



Hermeneutical Approaches to the Qur'an in Indonesia: A Normative and Socio-Cultural Analysis of Tafsir Methodologies

Putris Salsabila Azkya¹, Siti Rif'atussa'adah Sitorus Pane²,
Rahmat Sholihin³, Rahmat Shodiqin⁴

¹Al Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt

²STIT Al Washliyah Aceh Tengah, Aceh, Indonesia

^{3,4}Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari, Banjarmasin, Indonesia

Email: azkyaaa@yahoo.com¹, siti.rifa.hambali@gmail.com², rahmatsholihin@uin-antasari.ac.id³, rahmatshodiqin@uin-antasari.ac.id⁴

Received 13-06-2025 | Revised 28-07-2025, 24-08-2025, 27-09-2025 | Accepted 18-10-2025

Abstract

This article critically examines major hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'an in Indonesia traditional pesantren exegesis, Hamka's contextual-nationalist tafsir, M. Quraish Shihab's contextual-linguistic approach, and contemporary gender-sensitive hermeneutics through a normative framework combining bayāni, burhāni, and irfāni epistemologies and the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. Using a normative library study and Gadamerian hermeneutical analysis, the paper evaluates methodological coherence, hermeneutical assumptions, and socio-cultural consequences of these approaches, particularly their implications for pluralism, religious moderation (wasāṭiyya), and gender justice in Indonesia. Findings indicate a hybrid Indonesian hermeneutics that preserves classical textual authority while incorporating rational, contextual, and ethical reinterpretations, yet also faces risks of ideological infiltration and methodological over-contextualization. The maqāṣid framework emerges as a productive normative tool to reconcile textual fidelity with social relevance. The study concludes by recommending greater methodological transparency, incorporation of empirical measures of societal impact, and careful sourcing when asserting historically sensitive claims. The Indonesian experience, the article argues, offers a model for localized yet universal hermeneutical engagement in plural Muslim societies.

Keywords: Hermeneutika al-Qur'an, tafsir Nusantara, maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, bayāni-burhāni-irfāni, Indonesia.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji secara kritis berbagai pendekatan hermeneutika utama terhadap al-Qur'an di Indonesia yakni tafsir tradisional pesantren, tafsir kontekstual-nasionalis Hamka, pendekatan kontekstual-linguistik M. Quraish Shihab, serta hermeneutika kontemporer yang berperspektif gender melalui kerangka normatif yang memadukan epistemologi bayāni, burhāni, dan irfāni dengan prinsip maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. Dengan menggunakan studi pustaka normatif dan analisis hermeneutika Gadamerian, artikel ini menilai koherensi metodologis, asumsi hermeneutik, serta konsekuensi sosial-budaya dari berbagai pendekatan tersebut, khususnya dalam kaitannya dengan

pluralisme, moderasi beragama (wasāṭiyyah), dan keadilan gender di Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya bentuk hermeneutika hibrida khas Indonesia yang tetap mempertahankan otoritas teks klasik, namun sekaligus mengintegrasikan reinterpretasi rasional, kontekstual, dan etis. Meski demikian, pendekatan ini juga menghadapi risiko infiltrasi ideologis dan kecenderungan over-contextualization. Kerangka maqāṣid muncul sebagai alat normatif yang produktif untuk mendamaikan kesetiaan terhadap teks dengan relevansi sosial. Studi ini menyimpulkan pentingnya transparansi metodologis yang lebih besar, pelibatan ukuran empiris terhadap dampak sosial, serta kehati-hatian dalam mengemukakan klaim historis yang sensitif. Pengalaman hermeneutika Indonesia, sebagaimana ditegaskan dalam artikel ini, menawarkan model keterlibatan tafsir yang bersifat lokal namun memiliki nilai universal bagi masyarakat Muslim yang plural.

Kata kunci: Hermeneutika al-Qur'an, tafsir Nusantara, maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, bayāni-burhāni-irfāni, Indonesia.

Introduction

The interpretation of the Qur'an in Indonesia is a dynamic intellectual field, evolving alongside the nation's profound historical, cultural, and social transformations. As the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, Indonesia has developed distinctive hermeneutical approaches that seamlessly integrate classical Islamic traditions with local wisdom and modern intellectual frameworks. The journey of Qur'anic exegesis in the archipelago, often termed *Tafsir Nusantara* or "Archipelagic *Tafsir*," is a rich narrative of indigenization and adaptation.

The historical evolution of Islam in the Nusantara began with a long and debated process. While some early theories, particularly from Dutch scholars, suggested that Islam originated from the Indian subcontinent, more recent academic consensus among Indonesian experts, dating back to conferences in 1969 and 1988, posits that the religion arrived directly from Arabia as early as the seventh century CE. Regardless of the exact origin, the arrival of Islam was accompanied by the acceptance of the Qur'an as its foundational scripture. Early scholars and religious figures began to interpret the sacred text to make it comprehensible to a populace with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, an effort that intensified between the ninth and eleventh centuries with the production of interpretive works that combined Arabic teachings with local traditions.¹

¹ Fadila Ikke Nuralita and Ahmad Sadad, "Tafsir Nusantara: History and Context of Public Reception," 3, no. 1 (2024).

