to modern tahrif. While classical tahrif refers to changes in the text, in this context, tahrif is understood as the distortion of meaning that obscures the divine intent. The emerging question is how to balance methodological innovation with respect for the authority of the Qur'an, without falling into relativism or dogmatism. This issue is crucial because it concerns not only academic discourse but also the faith and identity of Muslims as a whole.

This paper aims to critically analyze the relationship between hermeneutics and the authority of the Qur'an in the context of interpreting the sacred text. Specifically, this study focuses on evaluating whether the hermeneutic approach, which emphasizes historical context and the subjectivity of the reader, can be considered a threat to the authority of the Qur'an or whether it enriches the tradition of tafsir. By considering the views of Salafi scholars such as Al-Suyuti, who emphasized the importance of a tafsir methodology grounded in revelation⁶, as well as modern perspectives such as those put forth by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd on the dynamics of textual meaning⁷, this article seeks to explore the sources of the issues surrounding hermeneutics in interpreting the Qur'an.

Additionally, this paper aims to identify the potential for tahrif in the application of hermeneutics, as feared by scholars like Quraish Shihab, who stresses the importance of preserving the purity of the meaning of the Qur'an⁸. In the context of Indonesia, this study also seeks to explore how hermeneutics is accepted or rejected within local religious discourse. Thus, this paper hopes to provide recommendations for balancing methodological innovation with respect for the authority of the Qur'an, ensuring that the understanding of the sacred text remains relevant without compromising its divine essence.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature analysis method to examine the relationship between hermeneutics and the authority of the Qur'an. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of tafsir texts, hermeneutic works, and discussions on tahrif from various perspectives. Primary data includes the Qur'an, Salafi tafsir works such as Tafsir Al-Tabari and Tafsir Ibn Kathir, as well as modern works that apply hermeneutics, such as writings by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, an Egyptian Muslim scholar who

⁶ Al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1985), 4:180

⁷ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Mafhum al-Nass: Dirasah fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 1990)

⁸ Shihab, Quraish, "Menangkal Tahrif dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Ulumul Qur'an* 5, no. 2 (1994): 18.

was declared an apostate by the Al-Azhar scholars. Secondary data includes academic literature in English, such as the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer on hermeneutics, and Indonesian sources, such as articles by Prof. Dr. Quraish Shihab on the interpretation of the Qur'an.

The analysis is conducted using a comparative approach, comparing the tafsir methodology of Salafi scholars with the principles of hermeneutics to identify points of convergence and divergence in understanding the authority of the Qur'an. Additionally, this study uses critical analysis of the concept of tahrif, referring to the views of Salafi scholars such as Al-Suyuti and contemporary discussions in Indonesia, for example, through the works of Hamka. To ensure local relevance, the study also considers the context of interpretation in Indonesia. With this approach, this article aims to produce a balanced understanding between tradition and methodological innovation without disregarding the authority of the sacred text.

Result and Discussion

The Concept of Tafsir in the Islamic Tradition

Tafsir, in the Islamic tradition, refers to the science that aims to explain the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an so that they can be understood and applied in the lives of Muslims. The term "tafsir" comes from the Arabic root *fasara*, which means to explain or reveal something hidden⁹. According to Al-Suyuti, tafsir is a science that focuses on understanding the text of the Qur'an based on the rules of the Arabic language, the context of revelation, and authoritative sources such as hadith and the views of the¹⁰ companions. As a discipline, tafsir not only serves to reveal the literal meaning, but also to maintain the authority of the Qur'an as a universal and eternal divine revelation.

Definition and Principles of Tafsir

Mutaqoddimin scholars such as Imam Al-Tabari define tafsir as a systematic attempt to explain the intentions of Allah in the Qur'an by considering the *asbab al-nuzul* (the reason for the descent of verses) and the rules of Arabic grammar¹¹. In *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an*, Al-Tabari emphasizes that the interpretation must be based on authentic sources, such as the Qur'an itself, the hadith of the Prophet, and the *ijma'* of the companions, in order to avoid unfounded speculation. Ibn Katsir, in his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, reinforces this view by emphasizing the importance of tafsir bil ma'tsur, i.e. an interpretation that relies on authoritative texts and traditions, as the safest method of maintaining the purity of the Qur'anic meaning¹².

The main principle of tafsir is to respect the divine authority of the Qur'an. Verses such as Q.S. Ali Imran: 7 distinguish between the verses of *muhkamat* (which are clear in meaning) and *mutasyabihat* (which are vague), implying that only Allah and those who are deeply knowledgeable are able to understand the true meaning of the Qur'an. Therefore, tafsir requires scientific competence, including mastery of the Arabic language, hadith science, and Islamic history, as described by Al-Zamakhshari in *Al-Kashshaf*¹³.

Types of Interpretation

⁹ Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 2009), hlm.650

¹⁰ Al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1985), 4:170

¹¹ Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1992), 1:25

¹² Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1419 H), 1:130

¹³ Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1987), 1:40

In general, tafsir in the Islamic tradition can be divided into two main categories: *tafsir bil ma'tsur* and *tafsir bil ra'yi*. *Tafsir bil ma'tsur* prioritizes interpretation based on the Qur'an, hadith, and the views of companions or tabiin. An example is the commentary of Al-Tabari and Ibn Katsir, who cite authentic narrations to explain the interpretation of each verse. This approach is considered the most authoritative because it minimizes subjective interpretation.

On the other hand, *tafsir bil ra'yi* involves the use of reason and ijihad within the limits of sharia rules. Al-Zamakhshari, although still based on the Arabic language, often uses rational analysis in interpreting verses. Although flexible, this approach is strictly regulated so as not to deviate from divine intent, as Al-Suyuti warns that interpretations without a basis in science can lead to error¹⁴.

