

## Methodological Innovations in Contemporary Qur'anic Exegesis by Muslim Intellectuals in the West: Bridging Tradition and Modernity

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### Abstract

The study of the Qur'an in the West has developed into a robust academic discipline, marked by significant methodological transformations in interpreting the sacred text. Diverging from the classical Islamic tradition of tafsir, Western approaches frequently incorporate historical-critical methods, hermeneutics, and literary analysis. This article aims to examine the methodological evolution of Qur'anic exegesis in the West, highlighting the contributions of prominent contemporary Muslim scholars, including Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement, Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Approach, and Amina Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics. Employing a qualitative methodology rooted in library research, this study utilizes content analysis to elucidate the principles underpinning these innovative approaches. The findings indicate that these methodologies offer a more contextualized and modernly relevant reading of the Qur'an, addressing contemporary challenges while integrating historical analysis, a hierarchy of values, and principles of gender justice. These approaches facilitate the development of inclusive and adaptive interpretations that remain grounded in the fundamental values of Islam. However, they also encounter critiques, particularly concerning the application of hermeneutics to the interpretation of sacred texts. This article underscores the pivotal role of contemporary Muslim intellectuals in the West in reshaping the methodology of Qur'anic interpretation, forging a critical bridge between Islamic tradition and global academic discourse.

### Keywords

Qur'anic Exegesis, Contemporary Methodology, The West, Fazlur Rahman, Abdullah Saeed, Amina Wadud

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## Introduction

The study of the Qur'an in the Western world has undergone significant development, evolving into a comprehensive and profound academic discipline. The initial intellectual engagement between the West and the Qur'an can be traced back to the Latin translation project led by Petrus Venerabilis, the abbot of Cluny in France, during the 12th century.<sup>1</sup> This translation was not merely a linguistic endeavor but also a systematic introduction of the Qur'an to the West, paving the way for the academic study of Islam in

<sup>1</sup>Adnin Armas, *Metodologi Bibel dalam Studi al-Qur'a>n* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2005), 20.

Western academia.<sup>2</sup> This effort demonstrated how the West began to engage with the Qur'an as a significant religious text, albeit with approaches and motivations distinct from those of the Islamic tradition.

The Western approach to the Qur'an often contrasts with the perspective of Muslims. For Muslims, the Qur'an is regarded as divine revelation, sacred, and free from human intervention. Conversely, some Western scholars approach the Qur'an from a historical perspective, viewing it as a product of specific social and historical contexts. As highlighted by Mohar Ali, this perspective seeks to underscore the human dimensions of the text, opening the door for critical analysis and deconstruction. Such approaches have frequently sparked controversy, particularly when perceived as diminishing the sanctity of the Qur'an within the Islamic religious framework.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, not all Western approaches to the Qur'an are reductive or skeptical. Certain studies reflect a deep appreciation for the complexity and depth of the Qur'anic text. Scholars employ various methodologies, such as historical criticism, hermeneutics, and literary analysis, to explore the meaning and context of the Qur'an. The work of John Wansbrough (1928-2002) represents a significant milestone in this discourse, introducing comprehensive historical criticism and source analysis.<sup>4</sup> Wansbrough's approach fostered deeper critical discussions among Western academics, encouraging more interdisciplinary and theoretical explorations of the Qur'an.

Despite the substantial progress in Qur'anic studies in the West, tafsir as an academic discipline has received relatively less attention compared to direct studies of the Qur'an. Tafsir is often viewed as an auxiliary tool for understanding the Qur'anic text rather than a standalone discipline with its own methodological value. Consequently, tafsir research has often lacked depth compared to other fields of Islamic studies. However, in recent decades, interest in tafsir among Western academics has grown, with an increasing number of scholarly works exploring the hermeneutical principles of exegetes and the role of tafsir in the intellectual dynamics of Islam.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, Muslim intellectuals in the West play a crucial role. They introduce methodological innovations that integrate the Islamic tradition of tafsir with contemporary Western academic approaches. Intellectuals such as Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) with his "Double Movement" method and Abdullah Saeed (b. 1960) with his "Contextual Approach" have offered new perspectives more aligned with modern challenges. Similarly, Amina Wadud (b. 1952), through her "Feminist Hermeneutics," has opened up discussions on gender in tafsir, challenging traditional interpretations that exhibit gender bias. Moreover, contributions like *The Study Quran* edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933) and his team demonstrate efforts to integrate classical and critical methods into a single monumental work. These transformations not only enrich tafsir studies but also establish them as an integral part of global academic discourse, bridging understanding between Islam and the West.

This study employs specific technical terms such as *tafsir studies*, *the West*, and *contemporary*. Tafsir studies encompass in-depth exploration of the methods and principles of Qur'anic interpretation developed by Muslim intellectuals, particularly in the contemporary Western context. These studies emphasize methodological innovations that reflect a dialogue

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<sup>2</sup>Rom Landau, *The Arabs Heritage of Western Civilization* (New York: Arab Information Centre, 1962), 114.

<sup>3</sup>Muh}ammad Mohar Ali, *The Qur'a>n and the Orientalist: An Examination of Their Main Theories and Assumption* (Ipswich: Jam'iyat Ih}yaa' Minhaaj al-Sunnah, 2004), 1.

<sup>4</sup>John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Source and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 61.

<sup>5</sup>Andreas G rke and Johanna Pink, eds., *Tafsi>r and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-2.

between the Islamic tradition of tafsir and modern academic approaches. Thus, this research not only explores the transformation of tafsir methods but also examines how new approaches enhance understanding of the Qur'anic text in a global context.

The term *the West* carries both geographical and ideological dimensions. Geographically, it refers to regions such as North America, Western Europe, and Australasia, historically and culturally considered centers of global influence and civilization.<sup>6</sup> Ideologically, however, the concept is more complex. In this context, *the West* is often associated with Orientalism, positioning itself as a dominant subject in relation to *the Orient*. Orientalism creates a narrative in which the East is treated as an object of study, exploration, and control by the West. In this narrative, the West portrays itself as superior, while the East is depicted as passive and underdeveloped.<sup>7</sup>

The term *contemporary*, as identified by Issa J. Boullata<sup>8</sup> and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi',<sup>9</sup> refers to the period following the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War against Israel in 1967. This event marked a major shift in the history of Islamic thought, heralding a new era characterized by more modern intellectual and social dynamics. This period stimulated critical reflection among Muslim intellectuals, prompting efforts to reconcile Islamic thought with the challenges of modernity. This shift signifies a significant transformation in approaches to religious and social issues, paving the way for more adaptive and progressive explorations in addressing the continuously evolving global realities.

This article aims to explore how various approaches and innovations in tafsir studies have influenced the development of this discipline in the West. It will also highlight the contributions of contemporary Muslim intellectuals actively engaged in the dialogue and development of tafsir methodologies and examine how these new approaches make Qur'anic exegesis relevant and adaptive to the challenges of the modern world. Thus, this study seeks to analyze the dynamics and innovations in Qur'anic exegesis, particularly the contributions of contemporary Muslim intellectuals in the West in enriching and expanding this discipline.

This study employs a qualitative, library-based research model, utilizing descriptive methods. Data is sourced from primary and secondary documentation relevant to the topic. Primary sources include the works of Fazlur Rahman, Abdullah Saeed, and Amina Wadud, while secondary sources consist of articles, books, and other materials that enrich the methodological analysis discussed. Data analysis employs content analysis, emphasizing the elucidation of key concepts, historical context relevance, and the methodological contributions proposed by the figures under study. This method aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the development and innovation in contemporary Qur'anic exegesis, particularly as influenced by the thoughts of these prominent scholars.

