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Negotiating Qur'anic Hermeneutics in Indonesia: A Comparative Analysis of Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin

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Abstract

The use of hermeneutics in Qur'anic interpretation remains contested within contemporary Muslim scholarship, particularly regarding its epistemological compatibility with the Islamic exegetical tradition. This study examines the contrasting perspectives of Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin, two Indonesian Muslim scholars who articulate substantially different responses to Qur'anic hermeneutics. Rather than reducing their positions to acceptance and rejection, this study reconstructs the epistemological assumptions underlying their views concerning interpretive authority, the relationship between text and context, and the limits of interpretive plurality. Using a qualitative comparative approach based on their published works and relevant secondary literature, the study identifies two distinct orientations. Syamsuddin adopts an adaptive-integrative orientation, viewing hermeneutics as a methodological resource that can be critically integrated with 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, particularly through his ma'nā-cum-maghzā approach. Salim adopts a critical-protective orientation, questioning the legitimacy and methodological necessity of hermeneutics because of its distinct epistemological foundations. Despite their divergence, both affirm methodological rigor and fidelity to the Islamic exegetical tradition. The study argues that their disagreement reflects a broader tension in contemporary Indonesian Qur'anic studies

between preserving epistemological continuity with the inherited tradition and expanding methodological boundaries through engagement with modern thought. By reframing the debate beyond a binary acceptance–rejection model, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of how interpretive authority and methodological legitimacy are negotiated in contemporary Indonesian Qur’anic scholarship.

Keyword

Fahmi Salim, hermeneutics, Islamic exegesis, Qur’anic interpretation, Sahiron Syamsuddin

Abstrak

Penggunaan hermeneutika dalam penafsiran Al-Qur’an masih menjadi perdebatan dalam studi Islam kontemporer, khususnya mengenai kesesuaian epistemologisnya dengan tradisi tafsir Islam. Penelitian ini mengkaji pandangan yang bertolak belakang dari Fahmi Salim dan Sahiron Syamsuddin, dua akademisi Muslim Indonesia yang merumuskan respons yang sangat berbeda terhadap hermeneutika Al-Qur’an. Daripada mereduksi posisi keduanya sekadar pada penyimpulan “menerima” atau “menolak”, penelitian ini merekonstruksi asumsi-asumsi epistemologis yang melandasi pandangan mereka mengenai otoritas penafsiran, hubungan antara teks dan konteks, serta batas-batas pluralitas penafsiran. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-komparatif berdasarkan karya-karya terpublikasi mereka serta literatur sekunder yang relevan, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi dua orientasi yang khas. Syamsuddin mengadopsi orientasi adaptif-integratif, yang memandang hermeneutika sebagai sumber daya metodologis yang dapat diintegrasikan secara kritis dengan ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān, khususnya melalui pendekatan ma’nā-cum-maghzā. Sebaliknya, Salim mengadopsi orientasi kritis-protektif, yang mempertanyakan legitimasi dan urgensi metodologis hermeneutika karena landasan epistemologisnya yang berbeda. Di balik perbedaan tersebut, kedua tokoh sama-sama menegaskan pentingnya ketatnya metodologi (methodological rigor) dan kesetiaan terhadap tradisi tafsir Islam. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa perbedaan pendapat mereka merefleksikan ketegangan yang lebih luas dalam studi Al-Qur’an kontemporer di Indonesia antara menjaga keberlanjutan epistemologis dengan tradisi yang diwarisi, dan memperluas batas-batas metodologis melalui perjumpaan dengan pemikiran modern. Dengan membingkai ulang perdebatan ini di luar model biner “menerima–menolak”, penelitian ini menawarkan pemahaman yang lebih bernuansa mengenai bagaimana otoritas penafsiran dan legitimasi metodologis dinegosiasikan dalam studi Al-Qur’an kontemporer di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci

Fahmi Salim, hermeneutika, hermeneutika Al-Qur’an, penafsiran Al-Qur’an, Sahiron Syamsuddin, tafsir Islam

Introduction

One prominent trend in the development of contemporary tafsir studies is the emergence of interpretive models that are more contextual and oriented toward social issues (Husaini & Al Baghdadi, 2007, pp. 1–16). This trend stems from the need to keep the messages of the Qur’an relevant amid the continually evolving dynamics of modern life. Within this context, Muslim scholars have not only produced numerous contextually-oriented works of tafsir but have also developed a range of interpretive methodologies, such as tafsir maqashidi (Ibrahim & Bela, 2023, p. 127) and tafsir maudū’ī (Rokim & Triana, 2021, pp. 413–414), as well as approaches that seek to integrate hermeneutical theory with the tools of ulūm al-Qur’ān.

Nevertheless, these developments in contemporary exegetical methodology have not been uniformly accepted. One of the most debated issues is the incorporation of hermeneutics into Qur'anic studies. For some Muslim scholars, hermeneutics is regarded as a methodological tool that can facilitate the contextualization of the Qur'an's meaning, making it more responsive to the challenges of the modern era. In contrast, other scholars argue that hermeneutics originated within the Western intellectual tradition, which is based on epistemological assumptions that differ from those of the Islamic exegetical tradition; therefore, its application to Qur'anic interpretation should be examined critically. This debate has subsequently given rise to two major tendencies in contemporary Qur'anic exegesis: one group seeks to adapt hermeneutics to the study of the Qur'an, while the other rejects or restricts its use on the grounds that it has the potential to undermine the established authority of the Islamic exegetical methodology (Mabrur & Abas, 2023, pp. 84–87).

