TEXTUALIZATION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS (Understanding Approaches to Interpreting the Quran and Hadith)

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Abstract

This article discusses the two main approaches to understanding Islamic teachings regarding the Quran and hadith: the textual and contextual approaches. This article aims to examine the characteristics, mechanisms, strengths, and limitations of these two approaches, as well as to explore various models developed to bridge the two. This study employs a qualitative approach through library research, analyzing relevant classical and contemporary literature. The results of the study indicate that the textual approach emphasizes the literal meaning of the text and upholds the authority of revelation, whereas the contextual approach seeks to capture the substantive message of the text by taking into account its historical, social, and cultural context. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, meaning neither can independently produce a fully comprehensive understanding. Various integrative models proposed by contemporary Muslim scholars, such as the "double movement," contextual hermeneutics, maqāṣid al-syarīʻah, and maʻnā cum maghzā, demonstrate efforts to bridge the relationship between text and context. However, there is not yet a single model that is methodologically well established and universally accepted. Therefore, the development of a more integrative and methodologically sound approach remains a critical need in contemporary Islamic studies.

Keywords: Textual, Contextual, Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic Interpretation

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas pendekatan utama dalam memahami ajaran Islam terhadap al-Qur'an dan hadis, yaitu pendekatan tekstual dan kontekstual. Artikel ini bertujuan mengkaji karakteristik, cara kerja, kelebihan, dan keterbatasan kedua pendekatan tersebut, serta menelaah berbagai model yang dikembangkan untuk menjembatani keduanya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan jenis studi kepustakaan (*library research*) melalui analisis terhadap literatur klasik dan kontemporer yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan tekstual menekankan makna literal teks dan menjaga otoritas wahyu, sedangkan pendekatan kontekstual berupaya menangkap pesan substantif teks dengan mempertimbangkan latar historis, sosial, dan budaya. Masing-masing pendekatan memiliki

keunggulan dan kelemahan sehingga belum mampu secara mandiri menghasilkan pemahaman yang sepenuhnya komprehensif. Berbagai model integratif yang ditawarkan oleh sarjana Muslim kontemporer, seperti double movement, hermeneutika kontekstual, maqāṣid al-syarīʻah, dan maʻnā cum maghzā, menunjukkan upaya untuk menjembatani relasi antara teks dan konteks. Namun demikian, belum terdapat satu model yang secara metodologis mapan dan diterima secara universal. Oleh karena itu, pengembangan pendekatan yang lebih integratif dan metodologis masih menjadi kebutuhan penting dalam studi Islam kontemporer.
Kata kunci: Tekstual, Kontekstual, al-Qur'an, Hadis, Interpretasi Islam

A. Introduction

In his Farewell Pilgrimage sermon, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) urged Muslims to always adhere to two primary sources of guidance: the Qur'an and the Sunnah (hadith). These two sources constitute the prophetic legacy that serves as a guide for Muslims in navigating life in this world and the hereafter. In the Islamic legal system, the Qur'an holds the position of the primary source of law, while the hadith serves as the secondary source of law and also functions as an explanation (bayān) of the Qur'an's content.[1]

The Qur'an is the holy book revealed by Allah the Almighty to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. It serves as guidance for all humanity (hudan li al-nās), a distinction between right and wrong (furqān), and a moral and legal guide that remains relevant throughout the ages. Meanwhile, the hadith which encompasses the sayings, actions, and rulings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) serves to explain, elaborate on, and implement the teachings contained in the Qur'an.[2] Therefore, the Qur'an and the hadith are the two primary sources of Islamic teachings, which are inseparable from one another.

As a guide to life, the Qur'an and the hadith not only govern aspects of worship but also provide fundamental principles in the social, economic, political, legal, educational, and cultural spheres. In the belief of Muslims, these two sources possess universal characteristics and are relevant throughout all times, a concept known as ṣāliḥ li kulli zamān wa makān (suitable for every time and place).[3]

Nevertheless, the universality of the Qur'an and the hadith faces challenges when confronted with the ever changing course of time. Contemporary issues arising in modern life are becoming increasingly complex and diverse, while the revelation of the Qur'an has been completed and the Prophet's hadith came to an end with the passing of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him. According to M. Amin Abdullah, the ever evolving dynamics of human life can be described as al-waqā'i'

[1]Abdul Wahhab Khallaf, *Ilmu Ushul Fikih*, (Cet. I; Semarang; Penerbit Dina Utama Semarang, 1994). h.18.

[2]Munzier Suparta, *Ilmu Hadis*, (Cet. II ; Depok: Rajawali Press, 2001). 57.

[3]M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an: Fungsi dan Peran Wahyu Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2013). h. 75-80.

ghair mutanāhiyah (unlimited realities), whereas religious texts are al-nuṣūṣ mutanāhiyah (limited texts).[4] This situation raises methodological challenges in understanding and applying the messages of the Qur'an and the hadith so that they remain relevant to the needs of modern society. This is where the need arises for an interpretation capable of bridging the gap between the normative message of revelation and the ever-changing social reality.

In the intellectual history of Islam, various approaches have emerged for interpreting revealed texts, particularly in response to changing times, cultural differences, and scientific developments. In this context, there are two main approaches: the textual approach and the contextual approach.[5] The textual approach emphasizes understanding based on the literal meaning of the text, while the contextual approach seeks to understand the text by taking into account its historical, social, and cultural context, as well as the objectives behind the establishment of a doctrine (maqāṣid al-syarī'ah). Alternatively, these two approaches are sometimes referred to as the textual-theological approach and the contextual-historical approach. The textual-theological approach is a perspective that relies on and is oriented toward religious texts in a literal and rigid manner, whereas the contextual-historical approach is a perspective that relies on the universal moral ideas conveyed by the intent of religious texts while always taking into account the sociocultural context.[6]

These differing approaches have given rise to various schools of thought and interpretations within Islam. Some groups place greater emphasis on the literal authority of the text, leading to the emergence of textualist groups, while others seek to connect the text with an ever-evolving social reality. These differences demonstrate that the understanding of the Qur'an and hadith is not monolithic but requires an adequate methodological framework so that the message of Islamic teachings can be understood comprehensively and applied effectively.