## Result and Discussion

### The Development of Qur'anic Exegesis in the West

The development of Qur'anic exegesis in the West has witnessed significant progress since the 20th century, during which the study of Islam and Muslim societies emerged as a prominent field of academic inquiry. Alongside this growth, Islamic studies, including Qur'anic exegesis, have diversified to incorporate new approaches that blend traditional Islamic scholarship with critical Western perspectives. This trend parallels the increasing presence of Muslim scholars in the West, who not only broaden Western academia's

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<sup>6</sup>Amin Saikal, *Islam and The West: Conflict or Cooperation?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2.

<sup>7</sup>Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 2.

<sup>8</sup>Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>9</sup>Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 11.

understanding of Islam and the Qur'an but also foster interfaith and cross-cultural collaborations in Islamic studies. Post-World War II, Western universities expanded their Islamic studies programs, integrating disciplines such as language, history, and social sciences as foundational elements of a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to the study of Islam.<sup>10</sup>

In the realm of Qur'anic exegesis, the 20th and 21st centuries marked a period of innovative methodological advancements, exploring various approaches. Some scholars sought to understand the Qur'an from a general perspective, detached from the traditional Muslim view of its divine origins. Others critically examined classical Muslim understandings, applying methods commonly used in Biblical studies. A pioneering figure in this discourse was Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), whose work, *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranlegung* (1920), provided an in-depth examination of the diverse exegetical methods employed by Muslims, including traditional, dogmatic, mystical, sectarian, and modern interpretations.<sup>11</sup> Devin Stewart notes that before Goldziher's contribution, there had been no comprehensive study of this nature in the West, establishing Goldziher as a foundational figure in systematically and critically studying Qur'anic exegesis.<sup>12</sup>

The early focus of Western scholars on Qur'anic studies revolved around its origins and external influences, as exemplified in works like *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (What Did Muhammad Borrow from Judaism?) by Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) and *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* by Richard Bell (1889-1952), which explored potential Jewish and Christian influences on the Qur'an. However, scholars like W. Montgomery Watt (1909-2006) adopted a more neutral approach, steering clear of sensitive theological debates and focusing instead on classical exegetical works, such as *Ġami' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ay al-Qur'ān* by Abī Ja'far Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310 AH/839-923 CE). This approach allowed Western academics to explore Qur'anic exegesis without engaging in contentious discussions about the text's authority.<sup>13</sup>

Critical and skeptical perspectives also emerged in Western exegesis studies, heavily influenced by figures like Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Franz Schacht. These scholars critically assessed the authenticity of hadith, applying skepticism to Qur'anic exegesis to scrutinize the traditionally accepted authorities. Andrew Rippin (1947-2017) made significant contributions by developing methodological frameworks for evaluating early exegesis through *isnād* (chain of transmission) analysis and literary examination, enabling a deeper exploration of the authenticity of exegetical traditions and the methods employed by early Muslim communities in understanding the Qur'an.<sup>14</sup>

In contemporary times, scholars such as Mun'im Sirry (b. 1971) and Nicolai Sinai (b. 1972) have continued advancing exegesis studies, focusing on the early Islamic period and sectarian variations. Sirry examines interpretative differences between *Sunni* and *Shi'ah* perspectives on specific verses,<sup>15</sup> while Sinai investigates the contributions of early exegetes

<sup>10</sup>Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 106-107.

<sup>11</sup>Ignaz Goldziher, *Mazhab Tafsir: Dari Aliran Klasik Hingga Modern*, trans. M. Alaika Salamullah, et al. (Depok: eLSAQ Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>12</sup>Devin Stewart, "Reflection on the State of the Art in Western Qur'anic Studies," in *Islam and Its Past: Jāhiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an*, eds. Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198748496.003.0001>

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>14</sup>Annas Rolli Muchlisin, "Tafsir Studies in Western Academia: A Bibliographical Survey," *Shuf: Jurnal Pengkajian al-Qur'an dan Budaya*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (December, 2022), 292-293. <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v15i2.725>

<sup>15</sup>Mun'im Sirry, "Who Are Those in Authority? Early Muslim Exegesis of the Qur'anic *Ulu'l-Amr*," *Religions*, Vol. 12, No. 7 (June, 2021), 483. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070483>

like Muqātil bin Sulaymān.<sup>16</sup> Herbert Berg (1964-2022) analyzed the political and religious influences on exegesis, particularly the authority of figures such as Ibn 'Abbās during the Abbasid era.<sup>17</sup>

The study of early exegesis holds particular importance for Western scholars, as this period is seen as the foundation when the basic methods of interpretation were developed and standardized. Bruce Fudge argued that after the 10th century, exegetical works tended to be repetitive and lacked innovation.<sup>18</sup> John Wansbrough (1928-2002) asserted that Islamic exegetical literature required approximately a century and a half to establish stable interpretive methods, from the time of Muqātil bin Sulaymān (d. 150 H/767 M) to Ibn Qūṭayba (213-276 H/828-889 M).<sup>19</sup> Andrew Rippin supported this view, highlighting the historical evolution of exegetical methods and their eventual standardization in the third century AH.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, the development of Qur'anic exegesis in the West demonstrates significant methodological advancements, enriching cross-cultural understanding of Islam. The critical approaches employed by Western scholars not only challenge textual authority but also shed light on the historical and social diversity within exegetical traditions. Interfaith and cross-cultural collaborations further facilitate this field by combining scientific objectivity with an appreciation for the authenticity of Islamic traditions. Consequently, these open and multidisciplinary approaches enable a more balanced understanding, bridging the perception gap between the Western and Muslim worlds and fostering more inclusive and constructive intellectual dialogue in the globalized era.

The evolution of exegetical methodologies in the West did not occur in isolation but as part of an intellectual dialogue initiated by earlier Muslim thinkers. A key reformist figure in shaping the foundation of modern exegetical methodologies was Shaykh Walīyullāh al-Dihlawī (1703-1762). A prominent Muslim intellectual from India, al-Dihlawī inherited the classical Islamic scholarly tradition while introducing more contextual approaches to understanding the Qur'an. J.M.S. Baljon described him as "a precursor of Modern Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation",<sup>21</sup> while Muhammad Iqbal acknowledged him as a reformer who successfully bridged tradition and the need for intellectual renewal in Islam.<sup>22</sup>

One of al-Dihlawī's most influential ideas was his concept of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), distinguishing between macro and micro contexts, which al-Dihlawī termed *asbāb al-nuzūl ḥaqīqī* (holistic causes of revelation) and *asbāb al-nuzūl juḡ'ī* (partial causes of revelation). This perspective provided fresh insights into the historical context of revelation. In his seminal work, *Al-Fawāz al-Kabīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, al-Dihlawī emphasized the importance of understanding revelation comprehensively by linking it to the cultural, social, and political dynamics of Arab society during the Prophet Muhammad's era. This dialectical approach

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<sup>16</sup>Nicolai Sinai, "The Qur'anic Commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān and the Evolution of Early *Tafsīr* Literature," in *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, eds. Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 113.

<sup>17</sup>Herbert Berg, "Ibn 'Abba>s in 'Abbasid-Era *Tafsīr*," in *Abbasid Studies: Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies*, ed. James E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2004), 127.

<sup>18</sup>Bruce Fudge, "Qur'anic Exegesis in Medieval Islam and Modern Orientalism," *Die Welt Des Islams: International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (January, 2006), 121. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/157006006777896858>

<sup>19</sup>Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, 14.

<sup>20</sup>Andrew Rippin "Early Qur'anic Commentaries," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, eds. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 607; Muchlisin, "*Tafsīr Studies*," 294.