The Authority of Scholars in Tafsir

In the Islamic tradition, scholars play a central role in determining the meaning of the Qur'an. Works such as *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* by Jalaluddin al-Mahalli and Jalaluddin al-Suyuti are evidence of how scholars seek to simplify interpretation without sacrificing the authority of the text. In Indonesia, local interpretations such as *Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar* show how modern scholars integrate cultural values and social contexts, for example in explaining Q.S. An-Nisa: 34 about the relationship between husband and wife, while still respecting classical¹⁵ traditions.

The interpretation of scholars remains relevant because it serves as a bulwark against distortions of the meaning of the Qur'an. Approaches such as *tafsir bil ma'tsur* guarantee that interpretation remains in accordance with divine intent, while *tafsir bil ra'yi* allows adaptation to the challenges of the times within the limits of sharia. However, the rise of modern approaches such as hermeneutics challenged this methodology, sparking a debate about the extent to which innovation could be accepted without undermining the authority of the Qur'an. Thus, the concept of interpretation in the Islamic tradition becomes an important foundation for understanding the dynamics between the authority of sacred texts and the needs of contemporary interpretation.

Tahrif: Distortion of the Meaning of the Qur'an

In the Islamic tradition, *tahrif* refers to the deviation or distortion of sacred texts, both in the form of alterations in pronunciation (text) and distortion of meaning. The term comes from the Arabic root *harrafa*, which means to turn or change something from its original form¹⁶. In the context of the Qur'an, tahrif is a sensitive issue because Muslims believe that we are holy in the Qur'an and are protected from all forms of change, as guaranteed by Allah in Q.S. Al-Hijr: 9, "Verily We are the ones who have sent down the Qur'an and indeed We are the ones who preserve it". However, the discourse of tahrif is not only limited to the text, but also includes interpretations that deviate from divine intent, which is the main focus in modern debates about the authority of the Qur'an.

Definition of Tahrif in Islam

According to scholars of interpretation such as Al-Tabari, tahrif has historically been often associated with other religious communities, particularly the Ahl al-Kitab (Jews and Christians), who are believed to have altered their sacred texts, such as the Torah and the

¹⁴ Al-Suyuti, Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1985), 185.

¹⁵ Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1983), p. 320

¹⁶ Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 2009), hlm. 250

¹⁷Gospels. Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 75, for example, mentions that there are groups that distort the meaning of Allah's words after understanding them. However, in the context of the Qur'an, the tahrif text is considered impossible due to divine protection. On the other hand, the tahrif of meaning becomes a major concern, especially when the interpretation is carried out without a scientific basis or with a distorted motive. Al-Suyuti in *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* emphasizes that interpreting the Qur'an based on lust is a forbidden form of tahrif, as warned in the hadith of the Prophet about the dangers of interpretation without knowledge¹⁸.

Ibn Hazm in *Al-Fisal fi al-Milal wa al-Nihal* argues that texts before the Qur'an have undergone tahrif lafzi (textual changes) and tahrif ma'nawi (distortions of meaning), which are the reasons why the Qur'an was revealed as a perfecter of revelation¹⁹. However, in the internal context of Islam, accusations of tahrif are more often directed at interpretations that are considered distorted, such as the views of classical heretical groups (e.g., the Qadariyah or Jahmiyah) who interpreted verses about the nature of Allah in a controversial way. Quraish Shihab, in the modern context, warns that tahrif meaning can occur when interpretation ignores the rules of sharia or the context of revelation, such as in the reinterpretation of legal verses without a clear methodology²⁰.

The Threat of Tahrif in Modern Interpretation

In the modern era, the threat of tahrif meaning has become more complex with the emergence of unconventional interpretive approaches, including hermeneutics. Scholars such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who viewed the Qur'an as a cultural text that could be reinterpreted, were often criticized for opening up space for relativism of meaning. For example, a reinterpretation of verses such as Q.S. An-Nisa: 34 about male leadership with a modern approach can be considered as tahrif if it does not pay attention to the asbab al-nuzul²¹. John Wansbrough, an orientalist, also sparked controversy with his analysis that questioned the historicity of the Qur'anic texts, as a form of academic tahrif²².

In Indonesia, this phenomenon is seen in discussions about social verses, such as polygamy or inheritance law, which are reinterpreted with a contextual lens. Hamka in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* emphasizes the importance of maintaining the original meaning of these verses so that they are not distorted by foreign values²³. This concern with modern tahrif reflects the challenge of balancing freedom of thought with a commitment to the authority of the Qur'an.

Hermeneutics: A Western Approach to the Sacred Text

Hermeneutics, as a discipline of interpreting texts, has become one of the approaches that has influenced the study of sacred texts, including the Qur'an, in the modern era. Derived from the Greek word *hermeneuein* meaning "to interpret" or "to translate," hermeneutics originally developed in the Western Christian tradition of understanding the Bible, before being adopted

¹⁷ Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1992), 1:400

¹⁸ Al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1985), 4:190

¹⁹ Ibn Hazm, *Al-Fisal fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1986), 2:300

²⁰ Shihab, Quraish, "Counteracting Tahrif in the Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Ulumul Qur'an Journal* 5, no. 2 (1994): 16

²¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini* (Cairo: Sina li al-Nashr, 1992), 130.

²² Wansbrough, J., *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 45

²³ Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1983), p. 330

in the study of other texts, including the Qur'an²⁴. This approach emphasizes that the meaning of the text is not static, but rather depends on the historical context, the culture of the reader, and the dynamics of interpretation. In the context of the Qur'an, the application of hermeneutics sparked fierce debate because it was considered to undermine the authority of sacred texts as divine revelation.