An understanding of Islamic teachings from their primary sources, namely, the Qur'an and the hadith, cannot be separated from the perspective of a mufassir or mujtahid in interpreting the text.[7] This difference essentially stems from the different methodological approaches chosen and upheld by Islamic scholars and intellectuals in interpreting the Qur'an and the Hadith.[8] These issues of textuality and contextuality are also not without controversy, as they directly touch on questions of interpretation: Who has the right to interpret a text? Is the meaning of a text fixed or dynamic? Are

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[4]M. Amin Abdullah, *Islamic Studeis di Perguruan Tinggi*, (Cet.III; Pustaka Pelajar, Jogjakarta: 2012). h. 135.

[5]Bahkan Abdullah Saeed dalam bukunya menyebut istilah pendekatan semi-tekstualis selain pendekatan tektualis dan kontektualis yang selama ini dikenal. Baca Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān; Towards a Contemporary Approach* (Canada: Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada, 2006). h.3.

[6]Mu'min Ma'mun, *Metode Tafsir Inklusif*, (Cet.1;Yogyakarta: Idea Press, 2024), h.viii

[7]Ridwan Sahrani,et.al, 'Tekstualitas dan Kontekstualisasi Ajaran Islam Dalam Al Quran', *Journal of Inovative and Creativity*, 5.2 (2025), 14875–82.

[8]Sahrani. et.al, 'Tekstualitas dan Kontekstualisasi Ajaran Islam Dalam Al Quran', h. 14876.

there limits to reinterpretation? Who has the authority to do so?[9] And which of the two approaches is the most appropriate to use?

Therefore, although there is an awareness that both textual and contextual approaches play important roles in understanding Islamic teachings, the debate regarding these two approaches remains a relevant topic of study to this day. Without integrating these two approaches, our understanding of the Qur'an and hadith risks being incomplete, particularly when addressing various contemporary issues. This situation has prompted Muslim scholars to continue developing various ideas and interpretive models capable of accommodating both the textual and contextual dimensions.

However, to date, there is still no fully established methodological consensus regarding the boundaries and criteria for the use of each approach. A fundamental question that remains hotly debated is when a text should be understood literally (textually) and when it should be interpreted based on social and historical context and the objectives of sharia (contextually). Given this issue, it is important to examine the nature of the textual and contextual approaches, how they function, what integrative models Muslim scholars have proposed, and examples of their application in the interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith. On this basis, this paper seeks to explore and analyze various perspectives of Muslim scholars regarding the discourse on these two approaches.

B. Research Method

The research in this paper is a qualitative study in the form of library research, in which the researcher conducts the study by collecting and analyzing various literature sources that discuss the topics of textualization and contextualization of Islamic teachings in the Quran and hadith. This approach was chosen because the topic under study is normative-theoretical in nature. In this study, the researcher will refer to primary sources, particularly the works of key figures who pioneered these textual and contextual theories, such as Fazlur Rahman's Islam and Modernity: A Transformation of Intellectual Tradition, Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid's Mahfum al-Nass; Dirasah fi Ulum al-Qur'an," and Abdullah Saeed's "Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach," as well as secondary sources such as books on classical and contemporary thought, books on fiqh, books on tafsir, and related academic works such as books and journals that discuss the same topic. This paper presents a descriptive-comparative analysis of the textual and contextual approaches, covering the methodology, strengths, and weaknesses of each approach, as well as examples of their application in Quranic verses. To illustrate their application to Quranic verses, the author will examine verses deemed to be gender-biased. The comparative analysis in this study is not limited to a comparison between the textualist approach and the contextualist approach; it also compares approaches developed by different scholars within the same framework. However, this paper is not restricted to specific scholars

[9]Sahrani, et.al, 'Tekstualitas dan Kontekstualisasi Ajaran Islam Dalam Al Quran', h. 14877.

or works. The systematic steps to be followed in this study are as follows: selecting and defining the topic—namely, the textual and contextual approaches—followed by a literature review, particularly of primary sources, which in this paper will refer to the views and works of the pioneers of these approaches or those with a focus on this theme; then, data processing and analysis will be conducted, culminating in the drawing of conclusions.

C. Results and Discussion

1. The Textualization Approach: Definition, Characteristics, and Methods of Application.

The word "textualization" is derived from the root word "textual." Linguistically, the word "textual" comes from the English word "text," which refers to the content of a book or the original words of a speaker or writer.[10] In the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), the word "tekstual" is derived from the word "teks," which refers to written material serving as the basis for lessons to be taught to students; a manuscript consisting of the author's original words; and quotations from sacred texts that form the basis of teachings.[11]

In Arabic, the word "text" is referred to as nash. This term has been used in classical Islamic studies (Islamic law). Among scholars of usul al-fiqh, nash refers to a statement whose meaning corresponds exactly to its wording and cannot be interpreted to mean anything else.

From this linguistic definition, it can be understood that the textual approach, as it relates to the understanding of the Qur'an and hadith, is an approach that interprets the meaning and intent of the Qur'an and hadith as sources of Islamic law solely through their literal wording. In this approach, the wording of the nash, whether from the Qur'an or the hadith, serves as the primary focus.

