

The Authority of Revelation and The Contextualization of Qur'ānic Interpretation: The Hermeneutical Contestation Between Fahrudin Faiz and Adian Husaini



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Abstract: This article examines the epistemological contestation over the legitimacy of hermeneutics in Qur'ānic interpretation through a critical comparison of Fahrudin Faiz and Adian Husaini. Previous studies have commonly framed the debate through a binary of acceptance and rejection, without sufficiently distinguishing the ontological status of revelation, theories of meaning, the role of the interpreter, the function of context, the authority of tradition, and the limits of interpretive plurality. This qualitative library study employs a comparative-textual design. Its primary corpus consists of Faiz's and Husaini's works that directly address hermeneutics and Qur'ānic interpretation, while secondary sources include philosophical hermeneutics, Qur'ānic methodology, and scholarship published in national and internationally reputable journals. The analysis applies six symmetrical epistemological dimensions and tests the internal consistency of each argument. The study finds that Faiz develops an adaptive-dialogical orientation in which text, context, and contextualization interact productively, whereas Husaini advances a critical-protective orientation emphasizing the revelatory status of the Qur'ān, the determinacy of certain meanings, and the discipline of the exegetical tradition. Both reject undisciplined interpretation and recognize the need to relate scripture to lived reality, yet they differ over the legitimacy of Western hermeneutical theories, the productive role of readers, and the scope of interpretive plurality. The article proposes limited methodological complementarity: selected hermeneutical tools may be employed at the level of the historicity of interpretation, provided that they remain constrained by philological analysis, Qur'ānic textual structure, the exegetical tradition, a hierarchy of semantic certainty, and intersubjective procedures of validation.

Keywords: Qur'ānic interpretation; Fahrudin Faiz; Adian Husaini; authority of revelation; contextualization

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji kontestasi epistemologis mengenai legitimasi hermeneutika dalam tafsir al-Qur'ān melalui perbandingan kritis pemikiran Fahrudin Faiz dan Adian Husaini. Kajian terdahulu umumnya memetakan perdebatan hermeneutika dalam dikotomi penerimaan dan penolakan, tetapi belum cukup membedakan antara status ontologis wahyu, teori makna, posisi penafsir, fungsi konteks, otoritas tradisi, dan batas pluralitas interpretasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan studi kepustakaan kualitatif dengan desain komparatif-tekstual. Korpus primer terdiri atas karya-karya Faiz dan Husaini yang secara langsung membahas hermeneutika dan tafsir, sedangkan sumber sekunder mencakup literatur hermeneutika filosofis, metodologi tafsir, dan artikel pada jurnal nasional serta jurnal internasional bereputasi. Analisis dilakukan melalui enam dimensi epistemologis dan dilengkapi uji konsistensi argumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Faiz mengembangkan orientasi adaptif-dialogis yang menempatkan teks, konteks, dan kontekstualisasi dalam hubungan produktif, sedangkan Husaini mengembangkan orientasi kritis-protektif yang menekankan status wahyu, kepastian makna tertentu, dan disiplin tradisi tafsir. Keduanya berkonvergensi pada penolakan terhadap interpretasi tanpa kompetensi dan pada kebutuhan menjaga hubungan antara teks dan realitas, tetapi berbeda dalam legitimasi teori hermeneutika Barat, keluasan produktivitas pembaca, dan batas pluralitas makna. Artikel ini menawarkan konsep komplementaritas metodologis terbatas: perangkat hermeneutis dapat digunakan secara selektif pada wilayah historisitas penafsiran, selama dibatasi oleh analisis filologis, struktur internal al-Qur'ān, tradisi tafsir, hierarki kepastian makna, dan mekanisme validasi intersubjektif.

Kata Kunci: hermeneutika; tafsir al-Qur'ān; Fahrudin Faiz; Adian Husaini; otoritas wahyu; kontekstualisasi.

Introduction

The debate over hermeneutics in Qur'ānic studies in Indonesia can no longer be adequately mapped merely as a confrontation between groups that “accept the West” and those that “reject the West.” Such polarization has indeed appeared in the history of Indonesian academic discourse, but it oversimplifies what is in fact a multilayered problem: is the issue the origins of hermeneutics, its theory of knowledge, its view of language, the position of the reader, or its implications for the status of revelation? Reflita shows that the controversy revolves around the compatibility of hermeneutics with the methodological apparatus of Islamic *tafsīr*, while Izza Rohman notes that the Indonesian debate is closely related to projects of methodological renewal in interpretation and to the limits of legitimate contextualization. Accordingly, the focus of research should not stop at the question of whether hermeneutics is “permissible or impermissible,” but should move toward more analytical questions: which elements of hermeneutics are accepted or rejected, for what reasons, and according to what epistemological parameters are such judgments made?¹

The complexity increases because “hermeneutics” is not a single theory. Schleiermacher developed hermeneutics as the art of understanding discourse through grammatical and psychological dimensions; Gadamer shifted it toward an ontological register by emphasizing the historicity of understanding and the encounter of horizons; Ricoeur elaborated the relationship among distanciation, appropriation, and the surplus of meaning; while critical hermeneutics attends to the relationship between meaning and power. In religious studies, these different traditions generate different consequences. Victoria Harrison shows that modern hermeneutics shifts the question from whether religious language is meaningful to how meaning emerges through the creative interaction between text and reader, a shift that later influenced Muslim thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Farid Esack, and Mohammed Arkoun. Therefore, both wholesale criticism of “hermeneutics” and its unqualified acceptance risk excessive generalization.²

Within the Islamic tradition itself, interpretation of the Qur'ān has never proceeded without methodological instruments. Arabic language, *qirā'āt*, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *munāsabah*, *nāsikh-mansūkh*, *'amm-khāṣṣ*, *muṭlaq-muqayyad*, the concept of *maqāṣid*, and debates over *ta'wīl* demonstrate that the relationship between text and context is not an exclusive discovery of modernity. Komaruddin Hidayat further stresses that the hermeneutical problem of religious language arises whenever readers confront historical distance, linguistic difference, and differing psychological conditions. The real issue is not whether context exists, but how much weight it should carry, how it is constrained by textual structure, and how the validity of interpretive results is tested. At this point, the hermeneutics debate can be moved from identity polemics toward a more productive methodological discussion.³