In the Indonesian context, the debate over Qur'anic hermeneutics is reflected in contrasting epistemological responses to the legitimacy and role of hermeneutical approaches in Qur'anic interpretation. Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin provide a particularly relevant comparative case because they are contemporary Indonesian Muslim scholars who have explicitly addressed the question of hermeneutics while arriving at substantially different methodological and epistemological positions. Sahiron Syamsuddin advocates the critical integration of hermeneutics into Qur'anic studies, arguing that hermeneutical approaches can enrich Qur'anic interpretation without abandoning the fundamental principles of the Islamic exegetical tradition (Syamsuddin, 2017). Fahmi Salim, by contrast, adopts a critical stance toward the incorporation of hermeneutics into Qur'anic interpretation, emphasizing that its underlying epistemological assumptions may challenge or displace interpretive principles established within the Islamic scholarly tradition (Salim, 2010). Their contrasting positions therefore offer more than a simple distinction between acceptance and rejection of hermeneutics; they reveal different conceptions of textual authority, the nature and limits of interpretation, and the relationship between the Islamic exegetical tradition and modern intellectual approaches. Examining these two scholars comparatively thus provides a focused lens through which to reconstruct the epistemological foundations of the contemporary hermeneutics debate in Indonesian Qur'anic studies.

Previous studies that are directly related to this research generally focus on the debate surrounding the acceptance and rejection of hermeneutics in Qur'anic studies. Reflita (2016), for example, examined the discourse on the pros and cons of the use of hermeneutics in Qur'anic interpretation. A similar study was conducted by Ramadhan (2020), who discussed the controversy surrounding the application of hermeneutical methodology in Qur'anic interpretation, along with the arguments advanced by both sides. Meanwhile, Maimun (2015) investigated the various forms of resistance to Qur'anic hermeneutics in Indonesia and systematically mapped the intellectual backgrounds underlying its rejection. Taken together, these studies are valuable for establishing the broader contours of the hermeneutics debate, but their primary emphasis remains on mapping the positions and arguments involved rather than reconstructing the epistemological foundations underlying contrasting positions.

A second strand of scholarship critically examines the epistemological and methodological problems associated with Qur'anic hermeneutics. Arrasyid, Nawawi, and Rofiah (2024) and Al Faritzi and Ramadhan (2025), for instance, identify various epistemological concerns surrounding the application of hermeneutics to Qur'anic

interpretation. Setiawan (2016) similarly critiques the development of Qur'anic hermeneutics associated with the so-called *Mazhab Jogja*, particularly the *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach. A third strand adopts a comparative perspective, as illustrated by Syamsuddin's (2021) study of the responses of two Muslim scholars to Western hermeneutics. Although these studies have advanced the discussion by addressing epistemological questions and comparative perspectives, they do not specifically reconstruct the contrasting epistemological positions of Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin within the same analytical framework. In particular, existing scholarship has not sufficiently examined how their different conceptions of textual authority, interpretation, and the relationship between text and context shape their respective assessments of the legitimacy and role of hermeneutics in Qur'anic studies. This gap provides the basis for a focused comparative analysis of the two scholars.

Building on this gap, the present study examines Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin not merely as proponents of opposing positions on hermeneutics, but as two cases through which the epistemological dimensions of the contemporary hermeneutics debate in Indonesian Qur'anic studies can be examined. Rather than simply categorizing Salim as critical of hermeneutics and Syamsuddin as supportive of its critical integration, this study analyzes the assumptions underlying their respective positions concerning textual authority, the nature and limits of interpretation, and the relationship between the Qur'anic text and its historical or contemporary context. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to existing scholarship by moving beyond a descriptive mapping of acceptance and rejection toward an analysis of the epistemological reasoning underlying these divergent positions.

The study therefore aims to clarify not only how the two scholars differ in their assessment of hermeneutics, but also what their disagreement reveals about the methodological and epistemological boundaries within contemporary Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia. Accordingly, the study addresses three research questions: (1) How do Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin conceptualize the legitimacy and role of hermeneutics in Qur'anic interpretation? (2) What epistemological assumptions account for the convergence and divergence between their respective positions? (3) What do these contrasting positions reveal about the methodological and epistemological boundaries of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia?

Ultimately, this study goes beyond a binary classification of acceptance and rejection. By excavating the epistemological foundations of Salim and Syamsuddin's scholarship, it elucidates how textual authority, interpretive legitimacy, and the boundaries of Islamic tradition are continuously negotiated within the landscape of contemporary Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research method with a library research approach. This approach was selected because the research focuses on examining the thought of Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin on Qur'anic hermeneutics in the form of descriptive data (Gunawan, 2013, p. 82). Through this approach, the research was conducted by examining, understanding, analyzing, and comparing the views of the two figures regarding Qur'anic hermeneutics based on the works they have produced.

Data collection was carried out through the documentation method, namely by gathering various written sources, including printed books, electronic books, scholarly journal articles, and other literature relevant to the focus of the research. The data

sources in this study were classified into two types: primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from the principal works of Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin that directly discuss Qur'anic hermeneutics. Secondary data, meanwhile, were obtained from various supporting literature, such as books, journal articles, undergraduate theses, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, and other research findings relevant to the theme of the study.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis with a comparative approach. The analytical process was carried out through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Khilmiyah, 2016, pp. 331–333). Through these stages, the collected data were selected, classified, and systematically analyzed to identify the construction of Fahmi Salim's and Sahiron Syamsuddin's thought regarding Qur'anic hermeneutics. Subsequently, the results of the analysis were compared to identify the similarities, differences, and the underlying factors shaping the two figures' differing views on Qur'anic hermeneutics, so as to arrive at comprehensive conclusions in accordance with the objectives of the research.