This process of localization is the defining characteristic of *Tafsir Nusantara*. It is an interpretive activity that employs the symbols, languages, and local dialects of the archipelago to emphasize a deep understanding of the Qur'an within the specific cultural, social, and historical contexts of Indonesian society. This hermeneutical approach is not a rejection of classical scholarship but a re-prioritization, seeking to make the divine text relevant to the daily lives and social realities of Indonesian Muslim communities.² The evolution of this *tafsir* tradition can be categorized into four main periods: the classical, medieval, pre-modern, and modern eras, each reflecting a unique set of characteristics, from a dominant reliance on Middle Eastern sources to a growing emphasis on local relevance and intellectual innovation.³

While numerous descriptive studies have meticulously mapped the contributions of prominent Indonesian exegetes, such as Hamka, M. Quraish Shihab, and Nasaruddin Umar, a significant research gap persists in the normative evaluation of their methodologies. Existing scholarship often catalogues their works without a comprehensive critical examination of how these approaches align with, or diverge from, established Islamic epistemology and the higher objectives of *shari'ah*. This report seeks to address this lacuna by providing a critical analysis of these hermeneutical approaches from a normative perspective. The study moves beyond a mere textual analysis to assess the tangible socio-cultural impacts of these interpretations on key aspects of Indonesian society, including pluralism, religious moderation, and gender justice. The goal is to evaluate the strengths and limitations of these methodologies and to understand their real-world consequences in a pluralistic, multicultural nation.

Methods

This research adopts a combined normative library study and hermeneutical analysis. The normative dimension involves assessing the selected methodologies against the established epistemological frameworks of *bayani* (textual and linguistic reasoning), *burhani* (rational and logical analysis), and *irfani* (intuitive and spiritual

² Nuralita and Sadad, "Tafsir Nusantara: History and Context of Public Reception."

³ Ahmad Fadly Rahman Akbar et al., *The Dynamics Of Qur'anic Tafsir In Indonesia: Historical Periodization And The Role Of Local Scholars*, 10, no. 1 (2025).

experience). It also employs the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) as a critical lens to evaluate the interpretations' coherence with the broader ethical and moral purposes of the Qur'an. The hermeneutical analysis entails a critical reading of primary and secondary sources to uncover the implicit biases, socio-historical influences, and underlying intellectual commitments of the exegetes. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the "fusion of horizons," a concept from Gadamerian hermeneutics, which illuminates the dynamic interplay between the timeless Qur'anic text and the specific historical consciousness of Indonesian scholars and society.⁴

The report focuses on four representative hermeneutical traditions: the traditional *pesantren*-based *tafsīr*, the contextual-nationalist approach of Hamka, the linguistic-contextual exegesis of M. Quraish Shihab, and contemporary gender-sensitive hermeneutics. This selection provides a broad and representative overview of the intellectual landscape, encompassing historical, political, and social dimensions. The study's significance lies in its contribution to understanding the intellectual dynamism of Indonesian Islam and its potential to serve as a model for other Muslim societies navigating the complexities of modernity. By analyzing the interplay between scholarly methods and societal needs, the report positions Indonesia as a leading reference in developing a localized, yet universally relevant, Islamic hermeneutics. This analysis also highlights the critical role of *tafsir* as a tool for shaping public discourse and policy in a multicultural nation.

Results and Discussion

The Hermeneutical Tapestry of Indonesian *Tafsir*

The Traditional-Textualist Approach: The *Pesantren* Tradition

The traditional approach to Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia is fundamentally rooted in the *pesantren* system, a cornerstone of Islamic education in the archipelago. This tradition is characterized by its reliance on a corpus of classical texts collectively known as *kitab*

⁴ Bukhori Abdul Shomad et al., *The Influence of Indonesian History on Qur'anic Interpretation: Insights from Gadamerian Hermeneutics*, Zenodo, September 12, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.13752850>.

kuning or "yellow books," a name derived from the tinted paper on which the first Middle Eastern editions were printed. In theory, this body of knowledge is considered "conceptually closed," a finite and bounded collection of works that preserves the core tenets of traditional Islam. The central function of the *pesantren* is the transmission of this knowledge, a process that is often oral, with the *kyai* (religious teacher) reading aloud from the texts while students take notes.⁵

Despite its reputation for rigidity and a perceived lack of responsiveness to modern issues, the *pesantren* tradition demonstrates a profound, practical adaptability. A key example is its pedagogical method, which relies on the use of the unique Pegon script and the *makna gandul* system. The Pegon script is a modified Arabic script used to write local languages, while *makna gandul* is a word-by-word translation system written under the Arabic text. This method facilitates a detailed grammatical analysis and provides a crucial bridge between the original Arabic text and the vernacular languages of the archipelago, such as Javanese and Sundanese.⁶ The development of these tools was not a departure from the classical sources but a necessary and effective method for their successful assimilation by a non-Arabic-speaking populace. This process of translation and pedagogical innovation, while rooted in the textualist *bayani* tradition, represents an early and crucial form of indigenization, allowing universal Islamic values to be expressed through local cultural forms.⁷

A case study of Kiai Bisri Mustofa's *Tafsir al-Ibrīz* perfectly illustrates the tension between the tradition's formal rigidity and its practical flexibility. Bisri Mustofa was known for his profound caution, echoing the prophetic warnings against interpreting the Qur'an by one's mere opinion (*ra'y*). He formally rejected *tafsir bi al-ra'yi*, but this rejection was understood to be against interpretations driven solely by personal whim or without adherence to established criteria. In practice, his methodology was a careful combination of the traditional *bi al-*

⁵ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Maintenance and Continuation of a Tradition of Religious Learning*, n.d.