The debate must also be situated within the development of modern contextual Qur'ānic interpretation. Fazlur Rahman formulated a double movement from the contemporary situation to the context of revelation and back again to the present; within this framework, historical context is not intended to relativize revelation, but to extract moral objectives that transcend particular cases. Abdullah Saeed subsequently expanded this framework by emphasizing the complexity of meaning, sociohistorical context, and a hierarchy of values in ethico-legal verses. Contemporary scholarship shows that contextualization can be developed without eliminating the normative authority of the

¹ Reflita, “Kontroversi Hermeneutika sebagai Manhaj Tafsir: Menimbang Penggunaan Hermeneutika dalam Penafsiran al-Qur'an,” *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 24, no. 2 (2016): 136–140; Izza Rohman, “New Approaches in Interpreting the Quran in Contemporary Indonesia,” *Studia Islamika* 14, no. 2 (2007): 235–243.

² Victoria S. Harrison, “Hermeneutics, Religious Language and the Qur'an,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, no. 3 (2010): 207–214.

³ Komaruddin Hidayat, “Hermeneutical Problems of Religious Language,” *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2000): 1–6.

Qur'ān. The central problem is to determine the boundary between the actualization of values and readings that detach themselves from linguistic evidence and the interpretive tradition.⁴

Within the Indonesian arena, Fahrudin Faiz and Adian Husaini are particularly instructive for comparison because they represent two different structures of argument rather than merely two ideological labels. Faiz maps hermeneutics as a plural tradition and emphasizes that understanding occurs through the relationship among text, context, and contextualization. He does not treat hermeneutics as an automatic substitute for 'ulūm al-Qur'ān, but rather as a reflective instrument for recognizing the historicity of understanding. Husaini, by contrast, focuses his criticism on specific epistemological consequences: interpretive relativism, changes in the concept of revelation, the generalization of theories originating in the problematic history of Biblical texts, and the potential deconstruction of meanings that possess normative certainty. His critique therefore should not be simplified as "anti-context," although in several places he tends to treat diverse schools of hermeneutics too uniformly.⁵

Previous comparative studies provide an important foundation while also revealing a space that remains open. Sahiron Syamsuddin, for example, compares M. Quraish Shihab's acceptance and Muḥammad 'Imārah's rejection of Western hermeneutics and argues that rejecting a theory merely on the basis of its origins is insufficient; the theory must be tested at the level of its concepts and usefulness. Wardani, through the concept of critical traditionalism, demonstrates that thinkers who preserve traditional sources can still rationalize and critically engage Western approaches without having to choose between total rejection and total acceptance. Nevertheless, few studies have compared Faiz and Husaini symmetrically through the same analytical categories and then separated areas of convergence from epistemological differences that are genuinely irreducible.⁶

On the basis of this gap, the study poses three questions. First, how do Faiz and Husaini construct their assumptions regarding the status of revelation, theories of meaning, the position of the interpreter, the text-context relationship, the authority of tradition, and interpretive plurality? Second, along which dimensions do they converge, and along which dimensions are their differences irreducible? Third, is it possible to formulate a model for using hermeneutics that neither eliminates Husaini's protective critique nor closes off the analytical potential emphasized by Faiz? The contribution of this study lies in two respects: shifting the debate from a pro-versus-contra dichotomy to a symmetrical epistemological comparison, and proposing a model of "limited methodological complementarity" with testable parameters rather than merely issuing a normative call to take a middle position.

Method

This study is a qualitative library-based inquiry using a comparative-textual design. The units of analysis are not the personalities, organizational affiliations, or social reputations of the two figures, but the methodological propositions they advance regarding hermeneutics and Qur'ānic interpretation. Faiz's primary corpus includes *Hermeneutika Qur'āni: Antara Teks, Konteks dan Kontekstualisasi*, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'ān: Tema-Tema Kontroversial*, the article "Hermeneutika Modern dan

⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5–8; Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006), 116–125.

⁵ Fahrudin Faiz, "Hermeneutika Modern dan Implikasinya terhadap Islamic-Studies," *Refleksi: Jurnal Filsafat dan Pemikiran Islam* 18, no. 1 (2018): 4–6; Adian Husaini and Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi, *Hermeneutika & Tafsir Al-Qur'ān* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2007), 17–20.

⁶ Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Differing Responses to Western Hermeneutics: A Comparative Critical Study of M. Quraish Shihab's and Muḥammad 'Imārah's Thoughts," *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 59, no. 2 (2021): 479–486; Wardani, "Different Faces of Critical Traditionalism in Approaching the Quran in Contemporary Indonesia," *Kemanusiaan The Asian Journal of Humanities* 29, no. 2 (2022): 49–55.

Implikasinya terhadap Islamic-Studies,” and a coauthored work explaining the theory, criticism, and implementation of hermeneutics. These works were selected because of their direct relevance to the research theme. Husaini’s corpus includes *Hermeneutika & Tafsir al-Qur’ān* and *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat dalam Studi Islam di Perguruan Tinggi*, especially the sections dealing with interpretive relativism, the concept of revelation, the history of hermeneutics, and criticism of its use in Islamic studies.⁷

Secondary sources were selected for three functions. First, literature on philosophical hermeneutics was used to examine whether Faiz’s and Husaini’s reconstructions of Western theories are sufficiently accurate. Second, literature on tafsīr methodology and Muslim hermeneutics was used to situate both thinkers within broader developments. Third, journal articles discussing hermeneutical discourse in Indonesia were used to test the representativeness of their arguments. In this third category, the study deliberately includes articles from *Studia Islamika*, *Al-Jāmi‘ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, *Kemanusiaan The Asian Journal of Humanities*, and *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, so that the local debate is not read in isolation from international academic discourse.⁸

The analysis proceeds through six dimensions applied symmetrically to both thinkers: (1) the ontological status of the Qur’ān as revelation; (2) theories of meaning and the degree of textual determinacy; (3) the relationship among the text, the context of revelation, and the reader’s context; (4) the position and competence of the interpreter; (5) the authority of the tafsīr tradition and the possible use of external theories; and (6) interpretive plurality and the risk of relativism. Each dimension is analyzed in three stages. The first stage reconstructs the explicit statements of each thinker. The second tests the internal consistency of the argument. The third compares it with the literature of hermeneutics and Qur’ānic studies. This model avoids two errors: criticizing a thinker for a position he never articulated, and forcing two thinkers into categories that are not symmetrical from the outset.