The Origins of Hermeneutics

Modern hermeneutics is rooted in the work of philosophers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, who in the 19th century developed the idea that the interpretation of texts must understand the author's intentions and their historical context²⁵. This approach was expanded upon by Wilhelm Dilthey, who emphasized the importance of empathy towards the subjective experience of the textwriter. However, an important turning point occurred through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who in *Truth and Method* introduced the concept of the "hermeneutical circle". According to Gadamer, text understanding is a dialogue between the historical horizon of the text and the reader's horizon, so that meaning continues to evolve over time²⁶. This principle is far different from the interpretation in Islam, which emphasizes the divine authority of the Qur'an and the rules of interpretation such as *asbab al-nuzul*.

Application of Hermeneutics to the Qur'an

The application of hermeneutics to the Qur'an was begun by modern Muslim scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. Fazlur Rahman, in *Islam and Modernity*, proposes a "double movement" approach: understanding the historical context of Qur'anic verses (e.g., Q.S. An-Nisa: 3 on polygamy) in order to capture its moral spirit, and then apply it in a modern context²⁷. This approach allows for the reinterpretation of the laws of the Qur'an to be relevant to values such as gender equality. However, Rahman's views were criticized for being too flexible, risking ignoring the literal text of the Qur'an.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, in *Mafhum al-Nass*, argues that the Qur'an is a "cultural product" whose meaning depends on interaction with readers in different eras. He gave an example of verses about inheritance law (Q.S. An-Nisa: 11) that can be reinterpreted by considering the modern social context²⁸. This approach sparked controversy in Egypt, where Abu Zayd was accused of performing *tahrif* meaning and insulting the authority of the Qur'an. In Indonesia, a similar approach has emerged in gender studies by scholars such as Musdah Mulia, who reinterprets Q.S. An-Nisa: 34 on male leadership through the lens of equality²⁹.

The application of hermeneutics to the Qur'an challenges interpretation in several ways. First, hermeneutics tends to relativize meaning, contrary to the view of Islamic scholars who affirm that the meaning of the Qur'an is definite based on revelation and hadith. Second, the emphasis on the subjectivity of the reader can reduce the authority of the scholars as the

²⁴ Palmer, R. E., *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 33

²⁵ Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 95

²⁶ Gadamer, H.-G., *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 302.

²⁷ Rahman, F., *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 20.

²⁸ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Mafhum al-Nass: Dirasah fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 1990), hlm.70

²⁹ Mulia, M., "Towards an Inclusive Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Journal of Equality* 3, no. 1 (2004): 15–20.

guardians of interpretation, as explained by Al-Suyuti in *Al-Itqan*³⁰. Third, the hermeneutic historical approach, which views the Qur'an as a product of a particular age, has the potential to undermine confidence in the divine and universal nature of sacred texts.

Hermeneutics Controversy in Qur'an Studies

The application of hermeneutics in the interpretation of the Qur'an has sparked complex academic and religious debates, given that this approach often clashes with the rules of interpretation of scholars. Hermeneutics, which emphasizes historical context, the subjectivity of the reader, and the dynamics of meaning, is seen as a threat to the authority of the Qur'an as an absolute divine revelation. However, its proponents see it as a tool to bridge sacred texts with the challenges of modern times. One of the prominent figures in this discourse is **Muhammad Syahrur**, a Syrian thinker known for his controversial hermeneutic approach, especially through the **milk al-yamin theory** which triggered global polemics, including in Indonesia through an academic dissertation.

Criticism of Hermeneutics: Relativism and the Threat of Tahrif

The main criticism of hermeneutics focuses on its tendency to relativize the meaning of the Qur'an, which is considered to be contrary to the principles of interpretation. According to Ibn Katsir in *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, the interpretation of the Qur'an must be based on the Arabic language, the hadith of the Prophet, and the views of the companions to maintain the purity of the meaning of revelation³¹. The hermeneutic approach, as outlined by Hans-Georg Gadamer through the concept of the "hermeneutic circle," asserts that the meaning of a text is the result of a dialogue between the text's horizon and the reader, so that meaning can change over time. This raises concerns about *tahrif*—*a distortion of meaning that undermines the authority of the Qur'an as guaranteed* in Q.S. Al-Hijr: 9

A clear example of this criticism can be seen in the case of the interpretation of legal verses, such as Q.S. An-Nisa: 3 on polygamy. In the tafsir of scholars, such as Al-Tabari's, this verse allows polygamy on the condition of justice, based on the text of the verse and *asbab al-nuzul*³². However, scholars such as Fazlur Rahman with a "double movement" approach emphasize the spirit of social justice, which in the modern context can lead to monogamous preferences³³. This view has been criticized because it is considered to ignore the literal text and has the potential to lead to the tahrif of sharia law.

Similar criticism is also addressed to figures such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who in *Mafhum al-Nass* views the Qur'an as a "cultural product" whose meaning depends on the context of the reader. In Indonesia, Quraish Shihab reminded that interpretation must remain based on the rules of sharia to avoid distortion of divine meaning, although he acknowledged the importance of context in interpretation³⁴.

³⁰ Al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1985), 4:180

³¹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1419 H), 1:30

³² Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1992), 4:80

³³ Rahman, F., *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 20.

³⁴ Shihab, Quraish, "Counteracting Tahrif in the Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Journal of Ulumul Qur'an* 5, no. 2 (1994): 16.

Muhammad Syahrur: Contemporary Hermeneutics and the Theory of Milk al-Yamin

Muhammad Syahrur (born 1938, Damascus, Syria) is one of the most controversial contemporary Islamic thinkers due to his hermeneutic approach to interpreting the Qur'an. With a background in civil engineering from the University of Damascus and advanced studies in Russia and Ireland, Syahrur sought to formulate a new methodology for Islamic law through his works, such as *Al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an: Qira'ah Mu'asirah* (1990).³⁵ His approach, known as "limit theory" (*nazariyyat al-hudud*), emphasizes that Qur'anic law has a minimum and maximum limit that allows for contextual flexibility without violating the essence of sharia³⁶.