Result and Discussion

The Concept of Hermeneutics

Etymologically, the term hermeneutics derives from the Greek *hermeneuein*, meaning “to interpret,” with its noun form *hermeneia* meaning “interpretation.” In the Ancient Greek tradition, this term was used in three principal senses: to express or say, to explain, and to translate (Susanto, 2016, pp. 1–2). These three meanings subsequently developed in English into the term to interpret, which encompasses the activities of utterance, rational explanation, and translation from one language into another. Interpretation, therefore, is understood not merely as the process of translating a text, but also as an effort to comprehend, explain, and disclose meaning in its entirety (Mabrur & Abas, 2023).

Terminologically, hermeneutics is understood as the art and science of interpreting authoritative texts, particularly religious texts such as scripture. Kurt F. Leidecker defines it as the art and science of interpretation, especially of writings regarded as authoritative, such that in certain contexts it is often equated with the discipline of exegesis (*tafsir*). In another sense, hermeneutics is also understood as a set of rules and principles that an interpreter must follow in understanding texts from the past—particularly religious texts—so that the resulting meaning can be methodologically justified (Rasuki, 2021, pp. 105–106).

In its historical development, hermeneutics can be divided into two major periods: classical and modern. In the classical period, hermeneutics was primarily practical in nature, functioning as a technique for interpreting texts, especially sacred scripture and literary works (Haitomi, 2020, p. 56). In the modern period, by contrast, hermeneutics shifted toward becoming a philosophical discipline that addresses not only the methods of interpreting texts but also the very nature of human understanding. During this phase, hermeneutics developed through the thought of figures such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, who transformed hermeneutics into a broader and deeper theory of understanding. By the end of the twentieth century, hermeneutics could be classified into three principal tendencies: first, as philosophy, in which hermeneutics addresses the nature of human understanding within its existential dimension; second, as critique, in which hermeneutics is employed to expose ideology, power, and bias within the process

of textual meaning-making; and third, as theory, in which hermeneutics functions as a methodological instrument for systematically explaining the process of interpretation (Rasyidah, 2017).

In its broader development, hermeneutics has come to encompass a range of meanings. It has been understood as a theory of biblical exegesis, as a general philological methodology, as a science of all linguistic understanding, as the methodological foundation of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences), as a phenomenology of existence and existential understanding, and as a system of interpretation (Susanto, 2016, pp. 6–7). Alongside these developments, hermeneutics subsequently entered the discourse of Islamic scholarship, particularly within modern Qur’anic studies (Zahrani & Rubini, 2023). Its introduction into the Islamic sphere was closely tied to the intellectual interaction between Muslim scholars and Western thought in the modern and contemporary eras, as Muslim scholars began to confront methodological challenges in understanding sacred texts amid social change and the advancement of knowledge. Hermeneutics was then introduced as one of the alternative approaches within tafsir studies, particularly as a means of addressing the contextualization of Qur’anic meaning in modern life (Mustaqim, 2010, pp. 4–6).

The incorporation of hermeneutics into Qur’anic studies subsequently generated debate within Muslim scholarship concerning its methodological compatibility with established exegetical traditions. In this context, the discussion extends beyond the question of whether hermeneutics can be used as an interpretive method to broader questions concerning textual authority, the role of historical context, and the limits of interpretation. In Indonesia, these questions have become part of the broader discourse on contemporary Qur’anic interpretation, particularly as Muslim scholars respond differently to the encounter between classical exegetical traditions and modern hermeneutical approaches. This intellectual context provides the basis for examining the respective perspectives of Sahiron Syamsuddin and Fahmi Salim, whose approaches to Qur’anic hermeneutics are discussed in the following section.

Sahiron Syamsuddin and His Approach to Qur’anic Hermeneutics

Sahiron Syamsuddin is one of the leading scholars in the field of Qur’anic studies and tafsir, widely recognized for his contribution to integrating hermeneutics into the development of ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān. Sahiron Syamsuddin’s hermeneutical thought originates from his effort to develop a model of Qur’anic interpretation that is contextual and relevant to the needs of contemporary society. In constructing his ideas, he has been significantly influenced by several contemporary thinkers, including Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, H. G. Gadamer, and Amin Abdullah, all of whom regard hermeneutics as an approach capable of engaging in dialogue with the Islamic exegetical tradition (Setiawan, 2016, pp. 87–90).

According to Sahiron, hermeneutics and the science of tafsir share the same objective, namely, to facilitate a proper and profound understanding of the meaning of a text. This view is based on his understanding that, in terminological terms, hermeneutics is the art or theory of text interpretation and is therefore not fundamentally different from the concept of tafsir (Syamsuddin, 2017, p. 7). Consequently, he rejects the view that hermeneutics is incompatible with the Islamic exegetical tradition. In his opinion, both disciplines seek to understand texts and uncover the meanings they contain. Their difference lies primarily in their scope. Hermeneutics has a broader scope because it is employed to interpret various forms of texts, cultures, and human realities, whereas the science of tafsir is specifically concerned with the interpretation of the Qur’an.

Sahiron further explains that although hermeneutics developed within the tradition of Biblical interpretation, this does not necessarily make it foreign to Qur'anic studies. According to him, the Qur'an was communicated through human language and may therefore be examined using various scholarly approaches, including hermeneutics, provided that the fundamental principles of Islam are maintained (Syamsuddin, 2017, p. 8). Accordingly, hermeneutics should not be regarded as a substitute for classical exegetical methods, but rather as a methodological tool that can help address contemporary issues not fully accommodated by traditional approaches to tafsīr. In his study, he identifies several hermeneutical theories that demonstrate methodological compatibility with the Islamic scholarly tradition. This analysis leads him to conclude that the hermeneutical thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jorge J. E. Gracia has significant potential to contribute to the development of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān (Syamsuddin, 2017, p. 59).