Interpretive validation in this study follows the principle of intersubjective argumentation. Ricoeur rejects the assumption that the existence of many interpretations means that all interpretations are equally valid; interpretations can still be debated, compared, and assessed according to the strength of their arguments. In the context of tafsīr, this principle is combined with attention to competence, linguistic evidence, intratextual coherence, reception history, historical context, and openness to criticism. Khaled Abou El Fadl’s distinction between the authoritative and the authoritarian is also employed as an evaluative device: interpretive authority does not arise merely from claims made in God’s name, but from competence, diligence, honesty, self-restraint, and proportionality in the process of determining meaning.⁹

Results and Discussion

Qur’ānic Hermeneutics as an Arena of Epistemological Contestation

The term hermeneutics must first be disentangled from overly elastic usage. In a minimal sense, hermeneutics refers to systematic reflection on how understanding and interpretation are possible. In modern intellectual history, Schleiermacher sought to formulate a general hermeneutics not limited to sacred scripture; he connected grammatical understanding with the reconstruction of the speaker’s individuality, so that meaning is grasped through the relationship between part and whole.

⁷ Fahrudin Faiz, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur’ān: Tema-Tema Kontroversial* (Yogyakarta: Kalimedia, 2015), 9–13; Husaini and al-Baghdadi, *Hermeneutika & Tafsir Al-Qur’ān*, 20–31.

⁸ Rohman, “New Approaches,” 203–210; Syamsuddin, “Differing Responses,” 479–486.

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 79–87; Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 92–115.

Later developments shifted this emphasis. Gadamer no longer treated understanding primarily as a technical procedure for reconstructing authorial intention, but as a historical event in which the horizons of text and reader interact. The “fusion of horizons” does not mean that readers are free to impose their will upon the text; rather, it recognizes that every reading occurs from within a historical situation and that this situation must be brought into confrontation with the claims of the text.¹⁰

Ricoeur helps to avoid two extremes that often appear in Qur'ānic polemics: the absolutization of authorial intention and the absolutization of the reader. Once discourse becomes text, it is distanced from its original situation, but this distanciation does not abolish reference or make meaning limitless. The text opens a “world” that the reader can inhabit, while interpretation remains subject to argumentation, semantic structure, and inter-reader testing. This framework is important because some critics of hermeneutics equate the productivity of meaning with total relativism, while some proponents occasionally invoke the historicity of the reader to legitimize an expansion of meaning without criteria. Philosophical hermeneutics becomes useful precisely when it is treated as a theory of the conditions of understanding rather than as a license for arbitrary interpretation.¹¹

When brought into Qur'ānic studies, the issue becomes more complex because Muslims do not understand the text they read as an ordinary human product. The status of revelation changes the hermeneutical question. Whereas in literary texts the interpreter may discuss the intention of a human author, in the Qur'ān the relationship among God as the source of revelation, the Prophet as recipient and transmitter, the Arabic language, the context of revelation, and the receiving community must be formulated carefully. Komaruddin Hidayat shows that dialogue between text and reader remains possible without eliminating the transcendent dimension; the problem lies in how divine language enters history and how historically distant readers can enter into conversation with the text. Qur'ānic hermeneutics, therefore, cannot simply copy models for interpreting secular texts, but neither can it deny the fact that revelation is understood through language, history, and human capacities.¹²

Within contemporary Muslim thought, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd presents one of the more radical formulations of this problem. He criticizes ideological readings that foreclose the possibility of critique and emphasizes the need to distinguish historical meaning from significance that continues to be produced through the encounter between text and reality. Moch. Nur Ichwan shows that Abū Zayd's contribution is not merely the claim that the Qur'ān is a “cultural text,” but also an attempt to formulate criteria capable of distinguishing scholarly interpretation from ideological exploitation of the text. This point is relevant to the Faiz-Husaini debate: criticism of the ideologization of tafsīr can in fact be accepted by both sides, but they differ over the extent to which modern linguistic and historical categorizations may alter the epistemological apparatus of tafsīr.¹³

In Indonesia, M. Amin Abdullah has long proposed a circular relationship among epistemologies so that Islamic scholarly traditions do not become trapped in a linear pattern that treats one body of knowledge as final and closes itself to correction from other disciplines. His concept of *al-ta'wīl al-'ilmī* places *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and *'irfānī* approaches in a dialogical relationship rather than allowing them to negate one another. This development helps explain why hermeneutics has gained space in Islamic higher education: it is read as one instrument for reflecting on preunderstanding, historicity, and the text-context relationship. Yet the entry of hermeneutics into academic institutions

¹⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5–13; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 305–310.

¹¹ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 79–87.

¹² Hidayat, “Hermeneutical Problems,” 8–13.