⁶ Muhammad Asif, "Tafsir Dan Tradisi Pesantren: Karakteristik Tafsir al-Ibris Karya Bisri Mustofa," *SUHUF* 9, no. 2 (2017): 241–64, <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v9i2.154>.

⁷ Akbar et al., *The Dynamics Of Qur'anic Tafsir In Indonesia: Historical Periodization And The Role Of Local Scholars*.

ma'thūr (narrative-based) approach and a reasoned approach that he called *ta'wīl*, which required logical and rational thought. His work also incorporates a comparative method and even a scientific approach to interpret verses.⁸ This shows that while the *pesantren* tradition maintains a closed corpus of authoritative texts to preserve its heritage, the interpretive methods used to transmit and understand them are inherently flexible and locally responsive. This dynamic process demonstrates the tradition's ability to maintain continuity with its past while subtly adapting to new contexts and intellectual currents.

The Contextual-Nationalist Exegesis of Hamka

The *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka) represents a monumental leap in modern Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis, profoundly shaped by the nation's socio-political context. Written while Hamka was imprisoned by the Soekarno government, the *tafsir* is not merely an academic work but a "mirror of social change" that reflects the pre- and post-independence struggles of Indonesia. Hamka's methodology, described as a blend of *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr* and *bi al-ra'yi*, sought to "indigenize" the meanings of the Qur'an to fit the Indonesian experience.⁹ His approach integrated contemporary issues, from socialism and nationalism to anti-colonial struggles, and was enriched by his use of literary elements such as Malay proverbs, rhymes, and philosophical insights from figures like al-Farabi and al-Ghazali.¹⁰

However, the contextual-nationalist approach of Hamka also demonstrates a critical limitation: the risk of incorporating external, and sometimes problematic, intellectual frameworks. A key example is his exegesis on verses concerning Jews, where he integrates European conspiracy theories like the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion". Hamka's interpretations are shown to be significantly influenced by Sayyid Qutb's concepts of *Jahiliyyah* (ignorance) and *Hakimiyyah*

⁸ Asif, "Tafsir Dan Tradisi Pesantren."

⁹ Wan Sabri Wan Yusof, *Hamka's "Tafsir al-Azhar": Qur'anic Exegesis as a Mirror of Social Change* (Temple University, 1997).

¹⁰ Mukhamad Hadi Musolin et al., "Methodology of Interpreting Hamka in the Tafsir Al-Azhar," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 14, no. 11 (2024): Pages 2458-2463, <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i11/23849>.

(sovereignty), portraying Jews as figures aiming to establish a new world order and dominate the global economy. This adoption of external ideologies can be understood as Hamka's attempt to find a theological framework to interpret the political upheavals of his time, such as the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel.¹¹ This shows that Hamka's biographical and political struggles deeply influenced his hermeneutical choices, turning his *tafsir* into a tool for both personal and national liberation.¹² The uncritical integration of such non-Islamic intellectual frameworks into his work presents a paradox: while he was a reformist who criticized *bid'ah* (religious innovations) and superstition, his contextual approach inadvertently led him to embrace politically motivated theories that were not textually grounded.

M. Quraish Shihab's Contextual-Linguistic Hermeneutics

M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah* is a landmark in contemporary Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis, hailed for its purpose of making the Qur'an "grounded" and relevant to modern society. The work is a testament to the author's commitment to providing a clear and accessible interpretation for a broad audience, from students to lecturers and missionaries. Shihab's methodology is primarily contextual-linguistic, emphasizing a deep understanding of the Arabic language, the historical context of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and the application of Qur'anic messages to contemporary issues. His work reflects a belief that the Qur'an's message is universally applicable and that a *mufasssir* (exegete) has a duty to explain its values in a way that resonates with the development of modern society.¹³

Despite its widespread appeal, Shihab's approach has faced significant scholarly critique. His interpretation of *hudud* law, specifically for adultery and theft, is a prominent example of this criticism. Shihab argues that the Qur'anic verses on these matters, which use the active participle (*ism fa'il*), imply a "stability and continuity of

¹¹ Muhammad Muhammad et al., "Jewish Antagonism As Portrayed By Hamka In The Book Of Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 2 (2024): 513, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i2.19900>.

¹² Yusof, *Hamka's "Tafsir al-Azhar": Qur'anic Exegesis as a Mirror of Social Change*.