One of the most controversial concepts of Syahrur is the reinterpretation of *milk al-yamin* (the ownership of a righteous slave), referring to a slave who is allowed to have sexual relations with her master based on verses such as Q.S. Al-Mu'minun: 5-6 and Q.S. Al-Ahzab: 50. In the book of tafsir, such as Al-Qurtubi's work, *milk al-yamin* is limited to the context of slavery that has been abolished in the modern era, so that the law is considered no longer relevant³⁷. Syahrur, through his hermeneutic approach, proposes that *milk al-yamin* can be contextualized as *aqd ihsan* (commitment contract), i.e. consensual sexual relations outside of marriage that do not aim to form a family, similar to the practice of contract marriage or non-marital relationships in the West³⁸. He argues that the Qur'an, as a relevant text throughout the ages, allows this reinterpretation to accommodate modern social dynamics, provided that such relationships do not involve coercion, blood relations, or public offenses such as and homosexuality.

Syahrur's approach has sparked strong criticism because it is considered to weaken the sharia law on adultery. In the review of Islamic fiqh, sexual relations outside of marriage (*akad nikah*) are adultery, which is prohibited based on Q.S. Al-Isra: 32 and reinforced by the hadith of the Prophet PBUH narrated by Imam Bukhari about the prohibition of adultery³⁹. One of the examiners of Abdul Aziz's dissertation who wrote about this theory, Euis Nurlaelawati emphasized that the concept of Syahrur is problematic theoretically because it does not explain the harmony and conditions of *aqd ihsan* clearly, and is not in accordance with *the 'urf* (tradition) of the Muslim community that rejects non-marital relationships⁴⁰. Sahiron Syamsuddin, an Indonesian academic, also criticized Syahrur for imposing too much *pre-understanding* in his interpretation, thus ignoring the *intended original meaning* of the Qur'anic text⁴¹. This criticism is reinforced by the view that Syahrur was influenced by the secular Western context, especially during his stay in Russia and Europe, which tolerated practices such as *samen leven* (gathering together), which was clearly contrary to the teachings of Islam.

³⁵ Syahrur, Muhammad, *Al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an: Qira'ah Mu'asirah* (Damascus: Al-Ahali, 1994).

³⁶ Syahrur, Muhammad, *Principles and Basis of Hermeneutics of Contemporary Islamic Law*, ed. Sahiron Syamsuddin (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2007), p. 45.

³⁷ Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Misriyyah, 1964), 12:200

³⁸ Syahrur, Muhammad, *Nahwa Ushul Jadidah li al-Fiqh al-Islami* (Damascus: Al-Ahali, 2000), p. 150

³⁹ Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, Kitab al-Hudood, no. 6802.

⁴⁰ "Press Conference Responding to Mass Media News on Milk al-Yamin Concept Dissertation," UIN Sunan Kalijaga, August 30, 2019.

⁴¹ Syamsuddin, Sahiron, "Criticism of the Interpretation of Syahrur," *Journal of Hermeneutics* 3, no. 2 (2018): 145.

Milk al-Yamin's Dissertation Case: Controversy in Indonesia

The controversy over Syahrur's *milk al-yamin* theory reached its peak in Indonesia through a dissertation entitled *The Concept of Milk al-Yamin Muhammad Syahrur as the Validity of Non-Marital Sexual Relations* by Abdul Aziz, a doctoral student of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, which was heard on August 28, 2019⁴². This dissertation examines Syahrur's view that *milk al-yamin* can be interpreted as a consensual sexual relationship outside of marriage, which is considered legal with certain limitations, such as not involving coercion or violation of public morals. Abdul Aziz argues that this concept can enrich the discourse of sexual fiqh and become the basis for the reform of Islamic civil and criminal law, referring to verses such as Q.S. Al-Mu'minin: 5-6⁴³.

The publication of this dissertation triggered a strong reaction from the Indonesian public and academics. The mass media, reporting that this dissertation legalized sexual relations outside of marriage, triggered the perception that Abdul Aziz legalized adultery. The Rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yudian Wahyudi, stated that the media reports were false and the dissertation was actually an academic study of Syahrur's thoughts, not a recommendation to change Islamic law. However, he admits that there are shortcomings in the editing of the dissertation, especially since Abdul Aziz does not explicitly affirm that this view is Syahrur's perspective, so that it seems as if the author supports the validity of non-marital relationships⁴⁴.

This concept is contrary to the purpose of marriage in Islam, which is to form a family that is *sakinah, mawaddah, wa rahmah* (Q.S. Ar-Rum: 21), and does not reflect the principle of sharia justice. Abdul Aziz is stuck in references that support Syahrur without including adequate criticism, so his analysis is unbalanced.

The reaction of the Indonesian people reflects their sensitivity to this issue and their awareness of the sacredness and majesty of the teachings of Islam. Organizations such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) affirm that sexual relations outside marriage are adultery, which is contrary to sharia and local cultural values. Legalizing what is prohibited by shari'a such as adultery, khamr and other prohibitions and can lead to apostasy and invite disaster and wrath of Allah SWT. In a hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari from the companion of Abu Malik al-'Ash'ari that the Prophet Muhammad SAW said:

لَيَكُونَنَّ مِنْ أُمَّتِي أَقْوَامٌ يَسْتَجْلُونَ الْجَرَ وَالْحَرِيرَ، وَالْخَمْرَ وَالْمَعَارِفَ، وَلَيُنْزَلَنَّ أَقْوَامٌ إِلَى جَنْبِ عِلْمٍ، يَرُوحُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِسَارِحَةٍ لَهُمْ، يَأْتِيهِمْ -بِعَنِي الْفَقِيرَ- لِحَاجَةٍ، فَيَقُولُونَ: ارْجِعْ إِلَيْنَا غَدًا، فَيُبَيِّئُهُمُ اللَّهُ، وَيَضَعُ الْعِلْمَ، وَيَمْسُخُ آخِرِينَ قِرْدَةً وَخَنَازِيرَ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ.