¹³ Moch. Nur Ichwan, “Beyond Ideological Interpretation: Naṣr Abū Zayd's Theory of Qur'anic Hermeneutic,” *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2000): 20–30.

has also generated resistance because it is perceived as carrying assumptions about scripture that emerged from the historical problems of the Bible and Western philosophy.¹⁴

Izza Rohman shows that the Indonesian debate on hermeneutics revolves mainly around three issues: the position of hermeneutics in relation to Islam, its compatibility with the Qur'ān, and its significance for Qur'ānic studies. He also notes that polemical arguments often move away from substantive issues, for example by questioning an opponent's personal authority or judging ideological motives before testing the argument itself. This criticism is highly relevant to the present study. Both the acceptance and rejection of hermeneutics must be evaluated at the propositional level: does a theory contradict the status of revelation? Does it merely enrich historical analysis? Does the concept of semantic plurality eliminate the possibility of stronger meanings? Does the use of context negate literal meaning? Without such distinctions, the debate will continue to revolve around identity labels.¹⁵

Accordingly, the “arena of epistemological contestation” in this article is not understood as a war between tradition and modernity. What is contested is how to configure the relationship among five elements: the source of revelation, linguistic form, the original context, the interpretive tradition, and the contemporary reader. Faiz tends to expand the dialogue among these five elements, whereas Husaini constructs stricter boundaries so that the productivity of the reader does not displace the hierarchy of sources. The two positions can only be compared fairly if hermeneutics is not presupposed in advance either as a threat or as a solution. It must be disaggregated into particular tools and then tested for compatibility with tafsīr methodology at each level.

Fahrudin Faiz: An Adaptive-Dialogical Orientation

Fahrudin Faiz begins his discussion not by declaring that hermeneutics should replace *tafsīr*, but by mapping its diverse traditions. He distinguishes theoretical hermeneutics, which is oriented toward methods of attaining understanding; philosophical hermeneutics, which reflects on the conditions that make understanding possible; and critical hermeneutics, which investigates how power and historical determinations can shape interpretation. This distinction has important consequences. The term “hermeneutics” can no longer be treated as a single package of assumptions. Criticism of Gadamer, for example, does not automatically invalidate Schleiermacher's grammatical techniques; conversely, accepting contextual analysis does not require accepting every philosophical thesis about the productivity of meaning.¹⁶

At the operational level, Faiz attends to three horizons: author, text, and reader, while the interpretive process moves through text, context, and contextualization. In *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'ān: Tema-Tema Kontroversial*, he emphasizes that questions of grammatical form, lexical structure, the conditions under which a text emerges, and the reader's situation cannot be mechanically separated. In *Hermeneutika Qur'āni*, this pattern is used to read the dynamics of tafsīr as a process that does not stop at reproducing earlier commentaries but also involves the actualization of the message. Faiz's central emphasis, therefore, is not the relativization of revelation but the historicity of the activity of understanding. He distinguishes the sacred text from human interpretations of that text.¹⁷

The first strength of Faiz's position lies in his rejection of the assumption that a single human reading can simply be identified with God's intention. Hermeneutical awareness functions as a mechanism of epistemic humility: a mufassir must recognize that language, education, social position, political experience, and intellectual horizon all shape the questions brought to the text. Faiz explains

¹⁴ M. Amin Abdullah, “Al-Ta'wīl al-'Ilmī: Ke Arah Perubahan Paradigma Penafsiran Kitab Suci,” *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 39, no. 2 (2001): 359–370.

¹⁵ Rohman, “New Approaches,” 235–248.

¹⁶ Faiz, “Hermeneutika Modern,” 4–6.

¹⁷ Faiz, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'ān*, 9–13.

that plurality of understanding arises from plurality of contexts and that the history of religious thought displays multiple interpretive communities. Such awareness can prevent interpretive authoritarianism, especially when a particular sociohistorical opinion is elevated into the only legitimate form of Islam.¹⁸

Epistemic humility, however, is not equivalent to relativism. At this point, Faiz's position requires a more disciplined reading than the mere slogan that "everyone has a context." In his own article, he stresses the need for accurate and proportionate understanding and distinguishes theoretical hermeneutics from more philosophical forms of hermeneutics. Openness to context therefore still requires competence and procedure. What must be clarified is the hierarchy among linguistic evidence, historical context, Qur'ānic coherence, and the reader's horizon. If all these elements are merely invoked dialogically without rules of priority, the reader may turn "context" into a justification for shifting meaning toward a conclusion already desired in advance.¹⁹

A second strength is Faiz's ability to relate hermeneutics to the tafsīr tradition without identifying the two. He notes that Muslim scholars have long attended to *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *nāsikh-mansūkh*, schools of tafsīr, and differences in intellectual horizons. The point is not that classical scholars "already used Gadamer," but that the problem of the relationship between text and context is not foreign to Islam. This reading is more productive than a simple genealogical claim. A theory may arise from a different intellectual history yet address overlapping questions; at the same time, similarity of problems does not mean that all theoretical answers can be transferred without criticism.²⁰

A third strength is attention to the social effects of meaning-making. In Faiz's reading, critical hermeneutics asks who controls interpretive authority, how particular readings produce alienation or discrimination, and whether a tafsīr silences the possibility of critique. In the digital context, these questions become even more relevant. Fadhli Lukman shows that social media has altered the ecology of tafsīr: access to Qur'ānic commentary has become more egalitarian and popular, yet democratized participation simultaneously challenges older forms of authority. Faiz's framework provides reflective tools for reading this transformation, but it also requires new criteria of authority so that democratization does not become fragmentation without standards.²¹

It is precisely here that the critique of Faiz needs to be sharpened. First, the claim that the text at a certain level "becomes the reader's" can be misunderstood if detached from linguistic discipline and tradition. Second, not all forms of plurality carry equal weight: interpretive differences arising from linguistic ambiguity differ from readings that contradict established lexical evidence. Third, the historicity of tafsīr does not automatically render every Qur'ānic proposition relative. Abdullah Saeed distinguishes the complexity of meaning from the need to preserve fundamental values and proposes a hierarchy of values to constrain contextualization. Faiz's orientation therefore becomes stronger when combined with a validation mechanism that distinguishes the "productivity of meaning" from "freedom of meaning."²²

Overall, Faiz's orientation may be described as adaptive-dialogical. Adaptive means that he accepts the use of new theories after considering their problem-solving value; dialogical means that meaning is understood through the encounter among text, original context, interpretive tradition, and the reader's horizon. This label is more precise than "progressive," because Faiz does not call for a rupture with tradition. Yet this orientation requires a more explicit normative layer: what may not be

¹⁸ Fahrudin Faiz, *Hermeneutika Qur'āni: Antara Teks, Konteks dan Kontekstualisasi* (Yogyakarta: Qalam, 2003), 20–24.