In Islamic studies, this textual approach is better known as bayani epistemology. Understanding the meaning of the Qur'an and hadith texts cannot be separated from linguistic analysis and Arabic grammar. This approach relies on the sciences of the Arabic language, such as Nahwu, Shorof, and Balagah. That is why the textual approach emphasizes the literal meaning of the text, referring to the linguistic structure, wording, and grammatical rules as written in the Qur'an and Hadith.[12]

The textualist (literalist) approach refers to a method of interpretation that emphasizes the surface or literal meaning of a text. This approach treats the text as an absolute and definitive truth, so it is sufficient to read the text directly without needing to consider aspects outside the text, such as the historical context or the social purpose of a law.

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[10]Dedi Anton Ritonga dan Nur Azizah, 'Metode Memahami Al- Qur'an dan Hadis Antara Tekstual dan Kontekstual', *Rayah Al-Islam Jurnal Ilmu Islam*, 9.2 (2025), 308–323. h. 311.

[11]Indah Nuraini, *Kamus Bahasa Indonesia*, (Cet. I; Bogor: CV. Duta Grafika, 2010). h.940.

[12]Ritonga and Azizah. Metode Memahami Al- Qur'an dan Hadis Antara Tekstual dan Kontekstual, h. 308.

This approach was commonly used by the Salaf scholars (the early generations of Islam), who were linguistically and culturally closer to the prophetic era. Its "adherents" employed it as a form of respect and caution toward the text of revelation, which is considered sacred and unalterable. In this context, the text is considered complete and sufficient in providing guidance to humanity, so that reinterpretation, which is viewed as potentially leading to deviations from the original intent of the revelation, is no longer necessary.[13]

In practice, when exploring the meanings contained in the Quran and the hadiths, scholars treat the nash or the texts of the Quran and the hadiths as the primary object of study by analyzing the wording found in both.

In implementing this approach, there are several stages that must be followed, namely: First, a discussion is conducted regarding the scope of meaning contained in the terms, which consists of: khas (specific meaning), which includes muthlaq, mugayyad, al-Amr (command), and an-Nahyu (prohibition); and terms indicating general (am) meaning, which consist of mustarak and muawal terms. Second, a discussion is conducted regarding the meaning of the terms from the perspective of literal (hakikat) or figurative (majazi) meaning. This discussion covers literal (hakikat), figurative (majaz), explicit (sharih), and implied (kinayah) meanings. Third, a discussion is conducted regarding whether the meaning of a term is clear or unclear, consisting of discussions on wadhih and mubhan. Fourth, a discussion is conducted regarding how a term conveys meaning, consisting of ibarat nash, isyarat nash, dalalah nash, and iqtiqad nash. In addition to understanding the meaning of words, the textual approach also includes a study of the "letters of meaning" (huruf al-maa'ni), that is, the letters that carry meaning and influence the interpretation of words in the Quran and hadith.[14]

Adherents of the textualist school are often referred to as ahlul hadith, athari, or, in a modern context, are frequently associated with the Salafi-Wahhabi movement, or are even sometimes called fundamentalists. These labels are often applied to them because, in their understanding of the Qur'an and hadith, these groups focus solely on the literal (zahir) meaning without engaging in much rational interpretation or in-depth contextualization. For the Ahl al-Hadith and Athari, they even believe that the zahir meaning of the text is the sole authority they accept and reject metaphorical interpretation (ta'wil). The term "Ahl al-Hadith" in this context refers to followers of the Maliki school of jurisprudence. As for the Salafi groups, particularly the Saudi Salafis, they adhere to textualism very strictly. This is because they claim to follow the religious practices of the salafus shalih scholars, who, at that time, did indeed rely more on a textual approach in understanding the Qur'an and hadith.

Selain itu, dalam studi agama Islam dan tafsir, pendekatan tekstual juga sangat dipengaruhi oleh tradisi ulama klasik seperti Imam Syafi'i yang dalam pembentukan

[13]Sahrani, et.al, 'Tekstualitas dan Kontekstualisasi Ajaran Islam Dalam Al Quran', h. 14876.

[14]Ritonga dan Azizah. Metode Memahami Al-Qur'an dan Hadis Antara Tekstual dan Kontekstual, h. 31

kaidah ushul fiqih sebagaimana yang termuat dalam kitab ar-Risalah yang sangat menitiberatkan pada kepatuhan terhadap makna lahiriah teks.

According to M. Amin Abdullah, this kind of textual approach to interpreting the Qur'an and hadith is lexicographic in nature that is, it involves interpreting word by word, sentence by sentence, and verse by verse, without paying much attention to the social, economic, and cultural context of the present era. Such patterns and methods of interpretation are only suitable for a sacred text that is regarded as a closed, ahistorical corpus.[15] This is what prompted several Muslim scholars to offer critiques and, later on, to develop contextual approaches, as done by Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Muhammed Arkoun, Abdullah Saeed, and several other Muslim scholars. Abdullah Saeed, for example, developed his contextual approach based on his harsh criticism of "hard textualism," which relies heavily on the literal meaning of a verse without considering the socio-historical conditions at the time the text was revealed. Arkoun took a similar approach by strongly criticizing classical Islamic reasoning, which overly sacralizes the text without distinguishing between the Qur'an as a transcendent revelation and human interpretation as a cultural product.

In the author's view, the textual approach, as widely practiced by the Salaf and serving as the primary foundation for understanding the Qur'an and hadith was highly appropriate at that time, since the Salaf lived in an era that was still very close to when the sacred texts were "produced." However, in the contemporary context, a textualist approach, especially when applied very strictly can actually diminish the function of the Qur'an and hadith as ṣāliḥ li kulli zamān wa makān (suitable for every time and place), as well as the objectives of Islamic law (maqāṣid al-syarī'ah).