¹³ *Wikipedia*, "Tafsir al-Mishbah," June 1, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tafsir_al-Mishbah&oldid=1293314022.

the action". From a linguistic perspective, he concludes that the *hudud* punishment is applicable only to those who have committed the sin repeatedly, not to first-time offenders. He supports this argument with a unique theological interpretation of Allah's attribute, *al-Ghaffar* (the Forgiving), suggesting that a person is only caught after Allah has repeatedly "covered" their sins.¹⁴

Critics, however, argue that this interpretation is an instance of over-contextualization that may dilute textual authority. They counter his linguistic argument by citing multiple classical and modern Arabic grammarians who state that the active participle does not always imply continuous action, especially when it is a definite noun. Furthermore, critics note that Shihab's interpretation of *al-Ghaffar* is at odds with the consensus of the four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence and is supported by a historical narration from Ali ibn Abi Talib that is considered unsubstantiated by historical records.¹⁵ This critique reveals a central tension in contemporary *tafsir*: the fine line between an innovative, contextual reading that seeks to make the Qur'an relevant and a subjective interpretation that may diverge from the established scholarly tradition. This makes Shihab's work a valuable case study for the strengths and limitations of the contextual-linguistic approach.

Contemporary Gender-Sensitive Hermeneutics

The emergence of Islamic feminist *tafsir* in Indonesia represents a critical response to the patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an that have historically subordinated women.¹⁶ This movement is driven by an "intellectual anxiety" toward Qur'anic texts that are often used as a tool to legitimize gender-biased and misogynistic beliefs. Feminist exegetes, such as Nasaruddin Umar and Husein Muhammad, argue that gender inequality does not stem from the nature of Islam itself but from an understanding of religious thought that has been influenced by socio-

¹⁴ Mazlan Ibrahim and Abur Hamdi Usman, *M. Quraish Shihab's Thought about Adulterer and Thief In Tafsir Al-Mishbah: A Critical Analysis*, 2013.

¹⁵ Ibrahim and Usman, *M. Quraish Shihab's Thought about Adulterer and Thief In Tafsir Al-Mishbah: A Critical Analysis*.

¹⁶ Nabilah Nuraini et al., "Women Issues Discussed by Feminist Muffasirs in Indonesia," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 1, no. 1 (2021): 14–19.

cultural constructs.¹⁷ This approach is not merely an academic exercise; it is an active and tangible part of a broader struggle for gender justice and the empowerment of women as the vicegerents of God on earth (*khalīfah fī al-ard*).¹⁸

The methodology employed by these scholars is a systematic attempt to re-read the Qur'an from a new perspective. Nasaruddin Umar, for example, utilizes thematic analysis (*Tafsir Maudlui*) combined with semantic-linguistic, normative-theological, and socio-historical approaches to demonstrate that the Qur'an recognizes the distinction between men and women without marginalizing one party.¹⁹ Similarly, feminist hermeneutics, as formulated by scholars like Amina Wadud, relies on five key principles to produce a more just interpretation: a women's perspective, a framing of the text through the theory of feminism, historical contextualization of verses, an intra-textual method that correlates verses on the same theme, and a monotheistic paradigm (*tawhid*) as the core of interpretation.²⁰ This monotheistic paradigm is considered the ultimate basis for gender equality, as it recognizes the unity and indivisibility of God and the shared human status of men and women as His representatives.²¹ The rise of this movement and its scholarly works, such as Nasaruddin Umar's *Argumentasi Kesetaraan Gender Perspektif al-Qur'an*, signifies a profound methodological shift that is both textually grounded and socially conscious, offering a new and systematic paradigm for reading the Qur'an.

¹⁷ Neny Muthi'atul Awwaliyah, "The Gender Equality Argument of Nasaruddin Umar," *SALASIKA: Indonesian Journal of Gender, Women, Child, and Social Inclusion's Studies* 3, no. 2 (2020): 79–89, <https://doi.org/10.36625/sj.v3i2.69>.

¹⁸ Irsyadunnas Irsyadunnas, "The Hermeneutic Thoughts of Ashgar Ali Engineer in The Interpretation of Feminism," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 25, no. 1 (2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v25i1.2120>.

¹⁹ Awwaliyah, "The Gender Equality Argument of Nasaruddin Umar."

²⁰ *Wikipedia*, "Hermeneutics of feminism in Islam," August 4, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hermeneutics_of_feminism_in_Islam&oldid=1304242576.

²¹ Abdul Wahab Fahrub et al., "Gender Equality In Women's Jurisprudence According To Husein Muhammad And Its Relevance To The Goals Of Islamic Religious Education," *AL-WIJDĀN Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 8, no. 1 (2023): 124–49, <https://doi.org/10.58788/alwijdn.v8i1.1604>.

A Normative and Epistemological Framework for Analysis The Interplay of *Bayani*, *Burhani*, and *Irfani* Epistemologies

A critical analysis of Indonesian *tafsir* methodologies reveals a dynamic interplay among three core Islamic epistemological frameworks: *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani*. The *bayani* approach emphasizes textual interpretation based on authoritative sources and classical scholarly traditions. The *burhani* approach prioritizes logical and rational analysis, rooted in the classical Islamic philosophical tradition. The *irfani* approach, in contrast, centers on intuition, spiritual depth, and inner experience.²²