In Schleiermacher's hermeneutical thought, Sahiron identifies several principles that are relevant to the tradition of Qur'anic interpretation. Schleiermacher's grammatical and psychological hermeneutics emphasize the importance of understanding the author's language, analyzing the linguistic structure of the text, and considering the relationship between the parts of the text and its entirety. According to Sahiron, these principles correspond with the linguistic interpretation approach within 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān. Therefore, Schleiermacher's thought can strengthen the methodological foundation for understanding the Qur'anic text accurately and systematically.

Meanwhile, from Gadamer's hermeneutical thought, Sahiron highlights the concepts of historical consciousness and pre-understanding. These two concepts demonstrate the importance of the interpreter's awareness of the historical background and assumptions that influence the process of understanding. In the context of Qur'anic interpretation, these concepts are in line with the principle of caution in comprehending the text. Furthermore, the theory of fusion of horizons is considered to have a connection with the study of the context surrounding the text. Meanwhile, the concept of application is considered relevant to the *ma'nā* and *maghzā*-based interpretive approach developed by Sahiron himself. The last figure considered to have an important contribution to the development of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān is Jorge J. E. Gracia. According to Sahiron, Gracia's hermeneutical theory can enrich Qur'anic studies at a more philosophical level, particularly in explaining the relationship between text, meaning, and interpreter. In addition, Gracia's thought provides a stronger foundation for developing the ethics of interpretation, so that interpretive activities are not only oriented toward methodological aspects but also toward the intellectual and moral responsibilities of the interpreter.

Sahiron's engagement with hermeneutical theories is not limited to demonstrating their compatibility with the Islamic exegetical tradition. His broader project is to translate selected hermeneutical insights into a systematic approach to Qur'anic interpretation while retaining the methodological resources of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān. This effort is most clearly manifested in his development of the *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach, which seeks to connect the historical meaning of the Qur'anic text with its significance for changing contexts. Thus, *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* can be understood not simply as a technique of contextual interpretation, but as a concrete expression of Sahiron's attempt to negotiate between inherited exegetical principles and modern hermeneutical concerns.

Ma'nā-cum-Maghzā as Sahiron Syamsuddin's Integrative Approach to Qur'anic Interpretation

As part of his effort to bridge the Islamic exegetical tradition with modern

hermeneutics, Sahiron Syamsuddin formulated an interpretive model known as *ma'nā-cum-maghzā*. This approach emerged from his awareness that Qur'anic interpretation should not be oriented solely toward the historical meaning of the text, but must also consider its relevance to continuously changing social realities. Therefore, the *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* theory seeks to combine the objective dimension of the text with the subjective role of the interpreter in the process of interpretation (Syamsuddin, 2017, pp. 139–140).

Etymologically, the term *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* consists of three elements. The word *ma'nā* originates from Arabic, means meaning, sense, or the intention contained within an expression. In linguistic studies, *ma'nā* refers to the meaning indicated by a particular word or text. Meanwhile, the word *cum* derives from Latin, means “with,” “together with,” or “accompanied by.” The term *maghzā* also originates from Arabic and is related to the meaning of purpose, message, or significance intended to be achieved. Terminologically, *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* is an interpretive approach that seeks to reveal the historical meaning (*ma'nā*) of a text while simultaneously capturing its main message or significance (*maghzā*) (Syamsuddin, 2022). The historical meaning is obtained through an understanding of the linguistic and social contexts in which the text emerged, whereas *maghzā* refers to the message that can be developed and actualized within different contexts. The *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach developed by Sahiron Syamsuddin was inspired by hermeneutical thought and shares similarities with Fazlur Rahman's theory of double movement, Muhammad Talbi's *tafsir maqāsidī*, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's historical hermeneutics, all of which emphasize the contextual understanding of Qur'anic verses (Iffah, Iwanebel, & Kholid, 2025, p. 356). Nevertheless, Sahiron's approach does not merely adopt the ideas of his predecessors but further develops them into a more systematic and applicable methodology. In Fazlur Rahman's theory of double movement, the main objective is to discover the moral ideal embedded within the Qur'anic text (Setiawan, 2016, p. 87), while Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd emphasizes the importance of exploring the *maghzā* or significance of the text (Setiawan, 2016, p. 90). Building upon these two perspectives, Sahiron Syamsuddin develops the concept of *maghzā* in greater detail by dividing it into two main categories: (1) phenomenal significance, which consists of historical phenomenal significance and dynamic phenomenal significance; and (2) ideal significance. Historical phenomenal significance refers to the meaning that emerged within the initial context of the text, while dynamic phenomenal significance refers to the relevance and actualization of meaning within continuously changing contexts. Meanwhile, ideal significance refers to the universal message that represents the primary objective of the text (Syamsuddin, 2022, p. 225).

Furthermore, Sahiron expands this approach by broadening its scope of application. While some previous approaches were more commonly applied to certain verses with social or legal dimensions, the *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach is designed to be applicable to all verses of the Qur'an (Iffah et al., 2025, p. 357). Thus, this approach does not merely seek to understand the historical meaning of the text but also aims to establish a more comprehensive relationship between the message of the Qur'an and contemporary realities.