2. The Contextualization Approach: Definition, Characteristics, Background of Its Emergence, and Methods of Application.

In addition to the textual approach to understanding the Qur'an and hadith, there is also the contextual approach, which is used to contextualize Islamic teachings within a contemporary context.

The term "contextualization" derives from the word "contextual." Etymologically, "contextual" comes from the English noun "context." This word was subsequently adapted into Indonesian as "konteks," which means a part of a description or sentence that supports or clarifies meaning. Additionally, "konteks" is defined as a situation related to an event, while "kontekstual" is defined as pertaining to context.[16]

In al-Maurid's dictionary (English-Arabic), the word "context" is defined as al-qarīnah (indication) or siyāq al-kalām (connections, background, the circumstances surrounding a fact); bī'ah (atmosphere) and muḥīṭ (surroundings).[17]

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[15]Abdullah. *Islamic Studeis di Perguruan Tinggi*, h.139.

[16]Nuraini. *Kamus Bahasa Indonesia*, h. 540.

[17]Rohi Baalbaki, *Al-Mawrid: A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary* (Beirut: Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin., 2008). h. 212.

Terminologically speaking, the word "contextual" has at least three meanings: (1) An effort to interpret meaning to address today's generally pressing issues, such that the contextual meaning is synonymous with situational; (2) An interpretation that considers the interconnection between the past, present, and future or one that examines the term from historical, functional, and predictive perspectives deemed relevant; and (3) Establishing the connection between the text of the Qur'an and its application.[18]

Based on these contextual definitions—both etymological and epistemological it can be simply understood that the contextual approach to understanding Islamic teachings is a paradigm of thought that encompasses reality-oriented methods, techniques, and approaches. In other words, the term "contextual" refers to a perspective that takes into account the contextual dimensions and does not rely solely on the literal meaning of the text, but also considers the socio-historical context in which the text was revealed.

This approach seeks to understand the text within the contextual framework of the time and place of revelation. This context encompasses the social, political, cultural, and even psychological conditions of Arab society during the prophetic era. The approach aims to uncover the universal values of the revelation, which are dynamic and applicable in every time and place. It does not seek to obscure the text's meaning but rather to explore the essence and spirit of Islamic teachings, which are universal and transcendental—so that they remain relevant throughout the ages.

This contextual approach stems from the realization that the revealed text was revealed within a specific context of time and place, in this case, closely tied to the lives of the Arabs. Therefore, to fully and practically understand the moral and legal messages in the Qur'an and hadith, one must understand the historical context, the conditions of Arab society at that time, and the objectives of Islamic law (maqāṣid al-syarī'ah).[19] From the perspective of contextualists, the Qur'an and hadith are considered unchanging texts, but the interpretation of these texts is constantly evolving, in accordance with the spatial and temporal context of human life. Therefore, the Qur'an and hadith are always open to analysis, perception, and interpretation using various tools, methods, and approaches to uncover their true meaning. M. Amin Abdullah notes that the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah do not need to be updated in terms of their literal wording, as they will remain unchanged forever; however, our understanding and interpretation of them must continue to be informed by innovative ideas in line with the times and circumstances. According to him, without such renewal in our understanding of both, they will become "stagnant" and lose their relevance.[20]

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[18]Neong Muhadjir, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Edisi IV; Yogyakarta; Rake Sarasin, 2000). h. 263-264.

[19]Sahrani et.al, 'Tekstualitas Dan Kontekstualisasi Ajaran Islam Dalam Al Quran', h. 14876.

[20]Abdullah. *Islamic Studeis di Perguruan Tinggi*, h. 135.

One of the reasons that motivates scholars to use a contextual approach in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an and the hadith is to ensure that both remain relevant to people's lives.[21] According to its proponents, Muslims should not be bound (taklid) by the interpretations provided by earlier scholars. The reasoning is that the current situation is vastly different from that of the past. If the Salaf scholars employed a textual approach which is considered highly appropriate it was because they were still close in time to the prophetic era. In other words, the circumstances faced by the early scholars (the first generation of Islam) were not significantly different from those faced during the time of the Prophet.

While the application of the textual approach requires going through several stages of textual analysis, the primary requirement for applying the contextual approach is that, when applied to verses of the Qur'an, the asbabun nuzul (reasons for revelation) of the verse must first be understood; whereas when applied to hadith, the asbabul wurud (reasons for transmission) of the hadith must be understood.

In Islamic studies, this contextual approach is actually not new. Some classical scholars have already used it, even though it had not yet been termed "contextualization." Among the scholars or figures who used it was Imam al-Shatibi, who developed the theory of maqāṣid al-sharīʿah (the objectives of Sharia) as contained in his work al-Muwafaqat.[22] Meanwhile, in the modern context, similar methods can also be found in theories developed by contemporary Muslim thinkers and scholars such as Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Mohammed Arkoun, and Abdullah Saeed, and in Indonesia, figures such as Muhammad Syuhudi Ismail, who specifically discusses these methods in the context of understanding hadith.

In developing his contextual approach, Fazlur Rahman employs a historical approach, or "double movement"—that is, a back-and-forth movement between the present-day context and the historical context of the verse as the basis for understanding the verse.[23] In this model, the process is carried out in two steps: (1) understanding the historical context of the verse from the present context to the time when the verse was revealed, and (2) applying the verse's universal values to modern conditions—from the verse's general principles to the current context.[24]

Meanwhile, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd employs a literary hermeneutic approach (al-manhaj al-adabi) based on three main concepts: (1) historical analysis, (2) the search for the text's original meaning (dalālah), and (3) contextual interpretation relevant to

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[21]Umar Shihab, *Kontekstualisasi Al-Quran ; Kajian Tematik Atas Ayat-Ayat Hukum Dalam Al-Quran*, (Cet. III; Jakarta; Paramadina, 2005). h. 24.