<sup>21</sup>J.M.S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1880-1960)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 3.

<sup>22</sup>Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1954), 7.

enabled interpretations that were not only relevant to their time but also adaptive to future social changes.<sup>23</sup>

Al-Dihlawī's thought significantly influenced the development of modern exegetical methodologies. Scholars such as Fazlur Rahman drew inspiration from his approach to interpreting the Qur'an by considering universal values applicable in contemporary contexts. Rahman's Double Movement method reflects a continuity with al-Dihlawī's ideas, combining historical analysis with universal moral ideals in Qur'anic interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the hierarchy of values introduced by Abdullah Saeed in his Contextual Approach resonates with al-Dihlawī's efforts to distinguish universal elements from contextual aspects within exegesis.

Al-Dihlawī's contributions to exegetical reform had an impact far beyond the Indian subcontinent, earning widespread recognition across the Islamic world. His other works, such as *Hujjatullah al-Balighah and Fath al-Rahmān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, stand as enduring testaments to his transformative intellectual vision. Al-Dihlawī's efforts not only reformed exegetical methods but also revitalized Islamic scholarship to address the challenges of his time. Through his visionary ideas, al-Dihlawī provided an invaluable intellectual foundation for the development of modern and contemporary Qur'anic studies.<sup>25</sup>

### Methodological Innovations in Exegesis by Muslim Intellectuals in the West

Throughout Islamic intellectual history, methods of Qur'anic interpretation have evolved in diverse and complex ways, reflecting intellectual efforts to address social, political, and cultural changes in various eras. Two principal approaches often referenced in exegetical discourse are the textualist and contextualist approaches, which represent paradigmatic differences in interpreting the Qur'anic text. The textualist approach, which remains prevalent among *Sunnī*, exegetes, emphasizes in-depth linguistic analysis of Islamic texts, asserting that the Qur'an's meanings are fixed and authoritative. In contrast, the contextualist approach offers an alternative that underscores the importance of understanding the Qur'anic text in relation to the social, cultural, and political contexts surrounding its revelation.<sup>26</sup> This approach has gained traction in contemporary times, where textual analysis extends beyond linguistic studies to incorporate theories from diverse disciplines, such as hermeneutics and literary theory, enabling more contextual and relevant interpretations of the Qur'an for modern society.

This study will examine three methodological innovations introduced by Muslim intellectuals in the West that signify efforts to reform contemporary Qur'anic exegesis: Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement, which proposes a two-stage understanding process linking the historical context of revelation to the modern context; Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Approach, which advocates considering socio-cultural contexts as essential elements in interpreting the Qur'an's messages; and Amina Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics, which analyzes the Qur'anic text through a gender lens to offer more inclusive and justice-oriented interpretations. This discussion will highlight the contributions and significance of each approach and its relevance in bridging the understanding between the Qur'anic text and the challenges of modern society.

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<sup>23</sup>Ahmad Syaifuddin Amin, "Potret Dan Prospek Kajian *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* dalam Perkembangan Tafsir al-Qur'an," *Islamika Inside: Jurnal Keislaman dan Humaniora*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (December, 2021), 234. <https://doi.org/10.35719/islamikainside.v7i2.137>

<sup>24</sup>Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika al-Qur'an dan Hadis* (Yogyakarta: Esaq Press, 2010), 75.

<sup>25</sup>Abdul Djalal, "Shaykh Walīyullāh al-Dihlawī dan Konsep-Konsep Kunci dalam Penafsiran al-Qur'an," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (June, 2018), 125. <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2018.8.1.124-142>

<sup>26</sup>Saeed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction*, 220.

## 1. Double Movement by Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988)

### a. Biography of Fazlur Rahman

Fazlur Rahman Malik, a prominent modernist scholar from Pakistan, played a pivotal role in advancing modern Islamic discourse, particularly in reforming the methodology of Qur'anic exegesis to address contemporary challenges.<sup>27</sup> Born in Hazara, Pakistan (then part of India), Rahman grew up in a family rooted in traditional Islamic scholarship. His father, a Hanafi scholar with a rationalist inclination, had a significant influence on his early education. Although raised in a traditional religious environment, Rahman began to develop critical thinking beyond sectarian boundaries during his teenage years.

Rahman pursued his education at the University of Punjab, Pakistan, where Rahman earned a master's degree in Oriental Studies in 1942.<sup>28</sup> Rahman furthered his studies at the University of Oxford, England under the mentorship of the renowned orientalist Hamilton A. R. Gibb, which provided him with a strong foundation for analyzing issues faced by the Muslim community in modern contexts.<sup>29</sup> Upon earning his doctorate from Oxford, Rahman embarked on an academic career, teaching at Durham University, England before becoming a professor of philosophy at McGill University, Canada. His international experiences enriched his perspective on the need for Islamic reform, both academically and socially.<sup>30</sup>

In 1961, Rahman returned to Pakistan as a visiting professor and later became the director of the Islamic Research Institute. Between 1961 and 1968, Rahman served as an advisor to President General Ayub Khan, advocating for Pakistan to adopt a balanced path between modernist and traditionalist Islam. His vision was to shape Pakistan into a progressive Muslim state that avoided both traditional and modern extremism.<sup>31</sup> However, his reformist views faced fierce opposition from conservative groups aiming to preserve the traditional religious order. The criticism and threats Rahman encountered escalated to the point of death threats, compelling him to seek refuge in the United States.<sup>32</sup>

In the United States, Rahman was appointed as a Professor of Islamic Thought at the University of Chicago, Illinois, a position Rahman held until his death.<sup>33</sup> At Chicago, Rahman mentored a new generation of Muslim intellectuals, including Indonesia's prominent thinker Nurcholish Madjid. His students not only continued Islamic studies internationally but also applied Rahman's progressive ideas in their home countries, promoting discourses on liberal Islam and democracy in Indonesia. Rahman's thoughts also influenced the study of women's rights, as

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<sup>27</sup>Humaira Ahmad, "Mapping Neo-Modern and Postmodern Qur'anic Reformist Discourse in the Intellectual Legacy of Fazlur Rahman and Mohammed Arkoun," *Religions*, Vol. 14, No. 5 (May, 2023), 3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050595>

<sup>28</sup>Sibawaihi, "Epistemologizing the Islamic Concept of Resurrection in the Hereafter," *Afkar: Journal of 'Aqidah & Islamic Thought*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (December, 2021), 280. <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol23no2.8>

<sup>29</sup>Ali Akbar, "Fazlur Rahman's Influence on Contemporary Islamic Thought," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 110, No. 2 (June, 2020), 131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12334>

<sup>30</sup>Sibawaihi, "Epistemologizing the Islamic," 281.

<sup>31</sup>Fazlur Rahman, "Some Islamic Issues in the Ayub Khan Era, Essay on Islamic Civilization," in *Essays on Islamic Civilization*, ed. Donald P. Little (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 285.

<sup>32</sup>Saeed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction*, 223.