¹⁹ Faiz, "Hermeneutika Modern," 7–10.

²⁰ Faiz, "Hermeneutika Modern," 7–9.

²¹ Faiz, "Hermeneutika Modern," 12–15; Fadhli Lukman, "Digital Hermeneutics and A New Face of the Qur'an Commentary: The Qur'an in Indonesian's Facebook," *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 56, no. 1 (2018): 95–105.

²² Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, 102–125.

altered by context, how reinterpretation is to be distinguished from the cancellation of meaning, and who is entitled to determine whether a reading remains within defensible limits. These questions form the bridge between the discussion of Faiz and Husaini's critique.

Adian Husaini: A Critical-Protective Orientation

Adian Husaini proceeds from a different starting point. For Husaini, the primary issue in hermeneutics is not the effectiveness of a technique for reading texts, but the compatibility of its epistemological assumptions with the Qur'ān as *kalām Allāh*. In *Hermeneutika & Tafsir Al-Qur'ān*, he identifies interpretive relativism, changes in the concept of revelation, and the transfer of Biblical critical methodologies as three major problems. His critique is therefore protective: it seeks to ensure that analytical tools do not alter the status of the object being analyzed. Within this logic, methods are never completely neutral; each may carry ontological presuppositions and theories of truth that must be tested before use.²³

The argument about relativism requires more careful reading than simply saying that Husaini rejects interpretive difference. What he rejects is the claim that no interpretation can possess a higher degree of certainty and that all *tafsīr* is merely a temporal product of the reader. He maintains the distinction between *qaṭ'ī* and *ẓannī* domains and argues that comprehensive relativization would deprive the tradition of its ability to establish normative boundaries. This concern has a legitimate methodological basis. Even in interpretive theory, Ricoeur does not equate plurality with the absolute equality of all readings. Husaini's critique can therefore be read as a demand that hermeneutical theories explain their mechanisms of validation and degrees of semantic determinacy.²⁴

The problem emerges when criticism of relativism is extended into a criticism of hermeneutics in general. Not every school of hermeneutics claims that all meanings are relative. Schleiermacher still seeks a more accurate understanding through grammatical and psychological analysis; Betti emphasizes the objectivity of interpretation; Ricoeur maintains the possibility of rational debate among interpretations. Even Gadamer does not teach that a text may be interpreted however the reader wishes. Husaini's argument would therefore be stronger if the object of his criticism were narrowed: not "hermeneutics" as a whole, but particular theories that deny the possibility of stronger meanings or that regard textual reference as entirely determined by the reader. Sahiron Syamsuddin makes a similar criticism of genealogical rejection: Western origin is not sufficient grounds for rejecting a theory; its compatibility must be tested substantively.²⁵

Husaini's second argument concerns the concept of revelation. He worries that the application of textual theories emphasizing the historicity of language may slide into the thesis that the Qur'ān is a cultural product or that its wording is a construction of the Prophet. Within these limits, his objection is important because it shows that transferring methods from the study of other scriptures to the Qur'ān must take account of different doctrines of revelation. A method need not be criticized because it is "Christian" or "Western," but because specific premises may be incompatible with the object under study. Genealogy, in other words, may provide preliminary information, but it cannot serve as the final argument.

A third criticism concerns the history of Biblical studies. In Hegemoni Kristen-Barat, Husaini links hermeneutics, interpretive relativism, and religious pluralism within a single critical narrative. This narrative reflects anxiety about changing epistemologies in the study of Islam at universities, but analytically it risks guilt by association. The fact that a technique developed within the Biblical tradition does not prove that it necessarily carries the same theory of revelation when applied to the

²³ Husaini and al-Baghdadi, *Hermeneutika & Tafsir Al-Qur'ān*, 17–20.

²⁴ Husaini and al-Baghdadi, *Hermeneutika & Tafsir Al-Qur'ān*, 20–31.

²⁵ Syamsuddin, "Differing Responses," 495–504.

Qur'ān. Philology, history, semantics, and textual criticism also developed in Western contexts but can be used selectively. For Husaini's critique to become stronger, therefore, the causal relationship between an analytical tool and its theological consequences must be demonstrated rather than merely its historical origin.²⁶

Husaini's rejection of hermeneutics must also be distinguished from a rejection of context. The *tafsīr* tradition he defends itself recognizes *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *urf*, *siyāq*, and the methodological tools of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Reflita notes that opponents of hermeneutics generally do not reject the deepening of meaning; rather, they argue that Islamic *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* already possess their own methodological instruments. A more accurate contrast, therefore, is not "Faiz is contextual while Husaini is textual," but rather a difference over the epistemic status of context and external theory. Faiz is more ready to employ hermeneutics as a reflective device, whereas Husaini demands proof that such a device does not alter the foundations of *'aqidah* and the theory of meaning established within the tradition.²⁷

The strength of Husaini's orientation is its reminder that methodological openness requires limits. In the context of religious authority, an interpretation can become authoritarian either by closing itself to all criticism or by claiming interpretive freedom without any burden of proof. Abou El Fadl shows that authoritarianism emerges when human agents close the process of inquiry and identify their own will with the will of God; the remedy is not relativism but moral and methodological discipline. Husaini's critique can be incorporated into this mechanism provided that he also accepts that human traditions remain open to criticism and that safeguarding revelation is not identical with freezing every historical result of *tafsīr*.²⁸

Husaini's orientation is therefore more accurately described as critical-protective rather than simplistically conservative. "Critical" refers to his effort to test the presuppositions of theories, while "protective" refers to his priority of safeguarding the ontology of revelation and normative boundaries. Its weakness lies in the tendency to generalize across schools of hermeneutics and to rely too heavily on Western genealogy as an argument. If the critique is narrowed to particular theories and combined with recognition that the *tafsīr* tradition is itself a historical human activity, Husaini's position can function as an important epistemological control within methodological dialogue.