[22]Abu Ishaq Al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwāfaqāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004).

[23]Fazlur Rahman, *Islam Dan Modernity; Transformation Of An Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press., 1982). *Islam dan Modernity; Transformation Of An Intellectual Tradition*. h. 20.

[24]Aulia Rahman, dkk, 'Hermeneutika Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid dan Muhammad Arkoun Dalam Memahami Kitab Turats Islam', *Al-Ahnaf; Journal Of Islamic Education, Learning and Religious Studies*, 2.1 (2025), 155–66.

the present day (magzā).[25] In developing his theory, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd argues that the text of the Qur'an is a cultural product (muntaj tsaqofi) revealed in Arabic to respond to the traditions of the society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Therefore, Nasr rejects the excessive sacralization of the text, which stifles the role of reason in understanding it. In his book *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd asserts that a text is deeply influenced by the historical context and subjectivity surrounding it, including the text of the Qur'an.[26] Therefore, in developing his hermeneutical theory, Nasr identifies three main components: text, context, and reader. According to him, meaning is not found solely in the text, but also arises from the interaction between the text and the reader within a specific context.[27]

Another figure who developed a contextual approach to the study of Islam was Mohammed Arkoun (1928–2010). In line with the thought of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Arkoun rejected the tendency to sacralize human interpretations of religious texts. According to Arkoun, the Qur'an is a transcendent and sacred revelation, but human understanding and interpretation of it are historical and cultural products that are not immune to the possibility of error.[28] Therefore, interpretation should not be viewed as absolute, but must be open to criticism and reexamination (the desacralization of interpretation). Arkoun emphasizes that every verse of the Qur'an was revealed within a specific historical context; thus, the legal rulings derived from a verse must be understood by taking into account the social and historical conditions that shaped it. Consequently, a legal provision does not always apply absolutely to every time and place if the context in which it originated has changed. Based on this view, Arkoun encourages continuous ijtihad through a process of critical thinking and a re-examination of Islam's intellectual heritage (rethinking Islam) so that Islamic teachings remain relevant in the face of social change and the evolution of the times.[29]

Although Arkoun and Nasr are often compared because they both advocate a contextual approach, the concepts of these two thinkers actually differ in at least two respects: their starting points and their ultimate goals. Arkoun has an academic background in philosophy, anthropology, and history, and his theories are heavily influenced by the thought of Foucault and Bourdieu, while Nasr, who has an academic background in Arabic literature and literary criticism, is heavily influenced by hermeneutics and semiotics. Their academic backgrounds have significantly

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[25]Hafid Nur Muhammad, dkk, 'Analisis Metode Hermeneutika Dalam Al-Qur'an Atas Pemikiran Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid', 2 (2022), h. 49–57.

[26]Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 1994). h.27-28.

[27]Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics* (Utrecht: Humanistics University Press., 2004). h.90-95.

[28]Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books., 2002). h.1-44

[29]Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder: Westview Press., 1994). h. 39 – 41.

influenced the theoretical approaches they have developed. Arkoun, for example, in the contextual approach he proposed, must go through three levels of analysis: linguistic analysis of the text, historical analysis, and anthropological analysis.[30] While Arkoun starts from the view that the text is sacred, his understanding of the text is historical (a cultural product). Nasr holds the view that the Qur'an is a product of 7th-century Arab culture. Like Arkoun, Nasr also regards the revealed text as sacred and from God; however, once it enters the Arabic language and human reality, it becomes a text. Because it becomes a text, it must be subject to linguistic and cultural norms. Therefore, according to Nasr, the Qur'an as a sacred text requires an exploration of its core message (maghza) and should not be confined to the literal wording of the text (mantuq). In advancing their approaches, both seek to ensure that the Qur'an remains relevant to the context of the times. However, in their implementation, Arkoun is more "lenient" toward the text but strict regarding reason, while Nasr is considered far more radical because he challenges the very status of the text itself.

Another figure who developed the contextual approach is Abdullah Saeed. In applying his contextual approach, Saeed proposes four main stages that are interrelated: (1) understanding the context of the text, (2) conducting a critical analysis, (3) understanding the historical context, and (4) understanding its contemporary relevance.[31] The first stage in this contextual exegesis methodology is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the original context in which the revelation was received (initial considerations); the second step is to understand the Qur'anic text as an approximation, in which the meanings it conveys are not always absolute or final. This is done because many verses are of a mutasyabihat nature. (The text's meaning is an approximation.) Then, in the third stage, the importance of acknowledging the complexity of the meanings contained in the Qur'anic text is emphasized. In this regard, Saeed recommends that exegetes pay attention to both the macro and micro contexts when interpreting the text, including the reconstruction of the socio-historical context, literary analysis, and the identification of the specific time and place where the text was revealed. The final stage involves relating the interpretation of the text to the contemporary context.[32]

The theory developed by Saeed is actually an extension of the "double movement" theory developed by Fazlur Rahman.[33] What is interesting is that Abdullah Saeed, despite developing a contextual approach and strongly criticizing the approach of "hard textualism"—which relies heavily on the literal meaning of a verse—also acknowledges that not all verses must be understood contextually, nor,

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[30]Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*. h.42-45.

[31]Muhammad Halif dkk, 'Relevansi Tafsir Kontekstual Dalam Menjawab Masalah Sosial-Kemasyarakatan Di Abad 21', 1.4 (2024), 135–42.