The systematic steps of the *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach begin with the exploration of historical meaning (*ma'nā*) and phenomenal significance through several methodological stages formulated by Sahiron Syamsuddin. The first stage is linguistic analysis of the Qur'anic text by examining vocabulary, linguistic structures, and rhetorical styles according to the context of Arabic language during the period of revelation. The second stage is intratextual analysis, which involves comparing the interpreted verse

with other Qur'anic verses that contain similar themes or terms. The third stage is intertextual analysis by comparing the Qur'anic text with hadith, Arabic poetry, and other religious texts from the same historical period. The fourth stage involves examining the historical context of revelation, both at the micro and macro levels, in which *asbāb al-nuzūl* plays a significant role in revealing historical phenomenal significance. The final stage is identifying the main objective or core message of the verse (*maghzā al-āyah*), which becomes the basis for developing the meaning and relevance of the text within different contexts (Syamsuddin, 2022, pp. 232–235).

After explaining the exploration of historical meaning and historical phenomenal significance, the *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach proceeds to the construction of dynamic phenomenal significance (*al-maghzā al-mutaharrik*). This stage requires a dialogue between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the interpreter, so that meaning is not only understood historically but also contextualized within contemporary situations. To contextualize this dynamic significance, Sahiron proposes several steps: (1) categorizing verses based on their characteristics by referring to al-Zarkashi's classification (*tawhīd*, legal verses, and narratives) as well as Abdullah Saeed's hierarchy of values; (2) developing historical phenomenal significance so that it becomes relevant to contemporary contexts; (3) exploring the symbolic meanings of the Qur'an through the layers of meaning *zāhir*, *bāṭin*, *ḥadd*, and *maṭla'* and (4) employing interdisciplinary approaches, such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and other social sciences, in the process of interpretation (Syamsuddin, 2022, pp. 235–238).

Ma'nā-cum-maghzā demonstrates that Sahiron does not treat the Qur'anic text as either completely detached from historical context or reducible to contemporary interpretation. Instead, his approach establishes a layered relationship between historical meaning and contemporary significance. This position explains why he considers hermeneutics potentially compatible with *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*: hermeneutical concepts are legitimate insofar as they enhance contextual understanding without displacing the Qur'an's textual and religious authority.

Fahmi Salim and His Critical Thought on Hermeneutics

Fahmi Salim is one of the Indonesian Muslim scholars who graduated from Al-Azhar University, Cairo, in the field of *tafsir*, and who holds a deep concern for the study of the Qur'an and its exegesis. His thought on Qur'anic hermeneutics can be traced back to his master's studies at Al-Azhar University. His view of hermeneutics stems from a critical stance toward efforts to apply Western interpretive theories to Qur'anic exegesis (Salim, 2010, pp. xvi–xvii). In his view, the use of hermeneutics in Qur'anic studies requires thorough scrutiny, as it originates from an intellectual tradition distinct from the classical Islamic exegetical heritage. Before presenting his critique of hermeneutics, Fahmi Salim first compares the concept of *ta'wīl* in the Islamic scholarly tradition with the theory of hermeneutics (Salim, 2010, p. 1). This comparison is based on the fact that both seek to understand and uncover the meaning contained within a text. However, despite sharing a similar objective, Fahmi Salim argues that the two are founded upon different epistemological frameworks. These differences ultimately lead to contrasting conclusions regarding the source, authority, and limits of textual interpretation. It is from this point that Fahmi Salim develops his critique of hermeneutics, particularly with respect to its relevance to Qur'anic studies.

In his comparison between *ta'wīl* and hermeneutics, Fahmi Salim identifies several fundamental differences that, in his view, prevent the two from being regarded as equivalent. According to him, although both are concerned with understanding the

meaning of a text, ta'wīl in the Islamic tradition and Western hermeneutics are grounded in different epistemological foundations and therefore produce different interpretive orientations (Salim, 2010, pp. 76–77). *First*, the Islamic tradition of ta'wīl is founded upon the belief in the sacred and divine nature of the Qur'an as the revelation of God. Consequently, the Qur'anic text must be approached through a specific set of interpretive principles and ethical guidelines. By contrast, hermeneutics regards a text primarily as a linguistic phenomenon that does not inherently possess a sacred or divine dimension and therefore treats it in essentially the same manner as other texts.

Second, the Islamic tradition of ta'wīl recognizes various classifications of texts, such as *ẓāhir*, *naṣṣ*, *mufassar*, and *muḥkam*, each of which possesses its own characteristics and interpretive methods. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, does not recognize such classifications because all texts are generally situated within the same interpretive framework. *Third*, the Islamic tradition of ta'wīl is based on the assumption that a text possesses a stable meaning that can be discovered through established interpretive principles. Accordingly, ta'wīl is only undertaken when there are compelling and academically justifiable reasons for doing so. In contrast, modern hermeneutics shifts its emphasis from the search for meaning to the process of understanding, thereby allowing for multiple interpretations and treating meaning as something that is not necessarily fixed or final.

Fourth, ta'wīl in the Islamic tradition is grounded in a set of binding religious norms and principles, including belief in divine revelation, the authority of the Shari'ah, and the principles of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān. Hermeneutics, by contrast, is not founded upon a particular religious-normative framework but instead places greater emphasis on the methodological and philosophical dimensions of textual interpretation. On the basis of these differences, Fahmi Salim concludes that hermeneutics cannot be equated with the concept of ta'wīl in the Islamic tradition, even though both operate within the domain of textual interpretation.