<sup>33</sup>Fazlur Rahman, "An Autobiographical Note," in *The Courage of Conviction*, ed. Philip L. Berman (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 135-159.

seen in the works of scholars like Amina Wadud, who adapted Rahman's methodologies to support gender equality in Qur'anic interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

b. The Double Movement Concept

Rahman's intellectual restlessness stemmed from his concern over the inability of the Muslim community to adequately respond to the challenges of modernity. Rahman believed that the decline of Muslim societies was rooted in the intellectual legacy of Islam itself, particularly the reliance on conventional-traditional methods in tafsir and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. According to Rahman, the closure of *ijtihad* and the practice of blind adherence (*taqlid*) led to intellectual stagnation long before the Western expansion into the Muslim world in the 18th century. Rahman argued that the revival of Islam must begin with intellectual reform, prioritizing moral values above all else.<sup>35</sup>

In response to this situation, Rahman introduced the Double Movement method, an exegetical approach that focuses on the moral ideals and worldview (*weltanschauung*) of the Qur'an rather than merely interpreting its verses literally. This method distinguishes between specific legal injunctions and universal moral ideals, such as justice, brotherhood, and equality, which Rahman regarded as the foundational principles of Qur'anic understanding. Rahman criticized classical exegetes for adopting an atomistic approach, interpreting verses in isolation without considering the holistic unity of Qur'anic teachings. Rahman observed that the degradation of ethical values in Islamic history was often influenced by social, economic, and political interests, ultimately obscuring the essence of Islamic teachings. For example, Rahman criticized the violent conflict between the Ahmadiyya community and the government of Kwaja Nazib al-Din in Pakistan, which was supported by the majority of clerics. According to Rahman, such conflicts projected an image of Islam as a religion condoning violence rather than one emphasizing justice and freedom. Through the Double Movement method, Rahman advocated for a coherent and holistic approach that integrates religious and scholarly responsibilities in understanding the Qur'an.<sup>36</sup>

The Double Movement method consists of two critical stages. The first stage involves analyzing the micro and macro contexts of revelation. The micro-context refers to the specific circumstances surrounding the Prophet Muhammad when a revelation was delivered, while the macro-context encompasses the socio-cultural conditions of Arab society, particularly in Mecca and its environs. This stage allows for the generalization of legal rulings and the identification of moral ideals embedded in the Qur'an. The second stage involves applying these moral ideals to contemporary society. This begins with deriving a general understanding, which is then contextualized to address present-day issues.<sup>37</sup> Rahman emphasized that the

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<sup>34</sup>Abdullah Saeed, "Fazlur Rahman: A Framework for Interpreting the Ethico-Legal Content of the Qur'an," in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, ed. Suha Taji-Farouki (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 39.

<sup>35</sup>Mayadina Rohmi Musfiroh and Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Contextualization of Qiwamah Meaning: Reflection on Abdullah Saeed, Application and Consistency," *Palastren: Jurnal Studi Gender*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (December, 2020), 328. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/palastren.v13i2.7191>

<sup>36</sup>Khairul Hamim, "Comparison between Double Movement Theory and Nazariyyat al-Hudūd Theory on Polygamy Laws," *El-Mashlahah*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (December 2022), 195-196. <http://dx.doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v12i2.4903>

<sup>37</sup>Ahmad Hasan Ridwan, et al., "Implementing and interpreting Fazlur Rahman's Islamic moderation concept in the Indonesian context," *JITC: Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (December, 2022), 62. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.05>



Qur'an's moral ideals must be dynamically understood and applied to evolving contexts without compromising its fundamental principles.<sup>38</sup>

Rahman argued that one of the Qur'an's primary objectives is to establish a society based on justice, viewing the Prophet Muhammad as a social reformer who aimed to empower marginalized and vulnerable groups. Rahman considered the Qur'an a source of ethical principles intended to create a society free from the exploitation of the weak. In Rahman's view, Islam and the Qur'anic teachings should function as forces that promote welfare and equality among humanity. This goal, Rahman contended, could only be achieved when humanity is liberated from all forms of social, spiritual, political, and economic exploitation.<sup>39</sup>

As a reformist thinker, Rahman maintained that a literal application of the Qur'an in modern contexts risks obscuring its primary essence. While acknowledging the classical interpretations developed over more than a millennium, Rahman stressed that many of these interpretations were historical and contextual, making them potentially irrelevant or unsuitable for contemporary needs.<sup>40</sup>

c. Application Example

Rahman highlighted the issue of polygamy in the context of Islamic society in Pakistan, where the prevailing view was that Islam openly permits men to have multiple wives. Rahman argued that this view conflicted with the Qur'an's moral ideals, which aim to elevate women's dignity and reduce practices that demean them. Rahman maintained that the Qur'an does not unequivocally endorse polygamy but rather restricts it within a strict moral framework, requiring justice as a fundamental condition. For Rahman, this condition implies an implicit message: achieving perfect justice is exceedingly difficult, and thus, limiting oneself to one wife is preferable to fulfill the principle of justice in family life.<sup>41</sup>

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَّةَ ۖ وَرُبُعَ ۚ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ  
أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَذْنَىٰ ۖ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا

And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of (other) women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then (marry only) one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline (to injustice).<sup>42</sup>

To understand this command comprehensively through the Double Movement method, the first stage involves examining the socio-cultural context in which the polygamy ruling was revealed. In pre-Islamic Arab society, the practice of having multiple wives was deeply ingrained and difficult to eradicate abruptly. Therefore, the Qur'an introduced the ruling gradually, limiting the number of wives to a maximum of four and imposing the condition of justice. While polygamy was permitted, the ultimate moral ideal was perfect justice, which is inherently challenging to achieve. Consequently, the Qur'an implicitly encourages monogamy

<sup>38</sup>Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Abd. Rozaq, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics and its Applications by Fazlur Rahman," *International Journal of Islamic Social Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (November, 2023), 118. <https://doi.org/10.62039/ijiss.v1i2.27>

<sup>39</sup>Fazlur Rahman, "Some Reflections on the Reconstruction of Muslim Society in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 9 (June, 1967), 103.

<sup>40</sup>Fazlur Rahman, "The Impact of Modernity on Islam," *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (June, 1966), 127.

<sup>41</sup>Rozaq, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics," 119-120.

<sup>42</sup>Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf al-Qur'an Kementerian Agama RI, *Qur'an Kemenag in Word* (2019). Al-Qur'an, 4:3.

as the optimal means of realizing justice in familial and societal life.<sup>43</sup> Rahman contended that the inability to ensure justice in polygamy not only leads to familial discord but also negatively impacts society at large. Rahman emphasized that a harmonious family is the foundation of a stable and just society.<sup>44</sup>

The second stage of the Double Movement involves applying the moral ideal of restricting polygamy to contemporary contexts. Historically, this restriction aimed to protect and uphold the dignity and welfare of women, particularly widows and orphans, who often lacked protection in society. In today's context, with significant social changes allowing women to possess equal rights and positions, polygamy may no longer be relevant. The Qur'an's universal moral ideal, elevating women's dignity and ensuring justice in family life, remains applicable as the foundation for broader social justice. This gradual approach reflects the Qur'an's ethical methodology, akin to the progressive prohibition of intoxicants in Islamic tradition.<sup>45</sup>

## 2. Abdullah Saeed (1960)

### a. Biography of Abdullah Saeed

Abdullah Saeed, a prominent modernist scholar originally from Oman, has made significant contributions to the development of contextual approaches to contemporary Islamic studies, particularly in Qur'anic interpretation. Born in Addu Atoll, Maldives,<sup>46</sup> Saeed began his educational journey by moving to Saudi Arabia to study Arabic. During his time there, Saeed attended several formal educational institutions, including the Basic Arabic Institute (1977-1979) and the Intermediate Arabic Institute (1979-1982).<sup>47</sup> Saeed later continued his education at the Islamic University of Medina, Saudi Arabia, earning a bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies in 1986. Saeed subsequently pursued further studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia, focusing on Applied Linguistics. In 1992, Saeed completed a doctoral program in Islamic Studies at the same university.<sup>48</sup> Saeed started his academic career as a lecturer in the Department of Asian Languages and Anthropology at the University of Melbourne, where Saeed also completed his advanced studies. In 2000, Saeed was admitted to the Association of Professors, and three years later, Saeed attained the rank of Professor in the field of Arabic and Islamic Studies.<sup>49</sup>

Since 1997, Saeed's contributions to Islamic thought have gained prominence through his publications addressing contemporary issues. One of his early works

<sup>43</sup>Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *Tafsir al-Washit*, Vol. 1, trans. Muhtadi (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2012), 253-254.