[32]Halif dkk. Relevansi Tafsir Kontekstual Dalam Menjawab Masalah Sosial-Kemasyarakatan di Abad 21' h. 137-138.

[33] Zaimul Asroor, 'TEKSTUALITAS VIS-À-VIS KONTEKSTUALITAS (Studi Kritis Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Politik Muhammad Asad [1900-1992])', 18.2 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.18592/jiiu.v>. h. 155.

conversely, textually. For Saeed, verses that can be adequately understood textually include those related to historical, theological, and eschatological aspects. Meanwhile, verses that cannot be adequately understood textually are those pertaining to various situations closely tied to the time of the verse's revelation. It is these texts or verses that he refers to as ethico-legal texts, which emphasize ethical, moral, social, or legal issues. From Saeed's perspective, interpreting ethico-legal verses must take social changes into account in order to sustain a close relationship between the Qur'an and Muslims today.[34]

In addition to these three models, modern scholars, such as Jasser Auda, have also developed the "maqāṣid al-syarī'ah" model as an expansion of the concept of maqāṣid al-syarī'ah previously developed by Imam Al-Syatibi. The focus of this model is to interpret texts based on the primary objectives of Islamic law. The way this model works is quite simple: first, an analysis of the literal text is conducted; then, the interpretation of that text is tested to see if it is in line with the objectives of Islamic law (maqāṣid al-syarī'ah).

In developing their theory, adherents of this contextualist school of thought often cite Umar bin Khattab as a reference in applying a contextual approach to understanding and practicing the verses of the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet (peace be upon him). They often refer to policies implemented by Caliph Umar bin Khattab during his tenure as caliph, such as: (1) his policy of not enforcing the punishment of amputation for thieves which might seem to contradict the verse mandating this punishment for thieves (Quran 5:38); (2). The policy of removing some of the al-muallafah Qulubuhum (those whose hearts have been softened, or muallaf) from the list of zakat recipients, even though the Qur'an, in Surah at-Taubah, verse 60, explicitly states that there are eight categories entitled to receive zakat, one of which is the muallaf those whose hearts have been softened and have converted to Islam. In fact, Umar actually deposited the zakat funds intended for this group into the state treasury; and (3) Umar's policy of not distributing war booty, even though the Qur'an, in Surah Al-Anfal, verse 41, specifies the rules for the distribution of war booty.[35]

At first glance, Umar's actions may seem to contradict or go against the verses of the Quran. However, what Umar did at that time was inseparable from his interpretation of the context and social conditions prevailing at the time. For example, the Muslim community did not enforce the law of amputating the hand of a thief because there was a famine at the time, and they did not give zakat to new converts because, at that time, those who had converted to Islam were considered to be economically well-established. For adherents of the contextual school of thought, what Umar did at that time actually fulfilled God's own justice; in fact, it is considered to have applied the universal teachings and values of both the Quran and the hadith.

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[34]Ahmad Asroni, 'Penafsiran Kontekstual Al-Qur'an: Telaah Atas Pemikiran Abdullah Saeed', *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses*, 4.1 (2021), 107–23. h. 107.

[35]Amiur Nuruddin, *Ijtihad 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab : Studi Tentang Perubahan Hukum Dalam Islam* , Jakarta: CV. Rajawali, 1987). h. 137-140.

3. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Each Approach

The dynamic between adherents of the textualist school and adherents of the contextualist school in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an and the hadith arises because the textualist school seeks to preserve the purity (and originality) of the Qur'an through the meanings and interpretations inherent within the Qur'an itself, without involving an understanding of or reasoning about reality, while contextualists always seek to engage the texts of the Qur'an and hadith in dialogue with dynamic social reality.[36]

The debate over textual and contextual approaches is not merely a methodological issue; rather, it has implications for the face of Islam in society. A rigid and literal interpretation of the text can lead to exclusivism, which may result in acts of terrorism and radicalism, whereas an overly loose interpretation can create openings for value relativism and deviations from authentic Islamic teachings, thereby giving rise to people with liberal views. [37]

Simply put, both approaches have their own strengths and weaknesses. The textualist approach has several strengths, including: (1) It provides clarity of meaning because it is derived directly from the text, and (2) it avoids subjective forms and outcomes of interpretation because it also refers directly to the text. Meanwhile, its weaknesses are: (1) Limited understanding. The textual approach is insufficient for understanding the text within a broader context; it can even set a precedent suggesting that verses of the Qur'an are irrelevant to the changing times, especially when confronted with contemporary issues such as gender, religious freedom, democracy, human rights, and the relationship between religion and the state (2). It has a high potential to cause misunderstandings. This occurs because this approach is taken without considering the context, which allows for interpretations that are out of context.

Meanwhile, the advantages of the contextual approach include: (1) the results of interpretation are always relevant to modern life, so that the interpretations greatly assist in applying Islamic teachings to modern life in a relevant way, and (2) this approach helps in uncovering universal values from sacred texts, thereby avoiding rigidity. Conversely, this approach also has shortcomings, including: (1) There is a significant risk of highly subjective interpretation. This occurs because the contextual approach requires a very deep understanding of the context. To avoid erroneous interpretations due to subjectivity, an exegete must possess a deep understanding of the context of both the verses and hadiths to be interpreted. Subjective interpretation can also occur if the exegete has certain interests that influence their interpretation,

[36]Hendri Hermawan Adinugraha and Ahmad Hasan, 'Memahami Studi Islam Dengan Pendekatan Tekstual Da Kontekstual (Understanding Of Islamic Studies Through Textual And Contextual Approaches', *FARABI Jurnal Pemikiran Konstruktif Bidang Filsafat Dan Dakwah*, 17.1 (2020), h. 26.