In addition to highlighting the epistemological differences between ta'wīl and hermeneutics, Fahmi Salim also associates the emergence of hermeneutics with broader problems within the Western humanities tradition. According to him, the development of the modern humanities in the West has been characterized by speculative and relativistic tendencies, which have given rise to continuing debates concerning truth, meaning, and the authority of knowledge. In his view, these intellectual conditions have significantly influenced the development of hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation (Salim, 2010, pp. 489–491). Fahmi Salim also argues that one of the fundamental problems within the Western intellectual tradition is the emergence of tendencies toward syncretism and eclecticism, namely the incorporation of various philosophical ideas originating from different intellectual backgrounds into a single theoretical framework. As a consequence, the methodological boundaries between one discipline and another become increasingly blurred. According to him, this condition has caused certain theories within the humanities, including hermeneutics, to lack the solid epistemological foundation found in the Islamic scholarly tradition (Salim, 2010, pp. 486–487).

Fahmi Salim further explains that the Islamic tradition has already developed a well-established theory of interpretation through the rich scholarly heritage transmitted by classical Muslim scholars. Consequently, he considers the application of hermeneutics to Qur'anic interpretation to be unnecessary. In his view, hermeneutics is fundamentally a theory of understanding that emerged from the Western traditions of philosophy

and Biblical interpretation, and therefore possesses historical, epistemological, and civilizational foundations that differ from those of the Islamic exegetical tradition. For this reason, he argues that its application to the Qur'an is not appropriate because of these fundamental epistemological differences, particularly with regard to the unique nature of divine revelation and the interpretive methodology that has been developed within the discipline of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān (Salim, 2010, p. 77).

Intellectual Contexts of Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin's Approaches to Qur'anic Hermeneutics

The contrasting positions of Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin on Qur'anic hermeneutics can be situated within different intellectual contexts and trajectories. From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, scholarly ideas develop within particular academic environments, intellectual networks, educational experiences, and traditions of knowledge (Mannheim, 1936, p. 239). Such contexts do not necessarily determine a scholar's position, but they provide intellectual resources and frameworks through which particular questions, methods, and sources of authority are evaluated. Examining the intellectual contexts of Salim and Syamsuddin therefore helps clarify the different ways in which they negotiate the relationship between the inherited Islamic exegetical tradition and modern interpretive methodologies.

Fahmi Salim's critical position toward hermeneutics can be contextualized within his academic formation at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and his engagement with the classical Islamic tradition of Qur'anic scholarship. During the period of his study, *al-Dakhīl fī al-Tafsīr* constituted an important field of exegetical criticism concerned with identifying interpretive elements regarded as inconsistent with the principles of Islamic scholarship. Ibrahim Khalifah was among the scholars associated with the development of this field (Razi, 2024, p. 152) and, according to the available biographical account, was also among the lecturers who taught Fahmi Salim at Al-Azhar. Rather than establishing a direct causal relationship between this academic environment and Salim's rejection of hermeneutics, this context is relevant because it corresponds with the critical concern evident in his own writings regarding the introduction of external epistemological frameworks into Qur'anic interpretation.

Salim's writings also demonstrate a strong commitment to the authority of the established Islamic exegetical tradition. He regards *tafsīr*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and the sciences of the Qur'an ('*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*) as methodological resources developed within the Islamic scholarly heritage and capable of providing principles for addressing interpretive questions (Maimun, 2015, pp. 250–252). His critique of hermeneutics is therefore not limited to its Western intellectual origins. More fundamentally, he questions whether an interpretive framework developed within a different epistemological tradition can be legitimately applied to the Qur'an without altering the foundations of Islamic interpretation. This orientation provides an important contextual basis for understanding Salim's emphasis on epistemological continuity and methodological boundaries, which becomes more apparent in his comparison between hermeneutics and the Islamic tradition of *ta'wīl*.

In contrast, Sahiron Syamsuddin's intellectual trajectory is characterized by sustained engagement with modern scholarship in hermeneutics, philosophy, and Qur'anic studies. His engagement with Western hermeneutical scholarship provided intellectual resources for reconsidering the relationship between modern theories of interpretation and the Islamic exegetical tradition (Alwi HS, 2021). Rather than treating the Western origin of hermeneutics as sufficient grounds for its rejection, Syamsuddin

evaluates particular hermeneutical theories in terms of their methodological compatibility with Qur'anic studies. His approach therefore reflects an orientation toward critical engagement and selective integration rather than unqualified adoption of Western hermeneutics.

Syamsuddin's intellectual orientation has also been informed by contemporary Muslim thinkers who developed contextual approaches to Qur'anic interpretation, particularly Fazlur Rahman and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (Syamsuddin, 2022, p. 222). In the Indonesian context, the integrative-interconnected paradigm associated with Amin Abdullah likewise constitutes an important intellectual reference in Syamsuddin's methodological framework (Syamsuddin, 2022, p. 229). His engagement with these thinkers, however, does not result in the wholesale adoption of their respective approaches. Instead, Syamsuddin selectively incorporates their insights while retaining established interpretive resources from the Islamic tradition, including Arabic linguistic analysis, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *munāsabah*, and other disciplines within *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*. This combination of inherited exegetical resources and selected modern hermeneutical insights provides the intellectual context for the development of his *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach.

Taken together, the intellectual contexts of Salim and Syamsuddin reveal two different modes of negotiating the encounter between the Islamic exegetical heritage and modern interpretive thought. Salim's intellectual orientation places greater emphasis on preserving the epistemological continuity and normative boundaries of the inherited exegetical tradition, whereas Syamsuddin's orientation allows for a critical dialogue between that tradition and selected resources from modern hermeneutics. These orientations should not be understood as the direct products of their educational backgrounds alone. Rather, their respective intellectual trajectories provide a context for understanding why the two scholars assign different degrees of legitimacy to external interpretive frameworks. The significance of this divergence becomes clearer when their positions are compared in terms of the epistemological criteria by which they determine textual authority, contextualization, and the limits of interpretation.