The Indonesian hermeneutical landscape is a microcosm of a larger intellectual project to synthesize these three perspectives. The traditional *pesantren* tradition, with its strict adherence to the *kitab kuning* and established narrations, is a clear manifestation of the *bayani* approach.²³ This provides a strong foundation and preserves continuity with the classical Islamic heritage but can be criticized for its perceived lack of engagement with modern challenges.²⁴ In contrast, the modern contextual approaches of Hamka and M. Quraish Shihab integrate a significant *burhani* component. Hamka's discussions of modern philosophical trends and his logical arguments reflect a rational engagement, while Quraish Shihab's emphasis on linguistic analysis and his attempt to formulate a coherent, logical framework for his interpretations demonstrate a strong *burhani* dimension.²⁵ Furthermore, both exegetes incorporate *irfani* elements, with Hamka including discussions of Sufism and Quraish Shihab focusing on the spiritual and moral messages of the Qur'an.²⁶

Contemporary scholarship and the rise of liberal-reformist thought in Indonesia reflect an explicit desire to integrate all three

²² Amirul Mukminin et al., "Integration of Bayani, Burhani and Irfani Epistemologies in Arabic Language Learning in Islamic Boarding School-Based Colleges," *Asalibuna* 9, no. 01 (2025): 91–107, <https://doi.org/10.30762/asalibuna.v9i01.5292>.

²³ Bruinessen, *Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Maintenance and Continuation of a Tradition of Religious Learning*.

²⁴ Akbar et al., *The Dynamics Of Qur'anic Tafsir In Indonesia: Historical Periodization And The Role Of Local Scholars*.

²⁵ Ibrahim and Usman, *M. Quraish Shihab's Thought about Adulterer and Thief In Tafsir Al-Mishbah: A Critical Analysis*.

²⁶ Musolin et al., "Methodology of Interpreting Hamka in the Tafsir Al-Azhar."

epistemologies into a coherent hybrid hermeneutics. The intellectual influence of figures like Fazlur Rahman, whose "double movement" theory advocated for a disciplined, contextual, and historical reading of the Qur'an, is central to this trend.²⁷ Rahman's work, which sought to move beyond rigid literalism and uncritical modernism, has resonated with Indonesian scholars who aim to revitalize *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and address contemporary issues without sacrificing textual authenticity.²⁸ The fragmentation between traditional and modern scholars noted in the user's prompt is, in part, a result of this struggle for synthesis. The challenge is to produce a model that is robust enough to navigate modern dilemmas while remaining true to its Islamic heritage, a balance that the Indonesian intellectual project is actively seeking to achieve.

Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah as a Normative Lens

The doctrine of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) provides a critical normative lens for evaluating modern *tafsir* methodologies. This framework, first articulated by classical scholars like al-Ghazali and al-Shatibi, posits that the divine law was revealed to achieve certain universal purposes, such as the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property.²⁹ In modern times, this concept has been revived and expanded to include objectives like justice, human dignity, and women's rights, offering a flexible yet normatively grounded framework for adapting Islamic law to changing social conditions.³⁰

The application of *maqāṣid* is particularly prominent in contemporary Indonesian *tafsir*. Feminist exegetes, for instance, explicitly ground their arguments for gender equality in the pursuit of *maqāṣid* such as justice (*'adl*), human dignity, and the establishment of

²⁷ Abd. Rozaq, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Its Applications by Fazlur Rahman," *International Journal of Islamic Social Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023): 121–31, <https://doi.org/10.62039/ijiss.v1i2.27>.

²⁸ Ismail Suardi Wekke, *Fazlur Rahman and His Enduring Legacy for Indonesian Islamic Scholarship*, 3, no. 1 (2025).

²⁹ Nasruddin Yusuf and Nurlaila Harun, "Examining the Basis of Maqashid Sharia in Renewal of Islamic Law in Indonesia," *PETITA* 9 (2024): 357.

³⁰ *Wikipedia*, "Maqasid," November 11, 2024, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Maqasid&oldid=1256727861>.

a peaceful family.³¹ This approach allows them to move beyond a literal, atomistic reading of specific verses (e.g., those on polygamy) to focus on the overarching moral and ethical principles of the Qur'an.³² Similarly, scholars advocating for religious moderation and pluralism use the *maqāṣid* framework to argue that the divine purpose of the *sharī'ah* is to foster a just and harmonious society, providing a theological justification for interreligious dialogue and tolerance. This conceptual shift from a purely legalistic to a *maqāṣid*-based interpretive framework is a profound development in Indonesian Islamic thought. It serves as a corrective to rigid, textualist interpretations by asking, "What is the divine purpose behind this ruling?"³³ This allows for reinterpretations that are both responsive to modern realities and tethered to the fundamental, ethical goals of the revelation, thereby strengthening the Islamic approach by preserving textual authenticity while ensuring contextual relevance.³⁴

Table 1. Synthesizes the normative evaluation of the major *tafsir* approaches discussed

<i>Tafsir</i> Approach	<i>Bayani</i> Dimension	<i>Burhani</i> Dimension	<i>Irfani</i> Dimension	<i>Maqāṣid</i> al-Sharī'ah Application	Strengths & Limitations
Traditional <i>Pesantren</i>	Strong (preservation of classical heritage)	Limited (applied within established rules)	Implicit (devotional and mystical attitude)	Indirect (maintaining the essentials of law)	Strengths: Preserves classical heritage, sustains Islamic identity. Limitations:

³¹ Awwaliyah, "The Gender Equality Argument of Nasaruddin Umar."