<sup>44</sup>Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Petaling Jaya: Islamic Book Trust, 1999); Abur Hamdi Usman, et al., "The Concept of an Ideal Society: A Review of Fazlur Rahman's Perspective," *IJIT: International Journal of Islamic Thought*, Vol. 21 (June, 2022), 9. <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.21.2022.220>

<sup>45</sup>Labib Muttaqin, "Aplikasi Teori Double Movement Fazlur Rahman terhadap Doktrin Kewarisan Islam Klasik," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (July, 2013), 202. <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v7i2.564>

<sup>46</sup>Solehodin and Abdul Mukit, "Nahr (River) as an Icon of Heaven: Interpretation Analysis of Q.S 47:12-15 Contextual Theory Abdullah Saeed Perspective," *International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS)*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January, 2023), 3.

<sup>47</sup>Shinta Nurani, "Hierarchy of Values in Qur'anic Hermeneutic of Abdullah Saeed: A Study of Contextual Interpretation in Q.S. Al-Hujurat," *Al-Quds: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran dan Hadis*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (April, 2021), 161. <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v5i1.1951>

<sup>48</sup>Barsihannor, et al., "Abdullah Saeed's Construction of the Hierarchy of Values in the Qur'an: A Philosophical Hermeneutic Perspective," *JITC: Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (June, 2023), 124-125. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.131.09>

<sup>49</sup>Sopiyatun and M. Mujab, "A Study Of Qur'anic Verses on the Concept of Musyarakah: Study of the Contextual Tafsir of Abdullah Saeed," *Islamika Inside: Jurnal Keislaman dan Humaniora*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (June, 2024), 63. <https://doi.org/10.35719/islamikainside.v10i1.236>

was an article titled "Ijtihād and Innovation in Neo-Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia."<sup>50</sup> Saeed also authored the book *Islamic Banking and Interest: A Study of Prohibition of Riba and Its Contemporary Interpretation*, based on his 1996 dissertation. In this book, Saeed provided an in-depth analysis of the Islamic prohibition of riba (usury), using a moral and humanitarian values-based approach consistent with the spirit of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Additionally, Saeed authored the article "Rethinking Citizenship Rights of Non-Muslims in an Islamic State: Rachid al-Ghannushi's Contribution to the Evolving Debate," which explored the rights of non-Muslim minorities in Islamic states. This article highlighted crucial issues such as freedom of belief, the right to convert religions, equality in public office, and equal treatment of Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>51</sup>

Saeed's other contributions include chapters in the book *Muslim Communities in Australia*. One notable chapter "Searching for Identity: Muslims in Australia," co-authored with Shahram Akbarzadeh, examines how Australian Muslim communities, particularly second and third-generation immigrants, integrate Australian cultural identity with Islamic traditions and their ethnic heritage. This blending creates a hybrid identity that aligns with the secular norms of Australian society while preserving religious and cultural roots.<sup>52</sup> Saeed also published an article titled "The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures" which analyzes the claims of textual corruption in Jewish and Christian scriptures from an Islamic perspective, even though the Qur'an itself acknowledges the authority of these texts.<sup>53</sup> In collaboration with Akbarzadeh, Saeed authored "The Official Ulema and Religious Legitimacy of the Modern Nation State" in the book *Islam and Political Legitimacy*. This work examines the relationship between official religious scholars (ulema) and the legitimacy of modern nation-states in Islamic countries.<sup>54</sup>

Another significant contribution was co-authoring "Nurcholish Madjid and the Interpretation of the Qur'an" with Anthony H. Jones, featured in the book *Modern Muslim Intellectuals, and the Qur'an: Religious Pluralism and Tolerance*. This chapter delves into Nurcholish Madjid's interpretive approach to the Qur'an, particularly within the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society.<sup>55</sup> In 2005, Saeed introduced his contextual methodology for Qur'anic interpretation in his seminal work, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards Contemporary Approaches*. In this book, Saeed presented compelling arguments to free Qur'anic verses from narrow legalistic interpretations, enabling a more contextual approach tailored to modern social and ethical needs. Through this

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<sup>50</sup>Abdullah Saeed, "Ijtihād and Innovation in Neo-Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia," *International Journal of Phytoremediation*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1997), 279. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/09596419708721127>

<sup>51</sup>Abdullah Saeed, "Rethinking Citizenship Rights of non-Muslims in an Islamic State: Rashid al-Ghannūshi's Contribution to the Evolving Debate," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1999), 307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596419908721189>

<sup>52</sup>Abdullah Saeed and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Searching for identity: Muslims in Australia," in *Muslim Communities in Australia*, eds. Abdullah Saeed and Shahram Akbarzadeh (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>53</sup>Abdullah Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, No. 3-4 (2002), 419. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2002.tb03751.x>

<sup>54</sup>Abdullah Saeed and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "The Official Ulema and Religious Legitimacy of the Modern Nation State," in *Islam and Political Legitimacy*, eds. Abdullah Saeed and Shahram Akbarzadeh (London: Routledge, 2003), 1. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203503805>

<sup>55</sup>Abdullah Saeed and Anthony H. Jones, "Nurcholish Madjid and the Interpretation of the Qur'an: Religious Pluralism and Tolerance," in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an: Religious Pluralism and Tolerance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 67.

approach, Saeed offered a paradigm that empowers Muslims to understand Qur'anic teachings in ways that are both relevant and adaptive to contemporary contexts.<sup>56</sup>

b. The Contextual Approach Concept

Saeed's academic concerns stem from his observation that Muslims are lagging in addressing global issues, both in science and the social-humanities. He noted that while traditional tafsir methods are often seen as flexible and relevant, they fall short of adequately addressing the complexities of social change.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Saeed expressed concern over the dominance of literalist-textual interpretations, which he believed neglected the context of revelation and deep exegetical principles. In response, Saeed proposed adopting a more contextual and responsive approach to social dynamics.<sup>58</sup> This concern led him to formulate the Contextual Approach, based on a central question: how should the Qur'an be understood and interpreted in the context of present-day social changes? This question became the foundation for Saeed's development of interpretative principles that adapt to modern contexts, enabling Muslims to respond more effectively to contemporary challenges.