A Symmetrical Comparison: Six Epistemological Dimensions

A symmetrical comparison should begin with the first dimension: the ontological status of the Qur'ān. Faiz and Husaini both speak from within a Muslim horizon that accepts the Qur'ān as revelation; their difference emerges in how they explain the relationship between revelation, language, and history. Faiz emphasizes that revelation is articulated in Arabic and understood through human horizons, so *tafsīr* is always historical. Husaini stresses that the historicity of understanding must not be projected back onto the source of revelation in such a way that the wording and meaning of the Qur'ān are treated as cultural constructions. This distinction is important because category mistakes frequently occur: "historical *tafsīr*" is equated with "historical revelation," or vice versa. Separating the two allows acknowledgment of the history of interpretation without negating theological claims regarding the source of revelation.

The second dimension concerns theories of meaning. Faiz provides greater room for the development of significance as a text enters new contexts. Reading does not stop at recovering historical meaning, but moves toward contextualization. Husaini warns that not every meaning can be reproduced anew; linguistic structure, Prophetic explanation, consensus, and the *qaṭ'ī* domain place

²⁶ Adian Husaini, *Hegemoni Kristen-Barat dalam Studi Islam di Perguruan Tinggi* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2006), 225–226.

²⁷ Reflita, "Kontroversi Hermeneutika," 141–146.

²⁸ Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, 141–150.

limits on creativity. This debate need not end in a binary choice. Ricoeur demonstrates that a text can possess a surplus of meaning without losing the capacity to exclude weak interpretations. In Qur'ānic studies, Saeed's model likewise distinguishes historical meaning, interpretive complexity, and a hierarchy of values, so contextualization is not identical with indeterminacy.²⁹

The third dimension is the relationship between text and context. Faiz tends to place context as a constitutive variable of understanding; Husaini treats it as an explanatory instrument that must not displace textual and traditional limits. In practice, the distance between them is smaller than the rhetoric of polemics suggests. The tradition of *uṣūl al-fiqh* that Husaini defends itself uses context to understand causes, scope, and legal application. Conversely, Faiz does not reject linguistic analysis. The core issue is one of weight: when does context merely explain, when does it limit generalization, and when may it generate a new application? Fazlur Rahman provides a methodological example by relating historical context to moral objectives while still maintaining Qur'ānic normativity.³⁰

The fourth dimension concerns the position of the interpreter. Faiz emphasizes preunderstanding and the historicity of the reader, making self-awareness part of the method. Husaini emphasizes scholarly qualifications and the authority of tradition so that the reader does not dominate the text. These concerns can in fact correct one another. Competence without self-reflection can become expert authoritarianism; self-reflection without competence can become subjectivism. Gadamer reminds us that prejudgments cannot be entirely eliminated but must be brought into conversation with tradition and tested. Abou El Fadl adds an ethical dimension: authority requires not only competence but also honesty, diligence, and self-restraint.^{31,32}

The fifth dimension is the authority of tradition and external theories. Husaini tends to give high priority to 'ulūm al-Qur'ān and qawā'id al-tafsīr as epistemic boundaries. Faiz tends to regard tradition as a resource that should be brought into dialogue with new theories. Here Wardani's concept of "critical traditionalism" is especially useful: preserving traditional sources need not mean rejecting modern knowledge, and accepting modern knowledge does not require a rupture with tradition. The selection of methods should be based on their function and compatibility. Discourse analysis can be used to investigate power in the production of tafsīr without altering the doctrine of revelation; philosophical hermeneutics can be employed to reflect on the historicity of the reader without rendering every tafsīr relative.³³

The sixth dimension is plurality and relativism. Faiz sees interpretive difference as an unavoidable consequence of differing horizons; Husaini worries that this thesis removes criteria of truth. Academic literature suggests that they are often speaking about two different levels. Descriptive plurality—the fact that tafsīr is diverse—is not the same as normative relativism—the claim that all interpretations are equally true. Harrison shows that hermeneutics can encourage interpretive plurality in Muslim theology, but the question of legitimacy remains a separate debate. This study therefore distinguishes "controlled plurality," namely recognition of more than one defensible interpretation, from "relativism without criteria."³⁴

When these six dimensions are considered together, the Faiz-Husaini difference no longer appears as an absolute opposition. They are better understood as two methodological vectors. Faiz's vector draws interpretation toward responsiveness to the dynamics of language, history, and readers; Husaini's vector draws interpretation toward preserving a normative center and the discipline of

²⁹ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 79–87; Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, 90–116.

³⁰ Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 5–8.

³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305–310.

³² Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, 96–115.

³³ Wardani, "Different Faces," 60–67.

³⁴ Harrison, "Hermeneutics, Religious Language and the Qur'an," 214–220.

tradition. Productive tension emerges when each limits the other: responsiveness without control can become ideological projection, while control without responsiveness can turn historical tafsīr into something treated as though it were revelation itself. At this point, comparison produces a more useful finding than merely stating that one thinker “accepts” hermeneutics while the other “rejects” it.

This comparison also corrects two claims that frequently appear in polemics. First, the use of context is not a monopoly of Western hermeneutics; the tafsīr tradition has its own contextual instruments. Second, recognizing that human tafsīr is historical does not automatically mean that all meanings of revelation change. Sahiron Syamsuddin shows that Muslim responses to Western hermeneutics fall along a spectrum and should be assessed according to the accuracy with which the criticized theory is understood and the quality of the arguments for its use. This study therefore shifts the center of the debate from the origin of a theory to its methodological performance.³⁵

Points of Convergence and Irreducible Differences

The comparison reveals at least four points of convergence. First, both thinkers reject interpretation without rules. Faiz speaks of hermeneutics as an effort to understand accurately and proportionately; Husaini emphasizes the requirements of tafsīr and the authority of tradition. Second, neither eliminates language as the primary medium. Third, both acknowledge that human interpretation is not revelation itself, although they differ over how far the historicity of the reader affects meaning. Fourth, both share the normative aim of ensuring that the Qur'ān continues to function as guidance. These points of convergence are important because they challenge the portrayal of one side as concerned only with relevance and the other only with purity.