Meaning: 'Verily, there will indeed be among my people a group of people who make it lawful to have genitals (adultery), silk, khamr (liquor), and musical instruments. And some groups of people will actually stop on the slope of a mountain with their livestock, and someone comes to them – that is, the poor people – for some purpose, and they say, 'Come back to us tomorrow.' Then Allah tormented them and caused mountains to fall on them, and Allah turned some of them into apes and pigs until the Day of Resurrection.

⁴² Abdul Aziz, *The Concept of Milk al-Yamin Muhammad Syahrur as the Validity of Non-Marital Sexual Relations* (Dissertation, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2019).

⁴³ Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁴ "Rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Admits Mistake in Dissertation on the Concept of Milkul Yamin," *Indonesianside.id*, August 30, 2019

In addition to *milk al-yamin*, hermeneutic controversy is also seen in the interpretation of other verses. For example, Q.S. An-Nisa: 3 on polygamy is often reinterpreted with a hermeneutic lens to emphasize social justice, as Fazlur Rahman did⁴⁵. Similarly, the verse on hudud (Q.S. Al-Ma'idah: 38) is interpreted by scholars such as Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im as a contextual guideline that can be replaced by alternative punishment in the modern era⁴⁶. In Indonesia, pluralism verses such as Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 62 were interpreted by Amin Abdullah to support inclusivism, although it contradicted the interpretation of the muktabar scholars⁴⁷.

Implications for the Authority of the Qur'an

The introduction of hermeneutics in the interpretation of the Qur'an has raised fundamental questions about the authority of sacred texts as divine revelation. The Qur'an, which is believed to be the absolute and preserved word of Allah, has absolute authority in establishing the laws, morals, and guidelines of the life of Muslims. However, the hermeneutic approach, which emphasizes historical context, reader subjectivity, and the dynamics of meaning, poses new challenges to the way Muslims understand and apply sacred texts. This section analyzes the implications of hermeneutics on the authority of the Qur'an, compares it with the interpretive approaches of scholars, and explores solutions to balance methodological innovation with respect for the purity of revelation.

Hermeneutics, as described by Hans-Georg Gadamer, views that the meaning of text is the result of a dialogue between the text and the reader, which is influenced by their respective historical horizons. When applied to the Qur'an, this approach allows for the reinterpretation of verses according to modern social contexts, as done by Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Muhammad Syahrur. For example, Syahrur in *Al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an* proposes that the concept of *milk al-yamin* (Q.S. Al-Mu'minun: 5-6) can be interpreted as a non-marital consensual relationship, arguing that the Qur'an must be relevant to the dynamics of the times. This approach raises concerns that the authority of the Qur'an as a source of divine law could be distorted by human subjective interpretation.

From the perspective of Islamic scholars, the authority of the Qur'an is absolute because it comes from Allah, as affirmed by Al-Suyuti in *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*. Interpreting the Qur'an without sharia rules, such as Arabic, hadith, and ijma' of the Companions, can be considered as tahrif meaning⁴⁸. For example, the interpretation of Q.S. An-Nisa: 3 (polygamy) emphasizes that sharia law is fixed, with justice as a condition that cannot be relativized. Hermeneutics, by its flexibility, undermines this authority because it prioritizes the context of the reader over the divine text. The case of Abdul Aziz's dissertation at UIN Sunan Kalijaga on *milk al-yamin* Syahrur, which triggered accusations of legalizing adultery, strengthens the perception that hermeneutics can lead to distortions of sharia law that shake the faith of the ummah.

However, proponents of hermeneutics argue that this approach does not inherently undermine the authority of the Qur'an, but rather broadens its understanding. Paul Ricoeur asserts that sacred texts have a "*surplus of meaning*," which allows for new interpretations

⁴⁵ Rahman, F., *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 65.

⁴⁶ An-Na'im, A. A., *Toward an Islamic Reformation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), p. 100.

⁴⁷ Abdullah, A., "Pluralism in the Perspective of the Qur'an," *Tashwirul Afkar Journal* 10, no. 1 (2001): 25.

⁴⁸ Al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1985), 1:90

without eliminating the divine essence⁴⁹. Fazlur Rahman, for example, argues that the Qur'an should be understood as a dynamic moral guideline, not just a literal law. In his interpretation of Q.S. Al-Ma'idah: 38 (the punishment of theft), he emphasized the goals of the shari'a such as justice and the prevention of crime, which can be translated into alternative punishments in the modern era⁵⁰. This approach, according to its proponents, preserves the authority of the Qur'an by making it relevant to contemporary challenges, such as gender equality or pluralism.

However, the risk of relativism remains a major issue. Abu Zayd, who views the Qur'an as a "cultural product," faces charges of apostasy for allegedly demeaning the divine status of the sacred text. Similarly, Syahrur's view of *milk al-yamin* as *aqd ihsan* (non-marital commitment contract) was strongly rejected because it was considered contrary to Q.S. Al-Isra: 32, which prohibits adultery. In Indonesia, the reaction to *milk al-yamin*'s dissertation shows that Muslims tend to view hermeneutics as a threat to the authority of the Qur'an, especially when the interpretation touches on sensitive issues such as sexuality or family law.

Comparison with the Interpretation Approach in Islamic Science

Salafist interpretations, such as *tafsir bil ma'tsur* (based on the Qur'an, hadith, and companions) and *tafsir bil ra'yi* (based on reason within the limits of sharia), place the authority of the Qur'an at the heart of interpretation. Works such as *Tafsir al-Tabari* and *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* emphasize that the meaning of the verses must be in accordance with the divine intent, which is understood through the context of revelation and scientific principles. For example, the interpretation of Q.S. An-Nisa: 34 about male leadership in the interpretation emphasizes that each of them has their duties and obligations without having to be labeled as supremacy for men and degrading women, and vice versa, women are the responsibility of men to take care of and do good to them. On the other hand, hermeneutics offers much greater flexibility and even tends to be radical, but with the risk of distorted interpretations and tending to be deceitful so that what happens is the destruction of family relationships and far from the purpose of marriage in Islam.