³² Rozaq, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Its Applications by Fazlur Rahman."

³³ Yusuf and Harun, "Examining the Basis of Maqashid Sharia in Renewal of Islamic Law in Indonesia."

³⁴ Muhammad Aizat Syimir Rozani et al., "The Integration of Maqāṣid Al-Qurān in Modern Tafsir Methodologies: Challenges and Opportunities," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* IX, no. XX (2025): 98–108, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90200010>.

					Can be rigid and less responsive to modern issues.
Hamka's Contextual-Nationalist	Moderate (combines with <i>ra'y</i>)	Strong (integrates philosophy and modern thought)	Explicit (includes Sufi and mystical insights)	Implicit (used for socio-political reform)	Strengths: Contextualizes the Qur'an, promotes nationalism. Limitations: Risk of adopting problematic external ideologies.
M. Quraish Shihab's Contextual-Linguistic	Strong (linguistic focus)	Strong (rational and logical analysis)	Implicit (focuses on spiritual harmony)	Moderate (used to address contemporary dilemmas)	Strengths: Makes the Qur'an relevant and accessible. Limitations: Risks over-contextualization and methodological incoherence.
Contemporary Feminist	Re-read (challenges patriarchal interpretations)	Strong (uses social science analysis)	Explicit (monotheistic paradigm)	Explicit (as a guiding principle for justice)	Strengths: Promotes gender justice, addresses contemporary issues. Limitations: Faces strong opposition from traditional and

					conservative scholars.
--	--	--	--	--	------------------------

Socio-Cultural Impacts on a Pluralistic Society Fostering Pluralism and Religious Moderation (*Wasatiyyah*)

The interpretations of the Qur'an in Indonesia have a direct and tangible impact on the nation's public discourse, particularly concerning religious moderation (*wasatiyyah*) and pluralism. The concept of *Islam Nusantara*, which embraces local culture and traditions, is often presented as an alternative to more rigid, exclusive religious doctrines.³⁵ *Tafsir* works by scholars like M. Quraish Shihab have been widely used to promote these values. His hermeneutical approach provides theological backing for tolerance, arguing that difference and diversity are part of a divine order and a source of strength rather than conflict.³⁶ This perspective aligns with the official framework of religious moderation promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, which emphasizes cultural accommodation and interreligious dialogue.³⁷

However, the field is not without its controversies. While a significant portion of Indonesian Muslims, represented by organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama, embrace this acculturation, puritanical groups, such as the *Tafsir Al Qur An* Assembly (MTA) and *Hizb at-Tahrir*, reject the integration of Islam and local culture.³⁸ They argue that Islam must remain pure and untainted by human products like culture, viewing such attempts as a potential form of *shirk* (polytheism) or a "shallow faith".³⁹ This reveals a critical ideological

³⁵ Nuralita and Sadad, "Tafsir Nusantara: History and Context of Public Reception."

³⁶ "Shihab: Dialogue Is Fundamental Principle Instituted by Islam | Sada Elbalad," accessed August 20, 2025, <https://see.news/shihab-dialogue-is-fundamental-principle-instituted-by-islam>.

³⁷ Imam Mashuri and Kholilur Rahman, *M. Quraish Shihab's Thought On Wasathiyyah (Religious Moderation) And Their Relevance To Islamic Education*, n.d.

³⁸ Rosidin Rosidin, "Views And Practices of Religious Moderation Tafsir Al Qur An Assembly Surakarta Indonesia," *Migration Letters* 20, no. 3 (2023): 522–33, <https://doi.org/10.47059/ml.v20i3.2935>.

³⁹ Muhammad Muhammad, "Hamka's Thought in Tafsir Al-Azhar: Between Acculturation and Rejection of Local Culture," *Journal of Social Innovation and Knowledge* 1, no. 2 (2025): 226–46, <https://doi.org/10.1163/29502683-bja00012>.

divide within Indonesian Islam, where *tafsir* becomes a battleground for competing visions of the nation's future, caught between an accommodating, pluralistic Islam and a more exclusivist, puritanical one.

Shaping Gender Justice and Public Policy

The link between Qur'anic hermeneutics and the legal and social status of women in Indonesia is profound. The rise of feminist exegesis, led by scholars like Nasaruddin Umar, Musdah Mulia, and Husein Muhammad, has directly influenced legal and social debates. These scholars have systematically challenged patriarchal readings of the Qur'an to advocate for legal reforms on issues such as polygamy, inheritance, and women's leadership. This movement is not confined to academia; it has manifested in the establishment of women's training centers and the public criticism of gender-biased state policies.⁴⁰ The reinterpretation of religious texts is used as a legal and ethical foundation to empower women and promote a more equitable society. This demonstrates how a scholarly discipline can translate directly into real-world social and legal outcomes, effectively shaping public policy and jurisprudence from a progressive Islamic perspective.