The first convergence, interpretive discipline, can be developed into a shared principle of validation. A tafsīr should be able to demonstrate linguistic evidence, its relationship to the structure of the verse, the reasons for invoking context, and its consistency with a broader body of evidence. Reflita notes that hermeneutical controversy often becomes unproductive when it moves from substantive argument to personal delegitimation. The first standard of dialogue, therefore, is to return the debate to reasons that can be examined. Within this framework, Husaini's criticism of relativism becomes a valid question about criteria, while Faiz's criticism of the freezing of tafsīr becomes a valid question about historicity and relevance.³⁶

The second convergence is the importance of competence. Faiz recognizes grammatical, historical, and philosophical dimensions; Husaini emphasizes the scholarly tradition of tafsīr. This convergence can be translated into a layered model of competence: command of Arabic and textual structure; mastery of relevant *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* and *ḥadīth*; historical knowledge; the ability to compare tafsīr; and epistemological awareness of one's own assumptions. Such a model is stronger than restricting authority to formal credentials, but also stricter than assuming that a reader's experience alone is sufficient to produce normative *tafsīr*.

The third convergence is recognition of context, albeit with different functions. Husaini cannot fully reject context because classical interpretive tools themselves employ it; Faiz cannot allow context to operate without limits because theoretical hermeneutics itself demands accuracy. Izza Rohman shows that the Indonesian debate actually contains variations in how the history of revelation is understood: some use context as a path toward discovering universal messages, while others attempt to free the text from the “burden” of history. The positions of Faiz and Husaini become more productive when situated along this spectrum of contextual functions rather than reduced to textual versus contextual.³⁷

³⁵ Syamsuddin, “Differing Responses,” 490–506.

³⁶ Reflita, “Kontroversi Hermeneutika,” 145–149.

³⁷ Rohman, “New Approaches,” 238–246.

Nevertheless, three differences cannot be reduced to a simple compromise. First is the theoretical legitimacy of Western hermeneutics. Faiz considers theories capable of being borrowed critically; Husaini sees the risk that their philosophical presuppositions will also be imported. Second is the degree of reader productivity. Faiz is more open to the production of new significance, whereas Husaini demands tighter limits. Third is the status of semantic plurality. Faiz sees plurality as a historical and methodological consequence; Husaini emphasizes the need to preserve determinate meanings. Victoria Harrison shows that interpretive plurality is one important consequence of the reception of hermeneutics in Muslim thought, but the question of its legitimate limits is not thereby resolved.³⁸

These irreducible differences should in fact be preserved so that synthesis does not become rhetorical. Saying “take the best from both” is inadequate because it does not explain the criteria of selection. What is needed is a separation of levels. At the ontological level, this study does not use hermeneutics to determine whether the Qur’ān is revelation; that status functions as an internal theological premise of the study. At the epistemological level, hermeneutics is used to reflect on how knowledge of meaning is produced. At the methodological level, historical, linguistic, and dialogical techniques can be tested one by one. At the normative level, interpretive results must be tested against a hierarchy of meanings and values. This separation reduces Husaini’s concerns without closing off the reflective function emphasized by Faiz.

Faiz’s critique of authoritarianism and Husaini’s critique of relativism can therefore be positioned as two mechanisms of supervision. Faiz warns that interpreters may freeze historical interests into the will of God; Husaini warns that contemporary readers may use context to dismantle textual limits at will. Abou El Fadl offers a category that helps bring the two concerns together: the principal issue is not whether authority exists, but when an authoritative process becomes authoritarian because it closes inquiry, ignores evidence, or claims a degree of determinacy not supported by the text. Plurality can therefore be accepted without eliminating authority, and authority can be maintained without closing the door to criticism.³⁹

Another important point concerns tradition. Tradition need not be treated either as a storehouse of final answers or as a burden from the past that must be abandoned. Gadamer shows that tradition is a horizon that makes understanding possible; we never begin from zero. Yet tradition is not identical with final truth. In Qur’ānic studies, classical tafsīr functions as an archive of argumentation, language, transmitted reports, and legal experience with which interpreters must enter into dialogue. Faiz gives greater room to the transformation of horizons, whereas Husaini gives greater weight to continuity. A stronger model preserves both: tradition becomes a point of departure and a partner in criticism, neither a prison nor something that may simply be ignored.⁴⁰

The result of this section, therefore, is not a “middle way” in the sense of a moderate position that avoids tension, but a map of boundaries. Some elements can be brought into complementary relation—competence, historical awareness, linguistic analysis, context, and validation—while certain premises remain different and must be stated openly. Honesty about these differences is a condition for ensuring that academic dialogue does not turn into artificial harmony.

Limited Methodological Complementarity

On the basis of this map, the article proposes “limited methodological complementarity.” The term does not refer to a metaphysical synthesis between two epistemologies, but to a procedure for selecting analytical tools according to their functions and limits. Hermeneutics is used primarily to

³⁸ Harrison, “Hermeneutics, Religious Language and the Qur’an,” 214–220.

³⁹ Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name*, 141–150.

⁴⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305–310.

reflect on the historicity of understanding, the reader's preunderstanding, the text-context relationship, and the process of actualization. Classical *tafsīr* tools are used to test language, transmitted reports, internal textual structure, and continuity with tradition. In this way, a theory is neither accepted because it is modern nor rejected because it is foreign. It is accepted insofar as it increases explanatory power without undermining the stated ontological premises and rules of validation.