Saeed identified three primary modes of Qur'anic exegesis. First, the textualist approach emphasizes the literal meaning of the text. According to Saeed, this approach has limitations in addressing modern issues, although it remains important and cannot be entirely disregarded. Second, the semi-textualist approach retains a literal interpretation while attempting to adapt it with arguments relevant to contemporary needs. Third, the contextualist approach interprets the Qur'an by considering socio-linguistic aspects, historical context, and contemporary relevance. Saeed positioned himself within the third approach, which he deemed most suitable for making the Qur'an contextual and relevant to modern social challenges.<sup>59</sup>

To apply his contextual approach, Abdullah Saeed developed a systematic four-stage methodology designed to adapt Qur'anic interpretation to contemporary contexts. The first stage, general textual recognition, involves understanding the Qur'anic text holistically without engaging in detailed analysis. This foundational step provides a comprehensive overview of the text's structure and themes. The second stage, critical analysis, focuses on examining linguistic elements, literary context, textual forms, and the relationships between the text and other relevant passages within the Qur'an. This stage aims to uncover deeper meanings and connections inherent in the text. The third stage, socio-historical context analysis, requires interpreters to analyze the socio-cultural and historical circumstances surrounding the Qur'anic revelation. By situating the text within its original context, this step facilitates an understanding of the reasons and conditions underlying specific verses. Finally, the fourth stage, contemporary interpretation, identifies the relevance of the Qur'anic verses to modern social, political, economic, and cultural issues. This stage emphasizes drawing connections between the text's meaning

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<sup>56</sup>Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>57</sup>Abd. Aziz Faiz, "Epistemologi Tafsir al-Qur'an Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed dalam Arus Perubahan Sosial-Budaya Masyarakat Kontemporer," *Empirisma: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Kebudayaan Islam*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (June, 2024), 227-228. <https://doi.org/10.30762/empirisma.v33i2.2019>

<sup>58</sup>Musfiroh and Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Contextualization of Qiwanah," 328.

<sup>59</sup>Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Argumentasi Abdullah Saeed dalam Mengusung Pendekatan Kontekstualis dalam Penafsiran al-Qur'an," introduction in Abdullah Saeed, *Paradigma, Prinsip dan Metode Penafsiran Kontekstualis atas al-Qur'an (Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach)*, trans. Lien Iffah Na'atu Fina and Ari Henri, ed. Sahiron Syamsuddin (Yogyakarta: Ladang Kata Baitul Hikmah Press, 2017).

during its initial revelation and its potential application today. It also involves assessing whether the values conveyed by the verses are universal or context-specific, ensuring that interpretations remain both faithful to the Qur'an and responsive to contemporary realities.<sup>60</sup>

In this final interpretive stage, Saeed introduced a hierarchy of values to help interpreters understand and differentiate the various types of values embedded in Qur'anic verses. This hierarchy distinguishes universal, permanent values from those that are contextual or tied to specific social-historical conditions during the time of revelation. Using this hierarchy, Saeed provides a conceptual tool for systematically filtering the Qur'an's values and understanding them in ways relevant to contemporary contexts.

**Table 1. Hierarchy of Values in Saeed's Contextual Approach<sup>61</sup>**

Values Hierarchy	Category of Verses	Nature	Examples
Obligatory Value	Verses containing mandatory obligations that must be observed by all Muslims at all times.	Universal	Core pillars of Islam, clear prohibitions and allowances (al-Nahl: 116, Yunus: 59).
Fundamental Values	Verses emphasizing basic human values, such as justice, humanity, and the protection of rights, often repeated in the Qur'an.	Universal	Commandments to uphold justice (al-Maidah: 2).
Protection Values	Legal injunctions aimed at safeguarding fundamental values to ensure their sustainability within society.	Universal	Property protection, prohibitions on theft (al-Maidah: 38).
Implementation Values	Verses prescribing punishments	Temporarily local	Punishments such as qisas for murder (al-

<sup>60</sup>Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'a>n*, 150-152.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 129-144.

	for violations of protective values.		Maidah: 33), amputation for theft (al-Maidah: 38), and corporal punishments for adultery or false accusations (al-Nur: 2).
Instructional Values	Specific commands addressing societal issues at the time.	Contextual	Permission for polygamy under certain conditions (al-Nisa: 3), leadership roles within families assigned to men (al-Nisa: 34), and etiquette like greetings (al-Nisa: 86).

Saeed further developed and refined the exegetical methodology pioneered by Fazlur Rahman, adapting Rahman's framework into a more systematic form. According to Lien Iffah Na'fatu Fina, the first Indonesian scholar to study Saeed's Contextual Approach.<sup>62</sup> Saeed deepened Rahman's concept of moral ideals and articulated it in the form of a more detailed and structured hierarchy of values. This represents a unique contribution to contextual Qur'anic interpretation. Lien also highlights that Saeed incorporated a linguistic dimension into his interpretive theory, an aspect not previously included in Rahman's Double Movement concept. Thus, Saeed successfully constructed a more comprehensive and contextual methodology for Qur'anic interpretation, which considers not only historical and moral dimensions but also linguistic aspects.<sup>63</sup> In addition to Rahman, Saeed was influenced by figures such as Ghulam Ahmad Parvez, with his call to "return to the Qur'an," Mohammad Arkoun's concept of "deconstruction of revelation," Farid Esack's "hermeneutics of liberation," and Khalid Abu al-Fadl's work on ethico-legal studies.<sup>64</sup>

#### c. Application Example

The first stage in Saeed's methodology involves understanding the Qur'anic text holistically without conducting in-depth analysis. In *'Ulum al-Qur'an*, one of the sources providing information about the textual context of the Qur'an is known as *asbāb al-nuzūl*.<sup>65</sup> As an application example, Saeed utilizes *asbāb al-nuzūl* to examine

<sup>62</sup>Lien Iffah Na'fatu Fina, "Interpretasi Kontekstual: Studi atas Pemikiran Hermeneutika al-Qur'an Abdullah Saeed," *Thesis* (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2009).

<sup>63</sup>Lien Iffah Na'fatu Fina, "Interpretasi Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed: Sebuah Penyempurnaan terhadap Gagasan Tafsir Fazlur Rahman," *Hermeneutik*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (June, 2015), 66-67.

<sup>64</sup>M. K. Ridwan, "Metodologi Penafsiran Kontekstual: Analisis Gagasan dan Prinsip Kunci Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed," *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (June, 2016), 9-10. <https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v1i1.1-22>

<sup>65</sup>Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Maḥmūd al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah Jadīdah fī 'Ulum al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: Maktabah Usrah, 2001), 54.

the socio-historical context of verses related to jilbab (modest dress), such as al-Ahzab: 53, 59 and al-Nur: 31.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ إِلَى طَعَامٍ غَيْرِ نَظِيرٍ إِنَّهُ وَلَكِنْ إِذَا دُعِيتُمْ فَادْخُلُوا فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوا وَلَا مُسْتَأْنَسِينَ لِحَدِيثٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ كَانَ يُؤْذَى النَّبِيُّ فَيَسْتَحْيِي مِنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَسَأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُؤْذُوا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَنْ تَنْكِحُوا أَزْوَاجَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَبَدًا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ كَانَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمًا

O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal, without awaiting its readiness. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have eaten, disperse without seeking to remain for conversation. Indeed, that (behavior) was troubling the Prophet, and he is shy of (dismissing) you. But Allah is not shy of the truth. And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it is not (conceivable or lawful) for you to harm the Messenger of Allah or to marry his wives after him, ever. Indeed, that would be in the sight of Allah an enormity.<sup>66</sup>

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَى أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves (part) of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.<sup>67</sup>

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّبِيعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولَى الْأَرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

And tell the believing women to reduce (some) of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which (necessarily) appears thereof and to wrap (a portion of) their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you,

<sup>66</sup>Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf al-Qur'an Kementerian Agama RI, Qur'an Kemenag in Word (2019). Al-Qur'an, 33:53.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 33:59.

O believers, that you might succeed.<sup>68</sup>

Al-Ahzab: 53 was revealed in the context of the Prophet Muhammad's wedding banquet with Zainab bint Jahsh, where a curtain was used to separate male guests from the Prophet's wives. This indicates that the term hijab at the time referred to a physical barrier, not an article of clothing. Meanwhile, Al-Ahzab: 59 was revealed in the context of free women in Medina being harassed because they were not distinguished from enslaved women. This verse instructed women to wear a jilbab as an identifier to protect their dignity. The verse's structure emphasizes the prohibition of harming believers as the primary reason for this command. Additionally, al-Nur: 31 provides more detailed guidance on women's attire, including covering the chest with a cloth. These explanations reflect adaptation to the cultural and social conditions at the time of revelation, where women's clothing did not fully cover their bodies.