[37]Sahrani et.al, 'Tekstualitas dan Kontekstualisasi Ajaran Islam Dalam Al Quran', h. 14877.

and (2) this approach is highly dependent on and focused on context, so that its results can make Islamic teachings seem relative and constantly changing. Consequently, it also gives the impression that the sacred texts are not sacred or authentic. Likewise, its practitioners are often accused of being liberals.

Comparing the textual and contextual approaches to understanding the Qur'an and hadith raises the question: "Which approach is most appropriate and should take precedence? And can and should all verses be approached contextually?"

To answer this question, some have proposed an alternative approach: methodological synthesis combining the strengths of both approaches to analyze a verse or hadith. The textualist approach is used to preserve the purity (originality) of the sacred text, while the contextualist approach is used to ensure the relevance and applicability of verses and hadiths in contemporary life. In line with this, Hendri Hermawan Adinugraha stated that to arrive at a comprehensive interpretation, both approaches should be employed simultaneously. This ensures that Islamic studies remain current and factual, and that the content of the Quran and hadiths remains truly relevant to the facts or phenomena occurring at any time and in any place.[38]

To bridge the gap between textual and contextual approaches, scholars have proposed several methodological models. However, according to the author's analysis, among the various models proposed, there is not yet a single model that is truly well-established for use in answering the question, "Which approach is most appropriate, and when should that approach ideally be used?" Furthermore, there is not yet a single model that is free of gaps in its application.

Among the models in question is the "Double Movement" model by Fazlur Rahman. The advantage of this model is that it preserves the authority of the text so that it remains rooted in revelation while remaining flexible to the changing times. However, its critics argue that in applying this model, it is difficult to objectively determine universal values, making it highly susceptible to interpretive bias. Similarly, regarding the "Contextual Hermeneutics" model developed by Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, although this model is considered highly contextual and adaptive, particularly to modern issues such as human rights, gender, and so on, its application is viewed as overly relativistic. The same applies to the maqāṣid al-syarī'ah model developed by Jasser Auda. This model is seen as capable of bridging the gap between the text and reality in a normative sense and providing clear ethical guidance; however, it has the weakness of defining "maqasid" in a way that is open to debate, thus failing to provide clear boundaries and consequently often ending up yielding the same results as other approaches.

One of the leading contemporary figures offering methodological innovations in studies aimed at bridging the gap between classical interpretive traditions and the contextual needs of modern society is Sahiron Syamsuddin. Sahiron developed an approach he terms "Ma'na Cum Maghza," which emphasizes two main stages: the

[38]Adinugraha dan Hasan. 'Memahami Studi Islam Dengan Pendekatan Tekstual Da Kontekstual (Understanding Of Islamic Studies Through Textual And Contextual Approaches', h. 26.

exploration of the literal-historical meaning of the verse (ma'na) and the identification of its contextual core message (maghza). This approach requires an analysis of classical Arabic, historical context, and the integration of social science perspectives to strengthen the relevance of the Qur'an's message in modern life.[39]

The approach developed by Sahiron is more complex and capable of offering a balanced interpretation between the authentic values of revelation and the actual needs of society. According to Sahiron's own account, as recorded by Asroor, the Ma'na Cum Maghza approach emerged because the contextual approaches developed by Fazlur Rahman and Abdullah Saeed were limited to ethno-legal verses, whereas his approach, in his view, can be applied to all verses of the Qur'an without exception.[40] Although this approach has received widespread appreciation, in academic discussions it has also faced significant criticism on many fronts. This underscores the fact that, to date, no truly established model exists.

In fact, in the author's observation, there have been attempts to develop a new model namely, the Integrative-Interdisciplinary approach as a contemporary framework that combines classical (textual) interpretation, social sciences (contextual), and discourse analysis; however, this idea is also considered to be methodologically weak.

a. Verses on Polygamy (QS. An-Nisa/4 : 3)

وَإِنۡ خِفۡتُمۡ أَلَّا تُقۡسِطُواْ فِي ٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ فَٱنكِحُواْ مَا طَابَ لَكُم مِّنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ مَثۡنَىٰ وَثُلَٰثَ وَرُبَٰعَۖ فَإِنۡ خِفۡتُمۡ أَلَّا تَعۡدِلُواْ فَوَٰحِدَةً أَوۡ مَا مَلَكَتۡ أَيۡمَٰنُكُمۡۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدۡنَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَعُولُواْ ٣

Translation:

> And if you fear that you will not be able to treat orphaned women fairly (if you marry them), then marry other women whom you find acceptable: two, three, or four. However, if you fear that you will not be able to treat them fairly, then marry only one, or the female slaves you possess. That is closer to avoiding injustice.[41]

Most scholars agree that this verse serves as the legal basis for the freedom to practice polygamy. For adherents of the textualist school of thought, this verse is not merely understood as the basis for permitting men to practice polygamy, but is regarded as a command to do so, since the text explicitly states that men may marry two, three, or four women of their choice. Meanwhile, for adherents of the contextualist school of thought, this verse is not a command to practice polygamy in

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[39]Fikri Haikal dan Murni, 'PENDEKATAN MA'NA CUM MAGHZA DALAM PENAFSIRAN AL-QUR'AN: TELAAH PEMIKIRAN PROF. SAHIRON SYAMSUDDIN', *ALMUSTOFA: Journal of Islamic Studies and Research*, 2.01 (2025), 93–106 <https://ejournal.bamala.org/index.php/almustofa/article/view/357>. h.93.