A Comparative Analysis of Fahmi Salim's and Sahiron Syamsuddin's Perspectives on Qur'anic Hermeneutics

The preceding discussion has shown that the contrasting positions of Fahmi Salim and Sahiron Syamsuddin are situated within different intellectual contexts and trajectories. Building on this contextual foundation, this section moves from the reconstruction of their respective positions to a systematic comparison of the epistemological assumptions underlying them. The comparison focuses on three interconnected dimensions: the legitimacy and role of hermeneutics, the relationship between the Qur'anic text and its historical and contemporary contexts, and the limits of interpretive plurality.

Viewed from these dimensions, the disagreement between Salim and Syamsuddin extends beyond a simple opposition between the rejection and acceptance of hermeneutics. Both scholars recognize the importance of methodological rigor and the Islamic exegetical tradition, but they differ in how they determine the conditions under which external interpretive frameworks may legitimately engage with that tradition. Salim prioritizes the preservation of the epistemological boundaries established within the Islamic exegetical tradition, whereas Syamsuddin allows for a selective integration of hermeneutical insights insofar as they can be brought into dialogue with those foundations. Their divergence can therefore be understood as a broader epistemological

disagreement over the sources, conditions, and boundaries of interpretive authority in contemporary Qur'anic studies.

1. *Methodological Legitimacy: Integration versus Epistemological Continuity*

At the level of methodological legitimacy, Sahiron Syamsuddin and Fahmi Salim adopt substantially different criteria for assessing the relevance of hermeneutics to Qur'anic interpretation. Sahiron does not regard the Western origin of hermeneutics as sufficient grounds for its rejection. Instead, he evaluates hermeneutical theories according to their methodological compatibility with the principles of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* and their potential contribution to understanding the Qur'anic text. This position allows him to selectively appropriate elements of hermeneutical theories while retaining the foundational resources of the Islamic exegetical tradition. His development of *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* illustrates this strategy: hermeneutical insights are incorporated insofar as they can facilitate contextual understanding without displacing the Qur'an's textual and religious authority.

Fahmi Salim, by contrast, establishes a more restrictive criterion of methodological legitimacy. For him, the similarity between *ta'wīl* and hermeneutics at the level of their general objective—namely, understanding textual meaning—does not establish their epistemological equivalence. As discussed in his comparison between *ta'wīl* and hermeneutics, the two operate within different conceptions of textual authority, revelation, and the permissible limits of interpretation (Salim, 2010, pp. 76–77). Consequently, a method cannot be considered legitimate for Qur'anic interpretation merely because it offers useful interpretive techniques; it must also be compatible with the epistemological foundations of the Islamic exegetical tradition.

The difference between the two scholars therefore concerns the criteria by which an external interpretive method becomes legitimate. Sahiron adopts a criterion of critical compatibility: an intellectual resource may be incorporated when it can be critically adapted to the principles of Qur'anic scholarship. Fahmi, in contrast, places greater emphasis on epistemological continuity: the legitimacy of interpretation is primarily secured through its grounding in the established intellectual and methodological framework of the Islamic tradition. Their disagreement over hermeneutics is thus not simply a disagreement over whether a particular method is useful, but over what makes a method legitimate in the first place.

2. *Text, Context, and the Construction of Meaning*

This difference in methodological legitimacy is closely related to their respective conceptions of the relationship between the Qur'anic text and its context. Sahiron's *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach establishes a layered relationship between historical meaning and contemporary significance. The *ma'nā* refers to the historical meaning of the text as understood through linguistic, intertextual, and historical analysis, while *maghzā* concerns the significance that can be developed from that historical meaning for changing contexts (Syamsuddin, 2022, pp. 225, 232–238). The approach therefore does not treat contextualization as an external addition to interpretation. Rather, engagement with historical and contemporary contexts forms an integral part of the process through which the Qur'anic message is understood and actualized.

Fahmi Salim approaches the relationship between text and context from a different epistemological starting point. His distinction between *ta'wīl* and hermeneutics emphasizes that Qur'anic interpretation must remain governed by the nature of the Qur'an as divine revelation and by the methodological principles developed within the Islamic scholarly tradition. The existence of contextual factors does not, in his view,

justify treating Qur'anic meaning as open to unrestricted reconstruction. Interpretation remains subject to established principles, including reliable textual and rational evidence and the broader normative framework of Islamic scholarship. Thus, whereas Sahiron gives methodological space to the interaction between historical meaning and contemporary context, Fahmi places greater emphasis on the normative constraints that regulate such contextualization.

The divergence can therefore be understood as a difference in their conceptions of how context participates in the production and application of Qur'anic meaning. For Sahiron, context is constitutive of interpretation because the historical meaning of the text must be brought into dialogue with changing circumstances in order for its significance to be actualized. For Fahmi, context may inform interpretation, but it cannot become an independent source for redefining meanings that are constrained by revelation and established interpretive principles. The distinction is consequently not between a scholar who considers context and one who ignores it, but between different understandings of the epistemic authority assigned to context in the interpretive process.

3. *Interpretive Plurality and the Limits of Interpretation*

The epistemological divergence also becomes apparent in their respective responses to the plurality or relativity of Qur'anic interpretation. Sahiron Syamsuddin acknowledges the possibility of diverse interpretations by emphasizing the interaction between the text, its context, and the interpreter. Because interpretation takes place within particular historical and intellectual circumstances, different interpreters may arrive at different understandings of a text. For Sahiron, recognizing this possibility can serve an ethical function by encouraging intellectual openness and discouraging the uncritical assertion that a single interpretation necessarily constitutes the only legitimate understanding of the Qur'an.