The second stage involves critical analysis to understand the meanings of words and concepts more deeply, including their connections to historical and social contexts. For example, in al-Ahzab: 53, the term hijab is interpreted as a barrier or curtain within a household, not as women's clothing. This interpretation is supported by Fakhrud-dīn al-Rāzī, who explained that hijab referred to fabric used to cover doorways in the Prophet's wives' homes. In this context, hijab functioned as part of the household interior, distinct from its later association with women's clothing from the 4th century AH onward. This shift in meaning occurred due to interpretations linking the verse to women's modesty, despite the verse's structure primarily instructing men to interact from behind a barrier. Conversely, al-Ahzab: 59 explicitly commands women to wear a jilbab, a specific garment draped (*idnā'*) over the body. This critical analysis demonstrates that hijab in Qur'an 33:53 does not pertain to women's clothing but to spatial arrangements within homes, whereas al-Ahzab: 59 addresses women's attire. This distinction highlights differences in the term's meanings in these two verses and their relevance to modern interpretations.

The third stage involves analyzing the socio-historical context during the period of revelation. At that time, Arabian society was highly patriarchal, with women often regarded as inferior, including practices such as the burial of newborn daughters. The Qur'an sought to gradually reform this social structure, prohibiting the killing of daughters, granting inheritance rights, and elevating women's dignity while acknowledging gender role differences. Verses about jilbab reflect responses to these social contexts. According to Saeed, such verses fall into the category of instructional values, with applications that are flexible and contextual. Interpretations by the Prophet's companions also varied; for example, Ibn Mas'ud and Ibn 'Abbās viewed jilbab as covering the face, while Ḥasan referred to partial facial covering, indicating the influence of local customs. The Prophet's wives practiced jilbab by covering their heads and faces as a form of modesty within Arab culture. This suggests that the command for jilbab was designed to address the social needs of the time and could adapt to the cultural contexts of Muslim communities.

The fourth stage involves interpreting the text in contemporary contexts. The interpretation of jilbab verses in Indonesia illustrates their relevance to evolving social phenomena, such as women's freedom and fashion trends. The jilbab syar'i or wide and long hijab, covering the chest, represents a reinterpretation tailored to modern contexts, linking Islamic teachings with contemporary social dynamics. In Indonesia, the evolving styles of jilbab are a product of reinterpretation of the verses

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 24:31.



revealed during the Prophet's era. This phenomenon reflects how Indonesian society, through hijab communities (hijabers), aligns their fashion choices with religious guidance within broader social contexts. This interpretation involves not only textual understanding but also reflection on the verses' primary objectives within the framework of gender and social identity. As Saeed's approach emphasizes, it is essential to consider how the application of these verses fosters relevant understandings in the modern era. Here, the jilbab is not only a religious garment but also a symbol of social, political, and economic identity. Thus, the contemporary understanding of jilbab bridges the meaning of the text during its revelation with the current conditions of Indonesian society, which increasingly emphasizes gender equality, freedom of expression, and socio-cultural dynamics.<sup>69</sup>

### 3. Amina Wadud (1952)

#### a. Biography of Amina Wadud

Amina Wadud, an American progressive Muslim theologian, is widely recognized for her contributions to Islamic feminism and Qur'anic hermeneutics, particularly her focus on the role of women in Islam. Born in Bethesda, Maryland, Wadud converted to Islam in 1972 while studying at the University of Michigan, where she later earned her doctorate. Before her conversion, Wadud was known as Maria Teasley.<sup>70</sup> Wadud graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1975 and pursued graduate studies in Middle Eastern Studies, earning a Ph.D. in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Michigan in 1988. Additionally, Wadud studied Arabic at the American University and al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. Her intellectual journey also included studying exegesis at Cairo University and philosophy at al-Azhar University.<sup>71</sup>

Wadud's first book, *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, expanded on her dissertation and explored gender issues in Qur'anic exegesis. Her subsequent work, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, critically examined religious interpretations that she argued were discriminatory toward women. In 2009, Wadud spoke at the Musawah Conference on Equality and Justice in the Family, presenting a paper titled *Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender-Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis*. She has also authored numerous scholarly articles published in international journals. Wadud's academic focus encompasses Islamic feminism, progressive Islamic thought, inclusive worship practices, the concept of the feminine in divinity, and reform within Islamic traditions.<sup>72</sup> Her academic career spans prestigious institutions. From 1989 to 1992, she served as an assistant professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). In 1992, Wadud became a Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she worked until her retirement in 2008. Post-retirement, Wadud continued her contributions as a visiting professor at the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Nur Faizin, et al., "Fenomena Penggunaan Hijab Syar'i di Indonesia: Analisis Kontekstualisasi Ayat Jilbab Perspektif Teori Penafsiran Abdullah Saeed," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (December, 2022), 3-11. <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan.v7i1.18929>

<sup>70</sup>Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Woman's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneword, 2006), 1.

<sup>71</sup>Amina Wadud, "Qur'an and Woman," in *Liberal Islam: A Source Book*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 185.

<sup>72</sup>Fauzan Zenrif and Syabbul Bachri, "Critical Study of Amina Wadud's Thought in the Issue of Inheritance," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum dan Syar'iah*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (July, 2023), 39-40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v15i1.22217>

<sup>73</sup>Muhammad Fahrizal Amin, "Amina Wadud: Pendekatan Hermeneutika untuk Gerakan Gender,"

b. The Feminist Hermeneutics Concept

Wadud's academic engagement was shaped by her historical context, closely tied to her experiences and activism within African American women's communities striving for gender justice. As a Muslim woman facing layered discrimination, due to her gender, religious identity, and status as a widow, Wadud developed a profound understanding of the urgency of gender equality in Islam.<sup>74</sup> Wadud believes the Qur'an is the supreme source of values that justly positions men and women as equals.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, its commands and guidance must be interpreted with due regard for their historical context. Wadud also emphasizes the importance of considering a mufassir's cultural background and personal experiences, as these significantly influence their interpretations of sacred texts. From this perspective, she underscores that the Qur'an should be understood as a living and dynamic text capable of addressing contemporary challenges while maintaining its universal values.<sup>76</sup>

Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics is a comprehensive approach to interpreting the Qur'an with a focus on women's issues and gender justice. This concept involves three primary stages: contextual analysis, textual analysis, and worldview (*weltanschauung*) analysis. Contextual analysis centers on understanding the socio-historical and cultural background at the time of the Qur'an's revelation. In this stage, Wadud examines how pre-Islamic patriarchal cultures influenced classical exegesis, often marginalizing women. Textual analysis focuses on the grammatical and linguistic structures of the Qur'an to identify more inclusive meanings by distinguishing between normative, universal aspects and contextual, localized ones. Finally, worldview analysis seeks to uncover the Qur'an's core principles, such as social justice and gender equality, for application in modern life.