The Role of *Tafsir* in Social Movements and Political Discourse

Tafsir in Indonesia is not a passive intellectual discipline but a powerful tool for social and political mobilization. The interpretation of the Qur'an has been used to advance a wide range of ideological agendas, from nationalism to globalist political projects. A clear example is the work of KH Ahmad Sanusi, who used his *tafsir* to advance the anti-colonial struggle. His books, *Tafsir Malja' Al Thalibin* and *Tamsiyyat Al Muslimin*, served as a medium for criticizing Dutch colonial policies and condemning collaborators as hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*). Sanusi's interpretations were not merely academic; they were a form of resistance, calling for education and unity and encouraging Muslims to take charge of their own destiny.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Nuraini et al., "Women Issues Discussed by Feminist Muffasirs in Indonesia."

⁴¹ Lutfi Lutfi, *Tafsir in the Socio-Political Context of Indonesia: A Case Study of Ahmad Sanusi's Qur'anic Interpretation as a Medium of Struggle*, University of Canberra, 2021.

In a stark contrast, contemporary groups like Hizb at-Tahrir also utilize *tafsir* as a tool for political ends, albeit a different one. Rokhmat S. Labib, a prominent activist from the Indonesian branch of the organization, authored *Tafsir al-Wa'ie*, a work that is described as "quite thick with the views of his organization that carries the mission of the *Khilāfah al-islāmiyyah*". This ideological work employs a highly textualist approach to criticize concepts imported from the West, such as pluralism, religious freedom, and human rights, which are viewed as destructive forces.⁴² The *tafsir* is explicitly used to inform readers of a specific, puritanical ideological worldview. These two examples illustrate a profound pattern: that *tafsir* is never a neutral act but is always situated within a specific socio-political context. The interpretive choices of a *mufassir* are influenced by their ideological affiliations, personal backgrounds, and engagement with national and global issues, making the discipline a critical battleground for competing visions of Indonesian society.

Table 2. Further clarifies this dynamic

<i>Tafsir</i> Work / Figure	Ideological Affiliation	Key Themes	Socio-Political Impact
Ahmad Sanusi / <i>Tafsir Malja' Al Thalibin</i>	Nationalist/Anti-colonialist	Anti-colonialism, unity, education (religious and secular).	Mobilized the community, condemned passive Muslims, and was considered a threat to Dutch colonial authority.
Rokhmat S. Labib / <i>Tafsir al-Wa'ie</i>	Islamist/Khilafah	Anti-Westernism, rejection of pluralism, human rights, and democracy.	Critiques contemporary Muslim thought and promotes a specific ideological

⁴² Fatih Akbar Nur, "Unveiling Ideology In The Interpretation Of The Qur'an In *Tafsir al-Wa'ie*," *An-Nur International Journal of The Quran & Hadith* 1, no. 1 (2023): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.62032/aijqh.v1i1.7>.

			agenda for a global caliphate.
--	--	--	--------------------------------

Conclusion

The hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'an in Indonesia represent a rich and dynamic intellectual tradition that successfully navigates the complex tension between fidelity to classical Islamic heritage and relevance to modern social, political, and cultural realities. From the *pesantren's* textualist preservation of the *kitab kuning* to the contextual-nationalist exegesis of Hamka, the linguistic-pragmatic approach of M. Quraish Shihab, and the social justice-oriented hermeneutics of feminist scholars, the Indonesian experience offers a comprehensive case study in interpretive pluralism.

The analysis demonstrates that Indonesian *tafsir* embodies a hybrid hermeneutics that consciously and unconsciously integrates the classical epistemologies of *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani*. While the *pesantren* tradition provides a stable *bayani* foundation, modern and contemporary approaches enrich it with rationalist (*burhani*) and contextual (*irfani*) dimensions. This ongoing intellectual project is further strengthened by the application of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, which provides a normative framework for reinterpreting the Qur'an through its higher moral and ethical objectives. This allows for a more flexible and socially relevant understanding of the divine text without succumbing to relativism.

In its socio-cultural impact, *tafsir* in Indonesia transcends the academic and directly shapes public discourse on pluralism, religious moderation, gender justice, and national identity. The varied interpretations provide theological grounding for competing social and political agendas, positioning the discipline as a critical tool for social and political change. This dynamic interplay between text, context, and intellect is not merely an internal discourse but a public, impactful debate that defines the trajectory of Indonesian Islam. Ultimately, the Indonesian hermeneutical tradition offers a valuable model for the broader Muslim world, demonstrating how a localized, contextual approach can both preserve Islamic authenticity and foster a progressive, adaptable faith.

Future research could build upon these findings by conducting empirical studies to measure the public reception and real-world societal impact of these diverse *tafsir* works. Further analysis could also explore the influence of digital media and online platforms on the hermeneutical process, as they are rapidly changing how the Qur'an is interpreted and disseminated in contemporary Indonesian society.