Solution: Divine Approach with Knowledge, Faith and Reason

To address the hermeneutic implications of the Qur'anic authority, an approach is needed that balances methodological innovation with respect for divine revelation. First, hermeneutics can be integrated in the framework of interpretation by adopting the principles of *maqasid al-shari'ah* (the goal of sharia), such as justice, welfare, and protection. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, for example, suggests that contextual interpretation should remain grounded in the core values of the Qur'an, as contained in the Makkiyd verses on humanity, in order to avoid excessive relativism⁵¹. This approach allows for *tajdid* without sacrificing the authority of the text.

Second, religious education, science and manners must be strengthened to equip Muslims with an understanding of the dangers of hermeneutics without being accompanied by knowledge and manners. The case of *milk al-yamin*'s dissertation shows that there is a lack of knowledge and a deep understanding of the shari'a and wisdom in every law that Allah SWT has set. Therefore, institutions such as UIN and IAIN need to ensure that hermeneutic studies

⁴⁹ Ricoeur, P., *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 45

⁵⁰ Rahman, F., *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 65.

⁵¹ An-Na'im, A. A., *Toward an Islamic Reformation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), p. 100.

are accompanied by explanations that affirm commitment to the authority of the Qur'an, respect for salaf scholars and adherence to Islamic sources agreed upon by scholars.

Third, an ethical framework must be developed to govern the application of hermeneutics. Mohammed Arkoun suggests that modern interpretation should pay attention to the principles of justice and humanity that are at the core of the Qur'an, so that innovation does not fall into destructive relativism⁵². With this approach, controversial concepts such as *milk al-yamin* Syahrur can be critically evaluated without completely rejecting *tajdid* in Islamic law.

The implications of hermeneutics on the authority of the Qur'an have a wide impact, both at the academic and social levels. In Indonesia, where the majority of Muslims hold fast to Islam, hermeneutic approaches are often considered foreign and provoke resistance, as seen in reactions to *milk al-yamin* dissertations or Musdah Mulia's gender studies. Globally, this discourse reflects the challenges of Muslims in the face of globalization and intellectual pluralism. However, with the right framework, hermeneutics may be able to be a tool to strengthen the relevance of the Qur'an without sacrificing its authority.

For example, the reinterpretation of legal verses such as Q.S. Al-Ma'idah: 38 on the law of cutting off hands by considering *maqasid al-shari'ah* can answer the need of modern society for justice, without eliminating the essence of sharia. Similarly, approaches to social verses such as Q.S. An-Nisa:34 on *qowamatuh al-rijal* can accommodate the value of equality while still respecting the text, as Hamka's contextual interpretation of local culture shows. Thus, the authority of the Qur'an can be maintained through responsible interpretation, which combines contextual sensitivity with theological commitment.

Hermeneutics has the potential to enrich the understanding of the Qur'an, but it also poses a risk to its authority if it is not balanced with the framework of sharia. Compared to tafsir, which emphasizes the stability of meaning, hermeneutics offers an interpretation that can meet the needs of the times, but requires ethical constraints to avoid *tahrif*. Solutions such as the integration of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, religious education and adab, and ethical frameworks can ensure that the Qur'an remains a relevant divine guide without losing its authority. With this approach, Muslims can answer modern challenges while maintaining the purity of revelation.

The Views of Muslim Figures and Scholars on the Dangers and Implications of the Application of Hermeneutics in Interpreting the Qur'an

The application of hermeneutics in the interpretation of the Qur'an has sparked fierce debate among Muslim scholars, especially since this approach is considered to challenge the authority of the sacred text as divine revelation. In Indonesia, three figures who are vocal in criticizing hermeneutics are **Adian Husaini**, **Adnin Armas**, and **Syamsuddin Arif**. All three highlight the dangers and negative implications of hermeneutics, ranging from the relativism of meaning, the deconstruction of the concept of revelation, to threats to Islamic identity. This section outlines their views in detail, compares their arguments, and relates them to the context of hermeneutic controversies, such as the case of *Muhammad Syahrur's* *milk al-yamin* dissertation.

⁵² Arkoun, M., *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 70.

Adian Husaini: Hermeneutics as a Threat to the Absolute Truth of Islam

Adian Husaini, a prolific lecturer and writer, is known for his firm rejection of hermeneutics in the interpretation of the Qur'an. In his book *Hermeneutics and Interpretation of the Qur'an* (2007), Husaini argues that hermeneutics, which is rooted in the Greek and Christian traditions of interpreting texts such as the Bible, is incompatible with the Qur'an due to the different nature of the text. According to him, the Qur'an is *tanzil* (direct revelation from Allah) whose words and meanings come from God, in contrast to the Bible which is considered a text of human inspiration in the Christian tradition⁵³. The application of hermeneutics, which emphasizes the subjectivity of the reader and the historical context, has the potential to relativize the truth of the Qur'an, which for Husayn is absolute and final.

Husayn identifies three main dangers of hermeneutics:

1. **Relativism of Interpretation:** Hermeneutics views all interpretations as products of human intellect that are relative, temporal, and personal. This is contrary to the belief that the Qur'an has a fixed meaning, as shown by the agreement of the mufasir. According to Husaini, this relativism can eliminate the finality of Islamic teachings and open up opportunities to change the standard sharia law, such as inheritance law (Q.S. An-Nisa: 11) or the prohibition of adultery (Q.S. Al-Isra: 32).
2. **Deconstruction of the Concept of Revelation:** Hermeneutics tends to view the Qur'an as a cultural product (*muntaj thaqafi*), as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd views it. This weakens the status of the Qur'an as the kalam of Allah, which according to Husayn is guaranteed its authenticity through the transmission of mutawatir.
3. **Suspicion of Ulama:** Supporters of hermeneutics, according to Husaini, often accuse salaf scholars such as Imam Shafi'i of being textualist and rigid, such as the criticism of Mun'im Sirry in *Jurisprudence Cross Madzhab*. This can undermine the authority of scholars and Islamic scientific traditions that have been tested for centuries.