In implementing her hermeneutical approach, Wadud incorporates Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement methodology, which involves two steps: first, understanding the historical context of a verse to reveal its specific meaning, and second, identifying its universal principles for application in contemporary contexts, particularly concerning gender issues. Additionally, Wadud employs historical criticism to analyze the cultural context behind Arabic as the medium of revelation. This critique differentiates between the Qur'an's universal normative elements and the local influences of patriarchal culture. Wadud's approach aims not only to offer a more inclusive interpretation of the Qur'an but also to provide an alternative to traditional exegetical paradigms that are often biased against women. By linking Qur'anic texts to contemporary social, moral, political, and economic issues, Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics presents interpretations that are relevant, just, and transformative for modern Muslim communities. This approach highlights the importance of understanding the Qur'an as a universal text capable of addressing the challenges of gender justice in today's society.<sup>77</sup>

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*Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (December, 2020), 240. <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsla.v15i2.7040>

<sup>74</sup>Riffat Hasan, *Women's and Men's Liberation: Testimonies of Spirit* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 67-68.

<sup>75</sup>Imam Maksum, et al., "Analyzing Domestic Violence in the Qur'an through Hermeneutics of H.G. Gadamer: Views of Amina Wadud," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education (AJIE)*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (August, 2023), 470. <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.427>

<sup>76</sup>Abdul Mustaqim, *Paradigma Tafsir Feminis: Membaca al-Qur'an dengan Optik Perempuan* (Yogyakarta: Logung Pustaka, 2008), 81.

<sup>77</sup>Wadud, "Qur'an and Woman," 19.

c. Application Example

Wadud applies the stages of Feminist Hermeneutics to reinterpret eschatological concepts often perceived as gender-biased, including depictions of companionship in paradise. The first stage, contextual analysis, reveals that descriptions such as *ḥūr al-ʿayn* (companions with beautiful eyes) reflect pre-Islamic Arab patriarchal culture. These concepts were designed to appeal to the sensibilities of Jahiliyyah Arab audiences, who valued specific ideals of feminine physical beauty. Such verses were intended to persuade patriarchal societies to accept Islam's message using culturally relevant appeals.

In the second stage, textual analysis, Wadud differentiates between the terms *ḥūr* (companions) and *azwāj* (spouses). She argues that *ḥūr* is inherently gender-neutral and does not exclusively refer to women. In contrast, the term *azwāj*, found in verses revealed during the Medinan period, portrays ideal companions for both men and women. This distinction illustrates how the Qur'an gradually broadened its descriptions of paradise to adopt a more universal and equitable perspective, transcending the limitations of early patriarchal cultural frameworks.

The final stage, worldview analysis, emphasizes the ultimate essence of paradise: closeness to Allah. Wadud highlights that spiritual connection and justice are the ultimate values to be achieved, surpassing material depictions such as companionship or physical pleasures. Through this approach, Wadud deconstructs classical interpretations influenced by patriarchal biases, offering a perspective in which paradise is envisioned as a realm of justice, harmony, and equality for all individuals, regardless of gender.<sup>78</sup>

### Challenges and Criticisms of Contemporary Qur'anic Exegesis in the West

Contemporary approaches to Qur'anic exegesis in the West, particularly those employing hermeneutical frameworks, have faced substantial challenges and criticisms from both traditionalist and modernist circles. Critics argue that traditional exegetical methods, such as *naḥw* for linguistic analysis and *asbāb al-nuzūl* for understanding historical context, are sufficiently equipped to address issues like gender equality and justice without resorting to hermeneutical concepts rooted in Western intellectual traditions. According to this view, moral ideals such as justice, equality, and fraternity have been embedded in Islam since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, the adoption of hermeneutics is deemed unnecessary and potentially disruptive to established interpretive norms.<sup>79</sup>

Hermeneutics has also been criticized for its association with postmodern philosophy, which is often linked to relativism. Postmodernism's perceived rejection of universal truths and its tendency toward extreme subjectivism are viewed as fostering skepticism and fragmenting knowledge. Within the context of Qur'anic interpretation, such approaches are sometimes accused of inconsistency, a lack of objectivity, and an overemphasis on linguistic deconstruction rather than offering substantive solutions to pressing issues. These criticisms form the foundation of traditionalist resistance to incorporating hermeneutics into the field of Qur'anic exegesis.

Furthermore, liberal Muslim interpreters employing contemporary hermeneutical methods are frequently criticized for introducing subjective biases, particularly on issues related to gender. For example, in discussions about inheritance laws, critics argue that the

<sup>78</sup>M. Burhanuddin Ubaidillah and Aisah, "Arah Baru Tafsir Gender & Feminisme Amina Wadud dalam Qur'an and Woman, Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective," *Jurnal Pikir: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan dan Hukum Islam*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January, 2022), 18-24.

<sup>79</sup>Taufiqurrahman, *Tabfut Hermeneutika al-Qur'an: Melacak Kelemahan Argumentasi Pemikiran Kontemporer* (Makassar: Nas Media Pustaka, 2023), 136.

Qur'anic stipulations already embody justice by accounting for the physiological and psychological differences between men and women. However, proponents of hermeneutics challenge this view, highlighting the socio-cultural and historical contexts that influenced traditional interpretations. Hermeneutical approaches often deconstruct classical exegetical assumptions, which are seen as being shaped by patriarchal norms that justified gender inequities incongruent with the Qur'an's universal values.<sup>80</sup>

Despite these critiques, advocates for contemporary methodologies, such as Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza, assert that hermeneutics is indispensable for addressing the complexities of modern life. They contend that many classical interpretations were shaped by narrow cultural assumptions that, in some cases, perpetuated discriminatory practices misaligned with the Qur'an's core ethos of justice and humanity. Hermeneutics, in their view, provides the necessary tools for reinterpretation that responds to contemporary concerns, such as gender equality and women's rights, while remaining faithful to the Qur'an's essential teachings.<sup>81</sup>

This ongoing debate reflects the inherent tension between the need for methodological innovation and the imperative to uphold traditional interpretations. On one hand, critics of hermeneutics emphasize the importance of preserving the Qur'an's textual authority and its time-honored interpretive traditions. On the other hand, proponents argue that hermeneutics enables the reform of exegetical methodologies to maintain their relevance in addressing modern challenges without compromising the Qur'an's authentic and universal essence. Through the judicious application of hermeneutics, scholars can craft interpretations that are inclusive, equitable, and contextually attuned, while respecting the profound intellectual heritage of Islam.

## **Conclusion**

This study underscores that the methodological innovations advanced by Fazlur Rahman, Abdullah Saeed, and Amina Wadud represent significant intellectual breakthroughs, bridging the rich traditions of Islamic exegesis with the demands of contemporary thought. Rahman's Double Movement approach provides a systematic framework for analyzing the historical context of revelation to distill universal values that resonate with modern society. Saeed's Contextual Approach builds upon this foundation by introducing a hierarchy of values, enabling scholars to discern universal norms from contextual directives and fostering flexibility without undermining the Qur'an's core principles. Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics adds a transformative dimension by integrating gender justice into Qur'anic interpretation, producing readings that are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to contemporary concerns. Collectively, these approaches highlight the efforts of Muslim intellectuals in the West to reformulate exegetical methodologies, ensuring that the Qur'an remains relevant and accessible while preserving its divine essence. These innovations enrich the intellectual tradition of Islam and contribute to a global discourse that is inclusive, adaptive, and capable of bridging the diverse perspectives of Islamic tradition and modern academic inquiry.

## **Author Contribution Statement**

Siti Khodijah contributed as the initiator, data collector, and main drafter of the manuscript. Moh. Yardho contributed by providing analytical insight, analysis, and assisting

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>81</sup>Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza, "A Fresh Look at Women in Qur'anic Interpretation," *The Institute of Ismaili Studies*, in <https://www.iis.ac.uk/news/2021/november/a-fresh-look-at-women-in-qur-anic-interpretation/> (accessed November, 2021).

in critical revision of the manuscript. Isam Abdul Azeez T. M., contributed to validating the data and translate the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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