The model consists of six layers. The first is an ontological filter: the researcher first states the status of the Qur'ān as revelation within the Islamic theological horizon, so that theories that necessarily require the negation of that status are not adopted as premises. The second is a philological filter: meaning is constrained by Arabic language, syntax, semantics, and discourse structure. The third is a historical-contextual filter: *asbāb al-nuzūl*, social conditions, and the horizon of the earliest recipients are used to understand the problem addressed by the text. The fourth is an intratextual-traditional filter: a verse is read alongside other verses, relevant *ḥadīth*, and the history of *tafsīr*. The fifth is ethical actualization: the interpreter formulates principles that can be applied to new contexts. The sixth is intersubjective validation through openness of argument, comparison of alternatives, and willingness to revise. Saeed's framework of sociohistorical context and a hierarchy of values supports the distinction between initial meaning and contemporary actualization.⁴¹

At the stage of actualization, Fazlur Rahman's double movement can be used in a limited manner. The first movement requires the reader to return to the moral-social situation addressed by revelation; the second relates the principles identified there to present circumstances. The limitation lies in the fact that not all verses possess the same type of normativity. Theological statements, *'ibādah maḥḍah*, general moral principles, and socio-legal provisions need to be analyzed under different categories. Contextualization, therefore, cannot operate as a single formula. The principle that "the more historically conditioned the form of regulation, the greater the need for contextual analysis" may serve as a working hypothesis, but it must be tested case by case.⁴²

The model also requires a mechanism for evaluating external theories. M. Amin Abdullah proposes a circular relationship among epistemologies so that a tradition of knowledge can recognize its limitations and accept correction from other disciplines. In this article, such circularity is constrained by a principle of compatibility: external theories may influence the questions asked and the analytical tools employed, but conclusions must remain defensible on the basis of Qur'ānic evidence and relevant scholarly instruments. This principle avoids two forms of domination: the domination of traditionalism that rejects new questions because they do not originate in the classical heritage, and the domination of modern theory that forces the text into externally imposed conceptual categories.⁴³

As a procedural simulation, consider a verse that generates public debate in Indonesia because of the relationship among language, history, and contemporary politics. The complementarity model does not immediately ask whether "the old meaning must be abandoned" or "the new meaning must be rejected." The first step identifies the semantic field of key terms and their grammatical structure. The second traces the context of revelation and the verse's relationship to its discourse unit. The third maps the spectrum of classical and modern *tafsīr*, including the reasons for their differences. The fourth distinguishes propositional meanings with strong textual support from more contextual socio-political implications. The fifth tests contemporary applications against broader Qur'ānic values. Through this procedure, contextualization does not begin from the political needs of the reader but from a layered argument that remains open to criticism.

⁴¹ Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, 116–145.

⁴² Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 5–8, 19–20.

⁴³ Abdullah, "Al-Ta'wīl al-'Ilmī," 379–388.

The development of digital media makes such a model of validation increasingly urgent. Fadhlī Lukman shows that “digital hermeneutics” expands public participation in the production of Qur’ānic commentary while simultaneously challenging older structures of authority. In such a space, claims of competence and claims of relevance are both easily abused. Authority can turn into personal branding, while contextualization can become viral fragments of interpretation that lack argumentative depth. Limited methodological complementarity is therefore relevant not only to philosophical debate but also to *tafsīr* literacy: readers need to distinguish interpretations that leave a traceable argument, sources, and mechanisms of correction from opinions that merely use verses as legitimation.⁴⁴

This proposal is close to several contemporary developments but is not identical with them. Sahiron Syamsuddin shows that a critical reception of hermeneutics can be achieved by examining each school and considering its usefulness for interpretation. Quraish Shihab likewise discusses hermeneutics as an instrument that can help uncover dimensions of a text, while locating it within the requirements and principles of *tafsīr*. On the other hand, the tradition of critical traditionalism demonstrates that openness to modern methods can coexist with commitment to traditional sources. The model proposed here systematizes these intuitions into six filters, with particular emphasis on distinguishing ontological, epistemological, methodological, and normative levels.⁴⁵

This complementarity is called “limited” because it contains three explicit boundaries. First, theories that require the negation of revelation are not assumed to be neutral within internally oriented *tafsīr* research. Second, context may not override linguistic evidence without testable argumentation. Third, interpretive plurality does not mean that all interpretations are equal. The last boundary is especially important: a reading can be considered stronger if it is more coherent with the text, more comprehensive in considering the evidence, more transparent about its assumptions, and better able to answer objections. Here Ricoeur and Abou El Fadl meet productively: interpretation can remain open while still being accountable.

Within this model, Husaini’s critique is not positioned as an obstacle to modernization but as a control against the reduction of revelation and relativism, while Faiz’s openness is not treated as unlimited liberalization but as a control against the freezing of tradition and historical unawareness. The result is not a fusion of the two thinkers but a methodological division of labor: Faiz broadens awareness of the problems, while Husaini sharpens questions about limits. Further research needs to test this model on concrete themes—such as interreligious relations, gender, or family law—to determine whether the six filters genuinely produce interpretations that are more transparent and accountable

Conclusion

This study shows that the contestation between Fahrudin Faiz and Adian Husaini cannot be adequately explained through progressive-conservative or contextual-textual dichotomies. Faiz develops an adaptive-dialogical orientation that emphasizes the plurality of hermeneutical traditions, the historicity of understanding, and the productive relationship among text, context, and contextualization. Husaini develops a critical-protective orientation that places the status of revelation, the determinacy of certain meanings, and continuity with *tafsīr* methodology as safeguards against relativism and the reduction of the Qur’ān to an ordinary cultural text. The two orientations begin from different problems, which is why their critiques often pass one another when hermeneutics is treated as a single undifferentiated term. Comparison across the six dimensions shows that both thinkers

⁴⁴ Lukman, “Digital Hermeneutics,” 105–120;

⁴⁵ Syamsuddin, “Differing Responses,” 505–512; M. Quraish Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir: Syarat, Ketentuan, dan Aturan yang Patut Anda Ketahui dalam Memahami Ayat-Ayat Al-Qur’an* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2015), 401–405; Wardani, “Different Faces,” 63–70.

converge on the need for disciplined interpretation, interpretive competence, attention to language, and the function of the Qur'ān as guidance that must remain related to lived reality. Their irreducible differences concern the legitimacy of Western hermeneutical theories, the extent of readerly productivity, and the limits of semantic plurality. These findings challenge two simplifications: rejecting hermeneutics is not identical with rejecting context, and accepting the historicity of tafsīr is not identical with relativizing all meanings.

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