Husaini asserts that hermeneutics is better suited to the Bible, which has a history of interpretation full of debates about the authenticity of its text. In contrast, the interpretation of the Qur'an has had established methodologies such as *tafsir bil ma'tsur* and *bil ra'yi*, which maintain the authority of the sacred text. He quotes Syed Naquib al-Attas, who states that Islamic interpretation is not identical to Greek or Christian hermeneutics, because it is the foundation of the Islamic cultural structure. In the Indonesian context, Husaini sees the case of *milk al-yamin dissertation* as evidence of the dangers of hermeneutics, where the reinterpretation of verses such as Q.S. Al-Mu'minun: 5-6 by Syahrur triggers the perception of legalizing non-marital relationships, which is contrary to the sharia and local cultural values.

Adnin Armas: Hermeneutics as a Relative Western Product

Adnin Armas, a scholar who has been critical of the influence of Western scholarship in Islamic studies, argues that hermeneutics is not worthy of being used to interpret the Qur'an because of its relative nature and its derivation from non-Islamic traditions. In his article *Tafsir al-Qur'an or Hermeneutics al-Qur'an* (2004), Armas asserts that the interpretation of Islamic scholars is a product of Islamic history that has proven to be fertile, while hermeneutics is a

⁵³ Husaini, Adian, and Abdurrahman Al-Baghdadi, *Hermeneutics and Tafsir of the Qur'an* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2007), p. 8

Western method developed to deal with biblical texts that are full of historical contradictions⁵⁴. According to him, the application of hermeneutics to the Qur'an contains the following dangers:

1. **Excessive Relativity:** Hermeneutics allows for an overly liberal interpretation, thus ignoring the intended *meaning* of the verses of the Qur'an. Armas gives an example of the interpretation of legal verses, such as Q.S. Al-Ma'idah: 38 about hudud, which in a hermeneutic approach can be changed into alternative punishment, even though the interpretation of scholars such as Ibn Katsir confirms the ruling.
2. **Influences of Western Culture:** Armas argues that hermeneutics brings a secular Western *worldview*, which tends to ignore the transcendent dimension of the Qur'an. This can be seen in the views of figures such as Muhammad Syahrur, who interprets *milk al-yamin* as a consensual relationship, influenced by European contexts such as the practice of *samen leven*.
3. **Loss of Islamic Identity:** By adopting hermeneutics, Muslims risk losing their scientific identity, because the interpretations of scholars such as the works of Al-Qurtubi or Al-Suyuti are sufficient to answer the needs of the ummah without the need for foreign methods.

Armas rejects the claim that hermeneutics can enrich interpretation, because according to him, Islamic methodologies such as *'ulum al-Qur'an* are complete with the study of *asbab al-nuzul*, *nasikh-mansukh*, and the rules of the Arabic language. He criticized Syahrur's approach in the case of *milk al-yamin* as an example of how hermeneutics can deconstruct sharia law, which in the Islamic tradition is considered adultery based on Q.S. Al-Isra: 32.

Syamsuddin Arif: Criticism of Liberal Reinterpretation

Dr. Syamsuddin Arif, an academic at the International Islamic University Malaysia, criticizes hermeneutics from a more philosophical and methodological perspective. In his presentation at the workshop *on Hermeneutics and Tafsir of the Qur'an* (2009), he highlighted the danger of liberal reinterpretation driven by hermeneutics, which often ignores the rules of scholarly interpretation⁵⁵. Arif identified the following negative implications:

1. **Liberalization of Interpretation:** Hermeneutics allows for overly liberal interpretations, such as the views of Fazlur Rahman or Syahrur, that adapt the Qur'an to modern values without considering the authority of the text. For example, the reinterpretation of *milk al-yamin* as a non-marital relationship by Syahrur is considered by Arif to be a deviation from the original meaning of the verse (Q.S. Al-Mu'minun: 5-6), which in the interpretation of scholars is limited to the context of slavery.
2. **Methodological Incompatibility:** Arif argues that hermeneutics, which focuses on the "understanding of understanding" as developed by Heidegger and Gadamer, is incompatible with the Qur'an, which demands interpretation based on *sanad* and sharia rules. He compares this to the interpretations of scholars such as *Fakhr al-Din*

⁵⁴ Armas, Adnin, "Tafsir al-Qur'an or Hermeneutics of the Qur'an," *Islamia* 1, no. 1 (2004): 10.

⁵⁵ "The Danger Behind Hermeneutics, the Content of the Quran Is Doubtful," *Wahdah.or.id*, June 27, 2009.

al-Razi's Mafatih al-Ghayb, which integrates science without sacrificing the authority of revelation.

3. **Potential for Misleading:** By prioritizing the context of the reader, hermeneutics can mislead the ummah, especially when producing interpretations that are contrary to the consensus of scholars, as in the case of *milk al-yamin's dissertation* which triggered a polemic in Indonesia because it was considered to legalize adultery.

Although critical, Arif does not completely reject dialogue with a modern approach. He acknowledged that contextual studies can be useful, but they must still be based on Islamic methodologies such as *maqasid al-shari'ah* to maintain the authority of the Qur'an.

The three figures have similarities in rejecting hermeneutics because they are considered to undermine the authority of the Qur'an, but with different emphasis. Husaini focuses more on the threat of relativism and the deconstruction of revelation, Armas highlights the Western origins of hermeneutics and the loss of Islamic identity, while Arif criticizes the liberalization of methodology and the potential for misdirection. All three agreed that tafsir, such as the works of Al-Tabari, Ibn Katsir, and Al-Qurtubi, was sufficient to maintain the purity of the Qur'an without the need for hermeneutics.