Fahmi Salim, however, regards the broad application of interpretive relativism as problematic. His epistemological framework distinguishes between meanings that are definitive (*qaṭ'ī*) and those that remain open to interpretation, while grounding legitimate interpretation in the Qur'an, Sunnah, *ijmā'*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and established principles of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. From this perspective, interpretive plurality cannot be treated as unlimited because doing so risks obscuring the distinction between methodologically defensible interpretation and interpretations that conflict with established religious principles. His concern is therefore not simply with the existence of interpretive diversity, but with the epistemological criteria required to distinguish legitimate plurality from unacceptable relativization.

The disagreement thus reveals different conceptions of the epistemic limits of interpretive plurality. Sahiron places greater emphasis on the situated character of interpretation and consequently allows greater space for legitimate variation in understanding. Fahmi, by contrast, emphasizes the normative and epistemological constraints that establish boundaries within which interpretive diversity may legitimately operate. Their positions therefore raise a broader question for contemporary Qur'anic studies: how can interpretive openness be maintained without dissolving the criteria by which interpretations are judged as legitimate or illegitimate?

4. *Convergence and the Nature of Their Disagreement*

Despite these differences, the two scholars share several important commitments. Both regard the classical Islamic scholarly tradition as an essential foundation for understanding the Qur'an, and both emphasize the importance of methodological

discipline in the interpretive process. Neither scholar advocates the uncritical adoption of Western hermeneutics. Sahiron subjects hermeneutical theories to critical selection and seeks to integrate only those elements that he considers compatible with *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, while Fahmi rejects hermeneutics because he considers its underlying epistemological assumptions incompatible with the Islamic exegetical framework. Their disagreement, therefore, does not arise from fundamentally different commitments to scholarly rigor or from a simple opposition between tradition and modernity.

Rather, their disagreement concerns how the Islamic exegetical tradition should engage with intellectual resources developed outside its historical boundaries. Sahiron approaches the encounter through critical integration: the inherited tradition remains foundational, but its methodological resources may enter into dialogue with selected concepts from modern hermeneutics. Fahmi approaches the same encounter through epistemological protection: the established tradition must remain the primary framework for determining the validity of interpretive methods, particularly when external theories are grounded in different conceptions of revelation, text, and meaning. Their shared commitment to the Islamic tradition therefore produces different methodological strategies rather than eliminating their disagreement.

5. *Broader Implications for Contemporary Qur'anic Interpretation in Indonesia*

The comparison of Salim and Syamsuddin suggests that the contemporary debate over Qur'anic hermeneutics in Indonesia cannot be adequately reduced to a binary opposition between scholars who "accept" hermeneutics and those who "reject" it. At a deeper level, the debate concerns competing conceptions of interpretive authority, methodological legitimacy, the role of context, and the permissible extent of interpretive plurality. Hermeneutics becomes controversial not merely because of its Western intellectual genealogy, but because its underlying assumptions may challenge established answers to these questions.

From this perspective, Syamsuddin and Salim illuminate two different ways of negotiating the boundary between inherited exegetical knowledge and modern interpretive theory. Syamsuddin's position demonstrates an integrative orientation, in which external hermeneutical concepts can become legitimate components of Qur'anic interpretation through critical adaptation and methodological incorporation. Salim's position reflects a continuity-oriented critical stance, in which methodological legitimacy depends more fundamentally on continuity with the epistemological and normative foundations of the Islamic exegetical tradition. Neither position simply represents openness or closure toward modernity; rather, they embody different strategies for preserving the authority of the Qur'anic text while responding to changing intellectual conditions.

The significance of their disagreement therefore lies not in determining whether hermeneutics is intrinsically valid or invalid for Qur'anic interpretation. More importantly, their contrasting positions reveal that the boundaries of contemporary tafsīr are being negotiated around competing answers to a fundamental epistemological question: to what extent can new interpretive resources be incorporated without altering the sources, criteria, and limits through which Qur'anic meaning is regarded as authoritative? The debate between Salim and Syamsuddin consequently illustrates a broader transformation within contemporary Indonesian Qur'anic studies, in which the encounter between the Islamic exegetical heritage and modern hermeneutical theory is simultaneously a debate over methodological innovation, textual authority, and the boundaries of legitimate interpretation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the contrasting positions of Sahiron Syamsuddin and Fahmi Salim on Qur'anic hermeneutics reflect two distinct epistemological orientations toward the relationship between the Islamic exegetical tradition and modern interpretive approaches. Syamsuddin adopts an adaptive-integrative orientation, viewing hermeneutics as a methodological resource that can be critically integrated with *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, particularly through his *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach. Fahmi Salim, by contrast, adopts a critical-protective orientation, questioning the legitimacy and necessity of hermeneutics on the grounds of its distinct epistemological foundations. Rather than constituting a simple debate over the acceptance or rejection of hermeneutics, their divergence fundamentally concerns the sources of interpretive authority, the relationship between text and context, and the limits of interpretive plurality. Crucially, despite their divergent positions, both scholars affirm the necessity of methodological rigor and fidelity to the Islamic exegetical tradition. Their positions thus illuminate a broader tension within contemporary Indonesian Qur'anic studies between preserving epistemological continuity with the inherited tradition and expanding its methodological boundaries through engagement with modern thought. By reconstructing the debate in terms of underlying epistemological criteria, this study moves beyond a binary classification of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia. While this analysis is limited to the published works and documented intellectual trajectories of these two figures, it offers a basis for understanding how authority and methodology are negotiated within contemporary Indonesian Qur'anic studies. Future research could extend this comparative lens to other contemporary Muslim scholars or investigate how these competing epistemological orientations are translated into concrete exegetical applications to pressing contemporary social issues.

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