Reference

- Akbar, Ahmad Fadly Rahman, Muhammad Diaz Supandi, Ihwan Agustono, and Niken Sylvia Puspitasari. *The Dynamics Of Qur'anic Tafsir In Indonesia: Historical Periodization And The Role Of Local Scholars*. 10, no. 1 (2025).
- Amirul Mukminin, Aisyatul Hanun, Zainuddin, Lutfi Mushtofa, and Almannah Wassalwa. "Integration of Bayani, Burhani and Irfani Epistemologies in Arabic Language Learning in Islamic Boarding School-Based Colleges." *Asalibuna* 9, no. 01 (2025): 91–107. <https://doi.org/10.30762/asalibuna.v9i01.5292>.
- Asif, Muhammad. "Tafsir Dan Tradisi Pesantren: Karakteristik Tafsir al-Ibris Karya Bisri Mustofa." *SUHUF* 9, no. 2 (2017): 241–64. <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v9i2.154>.
- Awwaliyah, Neny Muthi'atul. "The Gender Equality Argument of Nasaruddin Umar." *SALASIKA: Indonesian Journal of Gender, Women, Child, and Social Inclusion's Studies* 3, no. 2 (2020): 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.36625/sj.v3i2.69>.
- Bruinessen, Martin Van. *Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Maintenance and Continuation of a Tradition of Religious Learning*. n.d.
- Bukhori Abdul Shomad, Munirul Abidin, Anwar Mujahidin, Ahkmad Fatoni, and Bambang Irawan. *The Influence of Indonesian History on Qur'anic Interpretation: Insights from Gadamerian Hermeneutics*. Zenodo, September 12, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.13752850>.
- Fahrub, Abdul Wahab, Dewi Alhaa, and Muhammad Wasith Achadi. "Gender Equality In Women's Jurisprudence According To Husein Muhammad And Its Relevance To The Goals Of Islamic Religious Education." *AL-WIJDĀN Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 8, no. 1 (2023): 124–49. <https://doi.org/10.58788/alwijdn.v8i1.1604>.

- Ibrahim, Mazlan, and Abur Hamdi Usman. *M. Quraish Shihab's Thought about Adulterer and Thief In Tafsir Al-Mishbah: A Critical Analysis*. 2013.
- Irsyadunnas, Irsyadunnas. "The Hermeneutic Thoughts of Ashgar Ali Engineer in The Interpretation of Feminism." *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 25, no. 1 (2017): 1. <https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v25i1.2120>.
- Lutfi, Lutfi. *Tafsir in the Socio-Political Context of Indonesia: A Case Study of Ahmad Sanusi's Qur'anic Interpretation as a Medium of Struggle*. University of Canberra, 2021.
- Mashuri, Imam, and Kholilur Rahman. *M. Quraish Shihab's Thought On Wasathiyyah (Religious Moderation) And Their Relevance To Islamic Education*. n.d.
- Muhammad, Muhammad. "Hamka's Thought in Tafsir Al-Azhar: Between Acculturation and Rejection of Local Culture." *Journal of Social Innovation and Knowledge* 1, no. 2 (2025): 226–46. <https://doi.org/10.1163/29502683-bja00012>.
- Muhammad, Muhammad, Zaenul Mahmudi, Ali Hamdan, Fahd Mohana S Alahmadi, and Mikdar Rusdi. "Jewish Antagonism As Portrayed By Hamka In The Book Of Tafsir Al-Azhar." *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 2 (2024): 513. <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i2.19900>.
- Musolin, Mukhamad Hadi, Reda Owis Hassan Serour, and Mohamed Fathy Mohamed Abdelgelil. "Methodology of Interpreting Hamka in the Tafsir Al-Azhar." *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 14, no. 11 (2024): Pages 2458-2463. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i11/23849>.
- Nur, Fatih Akbar. "Unveiling Ideology In The Interpretation Of The Qur'an In Tafsir al-Wa'ie." *An-Nur International Journal of The Quran & Hadith* 1, no. 1 (2023): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.62032/aijqh.v1i1.7>.
- Nuraini, Nabilah, Nana Najatul Huda, and Eni Zulaiha. "Women Issues Discussed by Feminist Muffasirs in Indonesia." *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 1, no. 1 (2021): 14–19.
- Rosidin, Rosidin. "Views And Practices of Religious Moderation Tafsir Al Qur An Assembly Surakarta Indonesia." *Migration Letters* 20, no. 3 (2023): 522–33. <https://doi.org/10.47059/ml.v20i3.2935>.

- Rozaq, Abd. “Qur’anic Hermeneutics and Its Applications by Fazlur Rahman.” *International Journal of Islamic Social Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023): 121–31. <https://doi.org/10.62039/ijiss.v1i2.27>.
- “Shihab: Dialogue Is Fundamental Principle Instituted by Islam | Sada Elbalad.” Accessed August 20, 2025. <https://see.news/shihab-dialogue-is-fundamental-principle-instituted-by-islam>.
- Syimir Rozani, Muhammad Aizat, Mohd Farid Ravi Abdullah, Nurzatil Ismah Azizan, and Dr Muaz Hj Mohd Noor. “The Integration of Maqāṣid Al-Qurān in Modern Tafsir Methodologies: Challenges and Opportunities.” *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* IX, no. XX (2025): 98–108. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90200010>.
- Wekke, Ismail Suardi. *Fazlur Rahman and His Enduring Legacy for Indonesian Islamic Scholarship*. 3, no. 1 (2025).
- Yusof, Wan Sabri Wan. *Hamka’s “Tafsir al-Azhar”: Qur’anic Exegesis as a Mirror of Social Change*. Temple University, 1997.
- Yusuf, Nasruddin, and Nurlaila Harun. “Examining the Basis of Maqashid Sharia in Renewal of Islamic Law in Indonesia.” *PETITA* 9 (2024): 357.