Adian Husaini, Adnin Armas, and Syamsuddin Arif consider hermeneutics to be a dangerous approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an because it triggers relativism, deconstructs the concept of revelation, and ignores the methodology of interpretation. Husaini emphasized the threat to the finality of Islam, Armas warned of the loss of Islamic scientific identity, and Arif criticized liberalization as potentially misleading. In contexts such as the case of *milk al-yamin*, their views reflect a broader concern about maintaining the authority of the Qur'an amid the challenges of modernity. However, dialogue between traditional and modern approaches is still necessary to ensure the relevance of the Qur'an without sacrificing its purity.

Comparison and Implications

The three figures have similarities in rejecting hermeneutics due to the potential for relativism, deconstruction of the authority of the Qur'an, and deviations from the interpretation of scholars. Husaini focuses on the threat to the finality of Islam, Armas highlights the origins of the West and the loss of identity, while Arif emphasizes liberalization and the potential for misinterpretation.

Character	Main Criticism Focus	Examples of Hazards	Key Implications
Adian Husaini	Relativism, the deconstruction of revelation	Reinterpretation of inheritance/adultery verses	Undermining the authority of the Qur'an
Adnin Armas	Western influence, excessive relativity	Hudud alternative punishment	Loss of Islamic scientific identity

Syamsuddin Arif	Liberalization, epistemological relativism	False interpreters, misguided	Disturbance of the faith of the ummah
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Conclusion

The introduction of hermeneutics as a method of interpreting the Qur'an has sparked a complex debate regarding the preservation of the Qur'an's authority. While hermeneutics offers a new way to understand the Qur'an by considering historical context and subjectivity, it often conflicts with the traditional tafsir methods upheld by Salafi scholars, who emphasize the Qur'an's absolute divine authority. The relativism introduced by hermeneutics raises concerns about potential tahrif, where the meaning of the Qur'an may be distorted to fit contemporary perspectives. In Indonesia, this debate is further complicated by the rise of hermeneutic interpretations that challenge traditional Islamic views on gender and law, creating resistance among Muslim scholars. Nevertheless, the integration of hermeneutics into the tafsir tradition, if done carefully and with respect to the Qur'an's original meaning, could offer valuable insights for adapting the Qur'an's teachings to modern challenges. Ultimately, the application of hermeneutics must be approached with caution to prevent undermining the Qur'an's divine authority, ensuring that its relevance is preserved without compromising its sanctity.

Suggestions for Balancing Hermeneutics with the Authority of the Qur'an

1. **Respect for Traditional Tafsir Methodology:** While embracing hermeneutics, scholars should ensure that interpretations remain grounded in traditional tafsir methodologies, which prioritize the authenticity of the Qur'an through the context of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*) and the established rules of Arabic grammar. This balance will prevent the distortion of the Qur'an's core message while allowing for contextual relevance.
2. **Use of Maqasid al-Shari'ah:** Integrating the principles of *maqasid al-shari'ah* (the goals of Islamic law), such as justice, welfare, and the protection of public interest, can guide hermeneutic interpretations without straying from the Qur'anic text's divine intent. For example, when interpreting verses related to social issues or legal matters, scholars can focus on the broader ethical objectives rather than rigid literal interpretations.
3. **Contextualizing without Relativizing:** Hermeneutic methods should be applied with caution to avoid relativizing the Qur'an's eternal and universal messages. While historical and cultural contexts are important, the Qur'an's divine nature and absolute authority must remain central in any interpretive framework. This ensures that reinterpretations do not compromise the authenticity of the sacred text.
4. **Academic and Religious Collaboration:** In regions like Indonesia, where Islamic scholarship interacts with diverse cultural and social contexts, it is crucial to foster collaboration between religious scholars and academics. This partnership can ensure that hermeneutic interpretations are not only theologically sound but also culturally sensitive, maintaining respect for both traditional Islamic teachings and the evolving needs of contemporary society.

5. **Ethical Training in Interpretation:** Scholars should be equipped with comprehensive ethical training to navigate the complexities of hermeneutic interpretation. This includes understanding the limits of contextual flexibility, respecting the Qur'an's sacredness, and recognizing the dangers of tahrif (distortion) that could arise from overly liberal or subjective readings. This ethical framework will help maintain the integrity of the Qur'anic text while adapting its teachings to modern challenges.
6. **Public Engagement and Discourse:** To prevent misunderstandings, scholars and religious leaders should actively engage in public discourse about the application of hermeneutics to Qur'anic interpretation. Clear communication regarding the methodological framework and the reasons for reinterpretations can help mitigate resistance from more conservative factions, fostering an informed and respectful dialogue about the evolving role of the Qur'an in modern times.
7. **Further Research on Hermeneutics and Islamic Law:** Future research should focus on the relationship between hermeneutics and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), particularly in areas like gender, inheritance, and legal punishment. This could yield valuable insights into how hermeneutic methods can coexist with established Islamic legal traditions while addressing contemporary societal issues.
8. **Defining Boundaries for Innovation:** While innovation in interpretation is vital for keeping the Qur'an relevant in modern society, scholars must define clear boundaries to prevent misinterpretations. These boundaries can be established by adhering to the Qur'anic principles of justice, equity, and moral guidance, ensuring that any reinterpretation does not conflict with the foundational ethics of Islam.

Ethics Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to its non-invasive and low-risk nature. The research involved digital ethnographic observation and voluntary in-depth interviews with adult participants discussing public religious activities. All participants provided informed consent, and their identities were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to ethical and privacy considerations, interview transcripts and observational data are not publicly available to protect participant confidentiality.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

AI Usage Statement

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT to improve readability and language. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication. References 1. [Edisi 2024]

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