[40]Asroor. 'TEKSTUALITAS VIS-À-VIS KONTEKSTUALITAS (Studi Kritis Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Politik Muhammad Asad [1900-1992])', 18.2 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.18592/jiiu.v>. h. 156.

[41]RI, Kementerian Agama, *Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya*. (Jakarta; Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf al-Qur'an (LPMQ), 2019QS. Al-Nisa/4; 3.

the sense of taking additional wives, because the principle underlying the revelation of this verse is actually one of reduction and limitation. Contextually, this verse was revealed in response to the practice of the pre-Islamic Arabs, who engaged in unlimited polygamy.

b. Verses on Men's Leadership Over Women (QS. Al-Nisa/4: 34)

اَلرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُوْنَ عَلَى النِّسَآءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللّٰهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلٰى بَعْضٍ ...

Translation:

> Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made some of them (men) superior to others (women)., …[42]

Textually, this verse is often interpreted as a statement that men are the absolute leaders of women and that women must not lead men in any sphere. This interpretation was widely embraced by classical scholars and is still upheld today. However, from a contextual perspective, the verse can be understood to mean that men's leadership over women is not absolute, including in the domestic sphere (the household). Amina Wadud, for example, interprets the word "qawwamun" in the verse as not necessarily signifying the absolute superiority of men. Rather, "qawwamun" is a designation conferred due to the socioeconomic responsibilities that were, at that time, placed upon men. Therefore, in the contemporary era, if there are women who can also contribute financially and socially, then the meaning of "qawwamun," which is often interpreted as leadership, can also be assumed by a woman or wife, so that this verse is better understood as a relationship of shared responsibility rather than one of domination.[43]

c. Verses on the Distribution of Inheritance (QS. al-Nisa/4 : 11)

يُوصِيكُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِيٓ أَوۡلَٰدِكُمۡۖ لِلذَّكَرِ مِثۡلُ حَظِّ ٱلۡأُنثَيَيۡنِۚ ...

Translation:

> Allah has prescribed for you the distribution of inheritance among your children, as follows: a son's share is equal to that of two daughters. …[44]

This verse serves as the basis and procedure for the distribution of an estate. For adherents of the textualist school of thought, this verse serves as the standard for the proportional distribution of an estate, the provisions of which may not be altered. According to this verse, a son's share is equal to the share of two daughters, which means a ratio of two to one. A son receives two shares, while a daughter receives only one. Followers of the textualist school continue to uphold this method of inheritance distribution and maintain that its provisions must not be altered. However, followers of the contextualist school understand that this provision is not set in stone; rather, it

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[42]RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya*. QS. Al-Nisa/4; 34.

[43]Sahrani et. al, 'Tekstualitas dan Kontekstualisasi Ajaran Islam Dalam Al Quran', h. 14879.

[44]RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya*. QS. Al-Nisa/4; 11.

can be modified in the interest of fairness such as a one-to-one ratio. Both sons and daughters receive equal shares. This arrangement may be based on various underlying considerations or may stem from the willingness of a son. According to adherents of the contextualist school of thought, the model for the distribution of inheritance as mentioned in Surah an-Nisa' verse 11 is rooted in the context in which the verse was revealed namely, in the Arabian Peninsula, where at that time women did not yet hold an equal status to men. In today's contemporary era, many women are directly involved in supporting their parents' livelihoods, sometimes even contributing more than a son does.

d. Verses on Women's Testimony (QS. al-Baqarah/2: 282)

وَٱسۡتَشۡهِدُواْ شَهِيدَيۡنِ مِن رِّجَالِكُمۡۖ فَإِن لَّمۡ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيۡنِ فَرَجُلٞ وَٱمۡرَأَتَانِ مِمَّن تَرۡضَوۡنَ

Translation:

> … and have two male witnesses from among you testify. If there are not two men, then one man and two women from among the witnesses whom you approve of …[45]

This verse explicitly states that the testimony of two women is equivalent to that of one man in financial transactions. Followers of the textualist school continue to uphold this principle as an unalterable rule. However, adherents of the contextualist school of thought view this provision as having arisen from the social conditions of that time, when women were generally not yet fully involved in public affairs; consequently, women did not pay serious attention to such matters and were thus prone to making mistakes or forgetting details when conducting transactions. For adherents of the contextualist school, in this contemporary era, women have become actively involved in various public affairs from the economic to the political sphere so the rule mentioned in Surah al-Baqarah, verse 282, needs to be functionally reevaluated. Moreover, today there are many highly educated women holding important positions, including those serving as judges.

D. Conclution

In understanding Islamic teachings derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, Muslim scholars generally employ two main approaches: the textual and the contextual. The textual approach emphasizes the literal meaning of the text, while the contextual approach seeks to understand the text's message by taking into account its historical background and the surrounding social realities. Although both make important contributions to Islamic studies, each has its limitations and is therefore considered incapable of fully producing a holistic and comprehensive understanding of religious texts. Awareness of these limitations has led to the emergence of various models that seek to integrate the textual and contextual dimensions in a more balanced manner. Among these approaches are the "Double Movement" by Fazlur Rahman, "Contextual Hermeneutics" by Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, the contextual model developed by Abdullah Saeed, "maqāṣid al-syarī'ah" developed by Jasser Auda, and

[45]RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya*. QS. Al-Baqarah/2; 282.

"ma'na cum maghza" proposed by Sahiron. However, to date, there is no single model that is widely recognized as a truly established approach capable of addressing all issues related to the interpretation of religious texts. Therefore, there remains ample room for the development of new models that are methodologically stronger and more relevant in bridging the authority of the text with the demands of an ever-evolving context. One recommendation worth considering for the future is to attempt to formulate a new model by synthesizing existing approaches.

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